

**When Students Feel Safe to Speak: How Belonging, Translanguaging, and Interaction
Support Emergent Bilingual Students' Oral Language Development**

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An Action Research Project

Master of Arts in Teaching

College of Education

Western Oregon University

June 2026

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MASTER'S DEGREE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Completion Term: Spring 2026

Type of exit requirement: Action Research Project

The supervisory committee met with the candidate for a final evaluation in which all aspects of the candidate's program were reviewed. The committee's assessment and recommendations are:

Recommendations:

- ✓ Degree should be awarded

Recommendations:

- ✓ Exit Requirement has been approved
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Abstract

This action research project examined how emotionally safe, translanguaging-friendly, and quality classroom interactions functioned as interdependent conditions supporting emergent bilingual students' participation, oral language development, linguistic self-efficacy, and sense of belonging in a secondary English Language Development (ELD) classroom. The study was grounded in Emotional Context of Learning Theory, Transformative Social-Emotional Learning, Sociocultural Theory, and Translanguaging Theory, reflecting the view that language learning is an emotional, relational, and socially mediated process. The study involved 17 emergent bilingual students in grades 9–12 and employed a qualitative action research design. Data were collected through classroom observations, teacher reflection journals, student work samples, student self-reflections, oral language observations, and instructional artifacts and were analyzed thematically. Findings revealed three interconnected themes: (1) emotional safety and a sense of belonging supported language risk-taking, (2) collaborative interaction supported oral participation and engagement, and (3) translanguaging and intentional scaffolds supported access to academic language development. Rather than functioning independently, these conditions appeared to work together to strengthen students' willingness to communicate and engage in oral language practices. The findings suggest that supporting emergent bilingual students requires more than isolated instructional strategies. Classrooms that intentionally integrate emotional responsiveness, meaningful interaction, and linguistic inclusion can create conditions that foster participation, confidence, and oral language development.

Acknowledgments

First of all, I want to acknowledge my students—especially the emergent bilingual students who inspired this research. Your courage, resilience, and determination reminded me every day why this work matters. Your stories, experiences, and voices shaped this project in countless ways, and you have taught me far more than I could ever teach you. Throughout this journey, you also reminded me of one of the beliefs I hold closest to my heart: everyone smiles in the same language.

A very special thank you goes to my ELD mentor teacher, Victoria Owenius, for trusting me from the very beginning and giving me the freedom to create, experiment, and grow. I am equally grateful to my Spanish mentor teachers, Aimee Losoya and Alex Potter. Having the opportunity to complete student teaching experiences in both Spanish and ELD classrooms was one of the most valuable aspects of this program.

I would like to recognize two people who appeared in my life at exactly the right moment. Silvana Valladares helped open the door to this opportunity through her mentorship, guidance, and unwavering support. Without her, this journey may never have begun. I am equally grateful to my daughter's teacher, Chanel Muñoz, who encouraged me to return to education in the United States during a time of transition and uncertainty. Both reminded me that sometimes the people who change our lives arrive when we need them most.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my clinical supervisor, Marcia Cahn-Corona. When entering a student teaching experience, it is easy to assume that supervisors are there primarily to evaluate your performance. Marcia quickly proved to be so much more than that. Beyond her professional expertise, I am grateful for the kindness, warmth, and humanity she brought to every interaction.

I am especially grateful to my professor Coley Lehman for creating a learning environment where I felt welcomed, included, and valued. Her commitment to her students, her responsiveness, her encouragement, and her ability to balance professionalism with genuine care make her an extraordinary educator. Thank you for every piece of feedback, every answered question, every word of encouragement, and every moment you invested in helping me grow.

A special thank you goes to Maria Dantas-Whitney, whose support extends far beyond her role as ESOL Coordinator and second reader of this ARP. From the very beginning, she believed in me and helped me believe in myself. She has a remarkable ability to make students feel seen, supported, and capable. In many ways, she was one of the first people to take my hand and help me navigate this journey, and I will always be grateful for her mentorship, generosity, and unwavering support.

I would also like to acknowledge every professor whose courses and mentorship left a lasting impact on my development as an educator and scholar. Each of them made a meaningful difference in this experience, challenging me to think more deeply, reflect more critically, and continue growing both professionally and personally.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Jessica Dougherty. She helped me see the beauty, strength, and potential that multilingual learners bring to our schools. Her guidance, encouragement, and commitment to educational equity have profoundly shaped my identity as an educator and strengthened my passion for working with emergent bilingual students.

To my colleague and dear friend Erin Lopez, my cohort colleague and friend Ben Clark, and the old friends who stood by me throughout this journey, thank you for walking alongside me during this chapter of my life. You celebrated my successes, helped me persevere when the workload felt overwhelming, and reminded me to keep going when I doubted myself.

To my nephew, who graduates this year as well, thank you for sharing this milestone with me. During these past months, we often encouraged one another when our energy and confidence were running low, and your commitment has inspired me many times.

To my husband Alejandro, thank you for every sacrifice made along the way. From the very first moment I said, “We need to reorganize our lives because I am going back to school,” you never doubted me. Your love and unwavering support sustained me throughout this demanding journey.

I dedicate this work to my daughter. She has been my greatest motivation and the reason I never stopped believing in our future. I hope that one day she will look at this journey and see a story of perseverance, courage, and hope. I hope she learns that it is never too late to begin again, to learn something new, or to pursue a dream with all your heart. Above all, I hope she knows that every challenge we overcome becomes a path for those who come after us.

Finally, I would like to honor those who are no longer physically present in my life but who continue to inspire me every day: my mother, my grandfather, and my grandmother. They remain part of every dream I pursue and every accomplishment I achieve.

As an immigrant, language learner, educator, mother, and lifelong learner, completing this project represents far more than an academic accomplishment. It represents resilience, reinvention, and hope. Looking back, I realize that this journey was about rediscovering who I am, reclaiming a profession I love, and proving to myself that it is never too late to begin again.

To everyone who walked beside me, believed in me, challenged me, encouraged me, and helped me reach this moment—gracias. This accomplishment belongs not only to me, but to all of you.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Emergent bilingual (EB) students, particularly newcomers, experience language learning as a deeply emotional and relational process. Participation, oral language development, and academic engagement are shaped not only by linguistic knowledge but also by students' sense of safety, belonging, and willingness to take risks. This Action Research Project is grounded in the understanding that language development, emotional experiences, identity, and interaction are inseparable processes for EB learners. Drawing on Emotional Context of Learning Theory, Transformative Social-Emotional Learning, sociocultural perspectives, and translanguage theory, this study examines how intentionally designed classroom environments can foster linguistic growth, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging.

This focus emerges directly from my personal educational history and the lessons I carry from two very different school systems: the centralized, state-controlled schools of Cuba and the public schools of the United States.

I grew up in Cuba during a time when the education system was both powerful and limiting. My teachers were deeply knowledgeable and genuinely committed to their students, yet the system was rooted in ideological control. Curriculum and textbooks were uniform, censored, and designed to reproduce loyalty rather than critical thought. As a child, I sensed that curiosity had invisible limits, shaping not only what could be said, but how safe it felt to speak.

As Paulo Freire (2018) observed, it is difficult to perceive oppression from within. My early schooling taught me discipline and perseverance, but also the cost of silence. Over time, I learned that education can either reproduce power or transform it. The teachers who inspired me were those who taught with love and courage, even in a repressive context. They modeled for me

what bell hooks (1994) later described as education as a practice of freedom; a relational act grounded in care, respect, and justice.

When I immigrated to the United States, I found a system rich in diversity but still marked by inequities. I witnessed emergent bilingual students, many recent arrivals, struggling to find belonging in classrooms that valued standardization over connection. These experiences mirrored my own journey as an immigrant educator learning to navigate language, identity, and belonging. I realized that the challenge for schools is not only to teach English but to humanize learning for multilingual students; to ensure that they feel safe, capable, and seen.

This realization shapes my Action Research Project. My research question is:

How do emotionally safe, translanguaging-friendly, and quality classroom interactions function as interdependent conditions supporting emergent bilingual students' participation, oral language development, linguistic self-efficacy, and sense of belonging in a high school ELD classroom?

The answer lies in integrating language instruction with social-emotional development, recognizing that learning is not only cognitive but profoundly relational and emotional.

To explore this research question, I use an Action Research approach situated within a high school English Language Development (ELD) classroom serving emergent bilingual students, including newcomers. Through this study, I examine how emotionally safe, translanguaging-friendly, and interaction-rich classroom environments shape students' participation, oral language development, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging. To better understand these experiences, I draw on classroom observations, student work samples, reflective teacher journaling, and student voice artifacts such as surveys and informal reflections. I analyze these data thematically to identify patterns related to participation, emotional safety,

interaction, and language development. Through this process, I seek to better understand how instructional design and classroom relationships influence emergent bilingual students' engagement and learning experiences.

These experiences did not initially provide me with a theoretical framework, but they shaped the questions that I carried into my teaching practice. Over time, recurring patterns became increasingly visible: silence, hesitation to participate, and the emotional weight of learning and using a new language. What I experienced intuitively as an educator and as an English learner myself is further explored through the theoretical framework reviewed in Chapter 2, which offers the conceptual language to understand language learning as an emotionally mediated, relational, and identity-driven process for EB students.

Guiding Pedagogical Theory

The theoretical framework guiding this study is grounded primarily in Emotional Context of Learning Theory (ECLT), which contextualizes language development and emotional experiences as inseparable processes. Engagement with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 clarified and refined this framework, allowing me to better understand how emotion, identity, interaction, and language development are deeply intertwined for EB students. Within this framework, Transformative Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and Translanguaging Theory (García & Kleifgen, 2018) function as complementary lenses that help explain how emotionally safe and linguistically inclusive classroom environments can foster participation, linguistic self-efficacy, sense of belonging and oral language development. All these theories and practices form an integrated pedagogical vision centered on equity, voice, and belonging.

Within an ECLT framework, Transformative SEL provides the relational and emotional conditions necessary for language learning to occur. CASEL (2019) identifies five core SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The transformative approach adds another critical dimension: the recognition of systemic inequities and the intentional creation of inclusive, culturally responsive spaces. Students from historically marginalized communities cannot thrive without emotional safety, cultural validation, and authentic relationships.

This framework resonates strongly with my personal and professional history. The silence I experienced in Cuba contrasts with the dialogic and liberatory practices of Transformative SEL, which demands humility and mutual respect between teacher and learner (Freire, 2018). hooks (1994) reminds us that teaching must be an act of love; one that heals and empowers us. For emergent bilingual students, such care is expressed through the validation of their identities, languages, and lived experiences.

From an ECLT perspective, social interaction is not only a cognitive mechanism for learning but also an emotionally mediated process that shapes students' willingness to participate and take linguistic risks. Sociocultural Theory provides the developmental lens for understanding how learning occurs through interaction in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Growth happens when students engage with "more knowledgeable others" who scaffold understanding through dialogue and collaboration. For EBs, this means designing learning experiences that are social, scaffolded, and linguistically accessible (Walqui, 2019). Building on these sociocultural principles, Walqui (2019) emphasizes the importance of quality interactions: purposeful, scaffolded opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and meaning-making that enable students to rehearse language, negotiate understanding, and participate in increasingly sophisticated forms of

communication. Such interactions are particularly important for emergent bilingual students because they simultaneously support language development, participation, and confidence.

Translanguaging Theory (García & Kleifgen, 2018) complements this framework as both a linguistic and emotional pedagogy, reducing affective load and enabling EB students to express knowledge and emotion using all their linguistic and cultural repertoires, building their confidence by feeling capable of participating in more authentic ways. It operationalizes the emotional goals of SEL and the social dynamics of Sociocultural Theory.

These theories frame language learning and acquisition as a cognitive, emotional, relational, and linguistic process in which shared, meaningful interactions that foreground emotional safety and linguistic inclusion create the essential conditions for emergent bilingual students to flourish.

Connection to InTASC Standards

My teaching goals and professional commitments align with the InTASC Standards and reflect the interpretation of Professor Ulveland at Western Oregon University, who views these not as compliance checklists, but as ethical commitments to human development, equity, and intentional design.

Standard 1: Learner Development. I recognize that each student is at a unique stage of academic, emotional, and linguistic growth. My practice centers on adapting instruction to these developmental differences; supporting students through differentiated scaffolds that build both skill and confidence.

Standard 2: Learning Differences. My approach honors the diversity of learning styles, languages, and experiences present in the classroom. By implementing Transformative SEL and

Translanguaging strategies, I foster an inclusive environment where linguistic and cultural differences are treated as assets.

Standard 7: Planning for Instruction. Consistent with Ulveland’s framework (2024), my instructional planning is proactive rather than reactive. Observations and formative assessments inform intentional differentiation that anticipates learners’ needs. Planning with equity in mind is a moral act that reflects deep respect for students’ individuality.

Standard 8: Instructional Strategies. I employ a range of strategies (collaborative structures, visual supports, and multimodal tools) that connect content, language, and emotion. These varied approaches embody differentiation as a form of care and justice, offering multiple pathways toward the same learning goals.

Standard 9: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice. My continuous reflection grounds my teaching. As an immigrant educator and language learner myself, I am committed to examining my biases and practicing pedagogy with integrity. I view teaching as an ethical relationship; one that requires empathy, self-awareness, and responsibility.

Collectively, these standards mirror the principles of Transformative SEL; fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness through intentional, compassionate, and reflective pedagogy.

Summary

My philosophy of education emerges from the intersection of lived experience and scholarly reflection. Having witnessed education functioning as both a tool of oppression and a force for liberation, I have chosen to teach for transformation. My journey—from Cuban classrooms shaped by silence to U.S. classrooms marked by linguistic and cultural diversity—has revealed that equity in education begins with relationships, emotional safety, and

meaningful participation. I aim to design classrooms where emergent bilingual students feel safe to take risks, express their identities, and experience academic, linguistic and emotional growth.

This chapter has outlined the personal, theoretical, and pedagogical foundations of this Action Research Project. Grounded in the Emotional Context of Learning Theory and supported by Transformative Social-Emotional Learning, sociocultural theory, translanguaging, and quality interactions, this integrated framework positions emotion, interaction, and identity as central to language development for emergent bilingual students. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that oral language development cannot be separated from students' emotional experiences, sense of belonging, opportunities for meaningful interaction, and access to their full linguistic repertoires. Understanding the relationships among these factors in the literature is essential for examining the conditions that support participation, confidence, and oral language development among emergent bilingual students. The literature reviewed in the following chapter further explores these relationships and informs the development of the conceptual framework guiding this study

Chapter 2. Review of Relevant Research & Scholarship

Chapter 1 presented the personal, theoretical, and pedagogical foundations of this study, establishing oral language development as an emotional, relational, and socially mediated process for emerging bilingual learners. Building upon these foundations, this chapter reviews the literature underpinning the conceptual framework guiding this research. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between language and emotion, Transformative Social-Emotional Learning, translanguaging, sociocultural perspectives on interaction, and quality interactions as conditions that foster engagement, linguistic self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and oral language development in emerging bilingual learners. Collectively, these perspectives help explain how emotionally supportive and linguistically inclusive learning environments can support oral language development in emerging bilingual learners.

To identify relevant literature, I conducted a systematic search of databases available through the Western Oregon University library, including ERIC, Education Source, APA PsycInfo, and Taylor & Francis Online. Search terms included *emergent bilinguals*, *bilingualism*, *English learners*, *social-emotional learning*, *Transformative SEL*, *emotional context of learning*, *language and emotion*, *translanguaging*, *oracy*, *quality interactions*, and *teacher beliefs*. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles and recent book chapters published between 2010 and 2025 that focused on multilingual learners in K–12 contexts or provided strong theoretical insight into the relationship between language, emotion, and learning. The annotated bibliography that follows summarizes and critically examines these sources in relation to my research focus: designing emotionally safe, linguistically rich classroom interactions that foster English development, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging for emergent bilingual students.

The literature reviewed in this chapter informed the development of the conceptual framework guiding this study. Sociocultural Theory provides the broad foundation for understanding learning as a socially mediated process that occurs through interaction, participation, and meaning-making. Within this perspective, the Emotional Context of Learning Framework emphasizes the inseparable relationship between language and emotion, recognizing that students' willingness to communicate, participate, and take linguistic risks is shaped by their emotional experiences. Transformative Social-Emotional Learning (TSEL) highlights the importance of emotional safety, identity affirmation, agency, and belonging, while Translanguaging Theory positions students' full linguistic repertoires as valuable resources for learning, communication, and meaning-making. Research on quality interactions further underscores the importance of meaningful dialogue, collaboration, and scaffolded participation in promoting oral language development. Rather than functioning as separate explanations, these perspectives form an integrated conceptual framework that positions emotion, language, interaction, and identity as interdependent dimensions supporting oral language development among emergent bilingual students. This framework is illustrated in Figure 2.1.

ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT FOR EMERGENT BILINGUAL STUDENTS

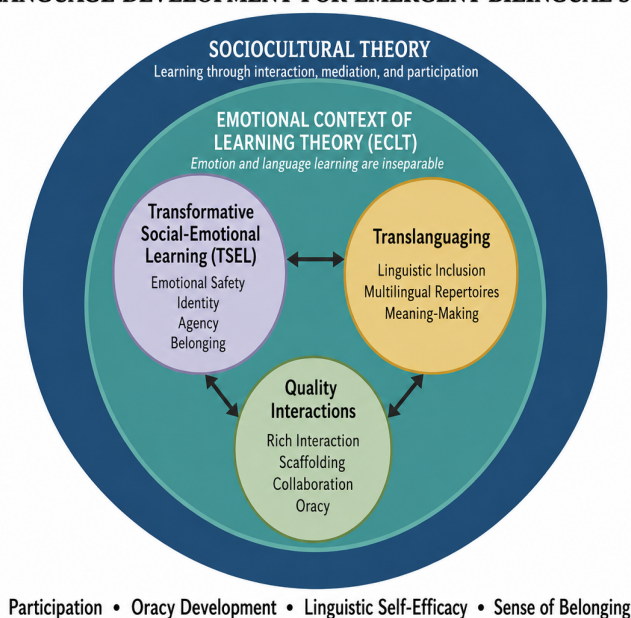


Figure 2.1. *Conceptual Framework for Oral Language Development in Emotionally Supportive and Linguistically Inclusive Learning Environments*

Aguilar, M., Ferré, P., & Hinojosa, J. A. (2024). The landscape of emotional language processing in bilinguals: A review. *Psychology of Learning and Motivation – Advances in Research and Theory*, 1–32. Elsevier.

This review synthesizes current research on how bilinguals process emotional language and clarifies how emotion shapes language processing—and how language shapes emotional understanding—within bilingual contexts. It aims to map key trends, tensions, and gaps in the field. The authors conduct an integrative literature review of 25 empirical studies across psycholinguistics, developmental psychology, neurolinguistics, and bilingualism research, comparing methods and findings to identify converging conclusions and open questions.

The chapter is grounded in current models of bilingual affective processing and broader cognitive-affective perspectives. It frames emotional language as an integrated system where

affect modulates attention, memory, and lexical access while language supports emotional labeling, meaning-making, and regulation—ideas consistent with the logic of Emotional Context of Learning Theory (ECLT). The review identifies two complementary perspectives that structure current research on emotional language processing in bilinguals. First, emotion influences language by modulating processing speed, lexical access, phrasing, and discourse organization. Second, language influences emotion by shaping how individuals label emotions, construct meaning, and regulate affective states. A major conclusion is that the traditional separation between language and emotion—dominant for nearly a century—is no longer tenable. Instead, recent evidence demonstrates that language and emotion form an integrated system, particularly for bilinguals whose emotional resonance often varies across languages, with first languages typically carrying stronger affective weight. The authors also emphasize the need for further research that connects laboratory-based findings to authentic learning and classroom contexts.

This article strengthens my ARP because it offers the theoretical foundation I was missing: a framework that explicitly integrates emotion, language development, identity, and participation. Emotional Context of Learning Theory (ECLT) aligns with my sociocultural and SEL-informed belief that emergent bilinguals' language development is inseparable from emotional experience. It supports my claim that reducing anxiety and strengthening belonging are not “extra supports,” but core conditions that shape cognition and participation. Instructionally, ECLT justifies designing learning experiences that reduce affective load, expand emotional vocabulary, promote meaningful interaction, and create emotionally safe opportunities for EB students to express ideas, perspectives, and lived experiences—reinforcing the importance of translanguaging as a pathway for sensemaking and self-expression.

Thinking critically and connecting this article to my overall findings, I would operationalize ECLT in my ELD classroom by intentionally building a Transformative SEL (TSEL) climate grounded in emotional safety, identity affirmation, agency, and belonging, because these conditions shape students' willingness to participate and take linguistic risks. Within that climate, I would design Quality Interactions (Walqui, 2019) that require collaborative sensemaking and extended talk, offer translanguaging spaces that legitimize students' full linguistic repertoires, explicitly teach emotional and relational vocabulary to support expression and self-regulation, and use feedback that extends and dignifies contributions rather than restricting them. Overall, this article moves my thinking forward by showing that emotional security is not simply good practice—it is a linguistic necessity that directly influences attention, memory, meaning-making, and language development for EB students.

Ferré, P., Fraga, I., & Hinojosa, J. A. (2025). The interplay between language and emotion: Introduction to the special issue. *Cognition and Emotion*, 39(7), 1405–1417.

The purpose of this article is to introduce a 2025 special issue focused on the bidirectional relationship between language and emotion. The authors aim to synthesize recent scholarship, identify emerging patterns and gaps in the field, and frame directions for future interdisciplinary research.

This article is conceptual in nature. The authors conduct an integrative literature review of recent studies across psycholinguistics, bilingualism, developmental psychology, neurolinguistics, and affective science. Rather than presenting original empirical data, the article functions as a field-level synthesis and agenda-setting piece. The article is guided by contemporary cognitive-affective, developmental, and embodied perspectives that conceptualize language and emotion as mutually constitutive systems. These approaches reject traditional

models that treat emotion and language as separate cognitive domains and emphasize two directions of influence: emotion shaping language processing, and language shaping emotional understanding and regulation. The authors conclude that the historical separation between language and emotion is no longer tenable. Emotional states influence attention, processing, lexical access, and discourse during language use, while language plays a central role in how emotions are conceptualized, labeled, and regulated. The authors highlight significant advances in recent decades but also call for more empirical work using varied methodologies to better understand the complexity of this relationship.

This article provides essential theoretical justification for my ARP by validating a core assumption of my framework: language learning is inseparable from emotional experience. For EB students, participation and speaking are emotionally charged acts shaped by vulnerability, fear, and the desire to belong. Although the article does not propose classroom-based interventions, it offers a field-level rationale for designing learning environments that intentionally foreground emotional safety, identity affirmation, and relational trust as foundational conditions for language development. Its recency (August 2025) makes it a particularly compelling source for grounding my study in current scientific thinking.

Ferré, P., Fraga, I., & Hinojosa, J. A. (2025). The interplay between language and emotion:

A narrative review. *Cognition and Emotion*, 39(7), 1418–1445.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2025.2549965>

The purpose of this narrative review is to synthesize theoretical and empirical research on how language and emotion interact across cognitive, linguistic, and affective processes. The authors aim to clarify the mechanisms through which emotional states shape language use and processing, and how language, in turn, structures emotional concepts, regulation, and expression

for both monolingual and bilingual speakers. The article employs a narrative review methodology, integrating evidence from psycholinguistic studies, affective neuroscience, bilingualism research, and cognitive psychology. Rather than analyzing a single dataset, the authors compile and interpret findings from diverse research traditions to construct a conceptual map of how emotion and language interact. This approach allows for a broad and interdisciplinary understanding of the topic, even though it does not include a formal empirical component. The review draws on multiple complementary frameworks, including cognitive–affective models, affective neuroscience, psychological construction of emotion, embodied cognition, and bilingual affective processing models, all of which support a view of emotion and language as deeply interconnected systems. Across these perspectives, the authors advance a unified view of language and emotion as an integrated system rather than separate domains. The authors conclude that emotion modulates attention, memory, lexical retrieval, syntactic planning, and discourse organization, while language shapes the development, labeling, interpretation, and regulation of emotion concepts. They also highlight that emotional resonance can differ across languages and that contextual and relational factors play a significant role in emotional meaning-making. Traditional models separating language and emotion are therefore inadequate.

This narrative review strengthens my ARP because it reinforces the central premise of my theoretical framework: language learning is fundamentally emotional. While the companion article (Ferré et al., 2025) provides a broad conceptual overview and introduces the integration of language and emotion, this narrative review deepens that foundation by offering a detailed interdisciplinary explanation of the cognitive, neurological, and social mechanisms that make language and emotion inseparable. It helps explain why participation may fluctuate depending on

emotional safety, why students may hesitate or freeze during oral tasks, and how translanguaging can reduce affective load by reconnecting learners to emotionally grounded linguistic resources. While the review offers a strong theoretical foundation, it remains largely grounded in laboratory-based research and leaves unanswered questions about how these findings translate into secondary newcomer classrooms. This gap underscores the need for context-specific classroom research.

The following synthesis brings together the three sources discussed above to examine how emotion, language, and bilingual experience jointly inform the theoretical foundation of this study. Taken together, Aguilar et al. (2024) and Ferré, Fraga, and Hinojosa (2025) establish that language learning is an emotionally mediated process rather than a purely cognitive one. Ferré et al.'s (2025) introduction to the special issue affirms that the historical separation between language and emotion is no longer defensible, while their narrative review explains the mechanisms through which emotion shapes attention, memory, lexical access, and discourse, and language structures emotional meaning and regulation. Aguilar et al. (2024) extend this work by centering bilingual speakers, showing that emotional resonance often differs across languages and helping explain why emergent bilingual students may experience vulnerability or hesitation when using English. Together, these sources suggest that emotional factors play a particularly important role in multilingual learning environments, underscoring the need for instructional approaches that intentionally address the emotional dimensions of language learning. Within this perspective, practices such as translanguaging, identity-affirming instruction, and meaningful interaction emerge as important supports for communication and language development. These connections support an Emotional Context of Learning perspective as a lens for understanding the relationships among emotion, language, participation, and bilingual experience.

Hurd, N. M., Brinegar, K., Harrison, A., & Walker, T. (2021). Equity-based social emotional learning (SEL): A critical lens for moving forward. (PDF provided).

This conceptual article argues that SEL must be approached through an equity lens to avoid treating social-emotional development as culturally neutral or disconnected from power, identity, and opportunity. The authors aim to clarify what “equity-based SEL” requires in practice. The article is theoretical/conceptual, grounded in scholarship on SEL implementation, equity, and schooling. It synthesizes literature and critiques common SEL practices that can unintentionally reproduce inequities. The authors apply equity-oriented and sociocultural perspectives that frame SEL as contextual and relational rather than as a decontextualized set of behaviors. The lens emphasizes identity, belonging, and cultural affirmation as conditions for development. The authors contend that SEL implementation can become superficial if it ignores race, culture, language, and structural barriers. Equity-based SEL requires intentionally designing environments where students’ identities are affirmed and where relationships are trustworthy and empowering.

This article aligns with my ARP by strengthening the rationale for Transformative SEL for emergent bilingual students. It highlights that when classroom norms implicitly privilege monolingualism or standardization, SEL can be experienced as compliance rather than genuine belonging. An equity-based approach to SEL instead supports the intentional design of translanguaging-friendly, identity-affirming interactional routines in which language development and belonging are built together. Particularly relevant to this study is the authors’ emphasis on equity, cultural responsiveness, and the affirmation of students’ identities and assets. Although the article does not explicitly address translanguaging, its call for culturally sustaining and equity-centered educational practices aligns closely with translanguaging perspectives that

view students' linguistic repertoires as resources for learning, participation, and identity affirmation. This perspective supports my argument that translanguaging practices and emotionally safe learning environments are essential for fostering linguistic agency, self-efficacy, and meaningful participation among emergent bilingual students..

Lee, G., & Zhang, J. (2025). Teacher candidates' language beliefs and their self-efficacy to teach emergent bilinguals. *Teachers and Teaching*, 31(4), 656–677.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2023.2282480>

This quantitative study examines how teacher candidates' beliefs about language—especially their views of translanguaging—relate to their self-efficacy for teaching emergent bilingual (EB) students, addressing a gap in what is known about beliefs and confidence in EB instruction. The authors surveyed 124 teacher candidates at a U.S. public university. The validated survey measured (a) perceptions of translanguaging, (b) language ideologies (monoglossic views that treat languages as separate systems versus heteroglossic views that recognize flexible language practices), and (c) self-efficacy for teaching EBs. Analyses included descriptive statistics, correlations, and multiple regression. The study is grounded in Translanguaging Theory and language ideology frameworks, which conceptualize beliefs about language as socially constructed and consequential for instructional decisions and equity-oriented practice. This theoretical lens allows for examining how teachers' beliefs can either constrain or foster emotionally safe and academically inclusive learning environments for EB students. Positive perceptions of translanguaging significantly predicted higher self-efficacy. Using two or more languages during student teaching also predicted higher self-efficacy, suggesting that authentic multilingual practice matters. The authors argue teacher education

should actively dismantle monoglossic norms and provide practical, multilingual teaching experiences.

This article is highly relevant to my ARP because it directly links teacher stance to the emotional and linguistic climate students experience in the classroom. When teachers view students' multilingualism as legitimate, they are more likely to create conditions for safe participation, which are central to both Emotional Context of Learning Theory (ECLT) and Transformative SEL (TSEL). Although the study focuses on teacher candidates, its implications extend directly to emergent bilingual students: just as future teachers require authentic multilingual experiences to develop self-efficacy, students need learning environments in which their linguistic repertoires are recognized, valued, and actively used as resources. From this perspective, translanguaging emerges not only as a linguistic strategy but also as an effective, social, and cognitive practice that shapes confidence, agency, and willingness to participate.

Rojas, M. (2025). *An exploration of languaging interactions of Spanish–English emergent bilinguals to build SEL skills during free play*. Early Childhood Research Quarterly.

This qualitative study investigates how young Spanish–English emergent bilingual children use languaging/translanguaging during free play to build social-emotional learning (SEL) skills, showing how language and SEL develop together in peer interaction. The author analyzes video-recorded free-play interactions using micro-interactional analysis. The study examines how children negotiate meaning, manage conflict, model and extend peer language, and develop emotional understanding through bilingual interaction, with particular attention to how children's bilingual practices contribute simultaneously to language development and the development of social-emotional competencies such as social awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and relationship-building. The study draws on Translanguaging Theory and

Sociocultural Theory (ZPD, mediation), treating peer interaction as the site where both linguistic growth and SEL competencies emerge through co-construction. The study documents a key contribution by demonstrating that peer linguistic support is directly tied to both language development and SEL-related skills, highlighting the importance of talking about emotions and mental states for social-emotional development. The author emphasizes that this relationship between peer language support and SEL growth had not been examined in prior research, positioning the study as a novel contribution to the field. The article concludes that classrooms should intentionally allow and promote translanguaging rather than restrict it, as doing so strengthens both linguistic and emotional development.

A key strength of this article lies in its empirical demonstration that language development and social-emotional development are not parallel or separate processes, but simultaneous and deeply interdependent. Although the study is situated in early childhood education, its findings regarding the interconnected nature of language and emotional development extend meaningfully to high school emergent bilingual students, who are simultaneously developing a new language and negotiating a sense of belonging.

At the same time, the developmental, academic, and sociocultural realities of adolescent newcomers introduce complexities that differ substantially from early childhood contexts. While the principles of peer-mediated language and emotional growth appear transferable, the study does not directly examine how these mechanisms operate within the institutional structures, identity negotiations, and accountability pressures of secondary newcomer classrooms. Rather than diminishing the study's value, this distinction underscores the importance of investigating how such interactional principles can be intentionally adapted and pedagogically strengthened in high school ELD settings—precisely the focus of my ARP. Most importantly, this article

reshaped my understanding of the reciprocal relationship between language and emotion: emergent bilinguals grow linguistically as they grow emotionally, and emotionally as they participate linguistically. This reciprocity lies at the heart of my ARP.

Sangeetha, S., & Sri Dhivya, D. (2025). The power of translanguaging: Theoretical insights and empirical evidence on language acquisition and social-emotional learning. *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(1), 102406.

<https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v8n1.102406>

This quasi-experimental study examines whether translanguaging-based instruction integrated with SEL principles improves multilingual learners' English acquisition and social-emotional competencies. The study seeks to address an important gap in the literature: while translanguaging is well established theoretically, there is limited empirical evidence directly examining its relationship with SEL outcomes. Seventy-five multilingual college students participated in a quasi-experimental intervention involving translanguaging activities aligned with SEL. Data were collected through Likert-scale surveys and open-ended responses to capture changes in language outcomes and SEL-related experiences. The study is grounded in translanguaging theory and SEL frameworks, with a sociocultural orientation that views learning as mediated through interaction, identity, and participation. Results indicate improvements in vocabulary acquisition, self-expression, and overall English proficiency, alongside growth in social-emotional competencies such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, cultural appreciation, and collaboration. The findings suggest that translanguaging integrated with SEL supports both language development and social-emotional growth, particularly for linguistically marginalized students, while monolingual instructional systems tend to create emotional and academic barriers. Based on these results, the authors recommend expanding

translanguaging-plus-SEL models across educational levels, positioning translanguaging as a transformative approach to inclusive, emotionally safe, and effective language learning.

This study is particularly valuable for my ARP because it is among the few empirical investigations demonstrating that translanguaging can strengthen both language outcomes and SEL-related competencies, aligning with my integrated framework (ECLT, TSEL, and Quality Interactions). This evidence supports my argument that emergent bilingual students benefit from emotionally safe, bilingual learning environments—not merely increased linguistic input—to foster meaningful language development.

However, the study provides limited information about how differences in classroom implementation may have influenced the reported outcomes. Moreover, the reported SEL gains may reflect factors such as novelty effects, teacher enthusiasm, or structured collaboration rather than translanguaging alone. Although conducted in a higher education context in India, the study offers insights that may be relevant to secondary newcomer programs, particularly the finding that when students are able to draw on their full linguistic repertoires, self-expression increases, affective barriers decrease, and richer interaction and language development become possible.

Despite these limitations, the study remains a significant contribution because it begins to empirically connect translanguaging and social-emotional development—an area that remains underexplored. Its findings support the direction of my ARP and reinforce the importance of intentionally designed translanguaging practices that create conditions for participation, communication, and language development. Overall, this article strengthens my central claim that translanguaging can function as both a cognitive and emotional bridge, making English learning more meaningful, affirming, and accessible for emergent bilingual students.

Walqui, A. (2019). *Shifting from the teaching of oral skills to the development of oracy*. In L. de Oliveira (Ed.), *The Handbook of TESOL in K–12 Education* (pp. 181–197). Wiley.

This article argues for shifting from isolated “oral skills” instruction toward oracy development—using language to explain, compare, argue, and participate meaningfully in academic settings—and clarifies what “Quality Interactions” look like for multilingual learners. This is a research-informed synthesis that draws on sociocultural theory, ecological approaches to language learning, and classroom interactions research (including work connected to QTEL). Through conceptual analysis and authentic classroom illustrations rather than a single empirical dataset, the author demonstrates how scaffolding and interactional design shape students’ opportunities to speak and make meaning. Grounded in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, Walqui argues that learning language is inseparable from developing conceptual understanding through social interaction. The chapter also incorporates van Lier’s ecological perspective, emphasizing that language learning depends on the quality of available affordances—the meaningful opportunities to participate, negotiate meaning, and co-construct knowledge. Walqui identifies Quality Interactions as the central pathway to oracy, emphasizing that students require intellectually rich tasks, contingent scaffolding, and feedback that extends ideas rather than simply correcting errors, which can shut down participation. The chapter underscores the importance of designing tasks that promote authentic intellectual engagement and fostering a classroom culture in which students feel safe to experiment with language. Overall, interaction quality determines the quantity and richness of linguistic affordances available to learners.

What stands out in this chapter is the clear connection between emotional safety and students’ willingness to participate orally, a core dimension of Transformative SEL. Walqui’s concept of Quality Interactions affirms that emergent bilingual students develop language not

through isolated practice, but through intellectually rich, socially supported exchanges in which their emerging contributions are valued.

This chapter is central to my ARP because it operationalizes what my framework requires in practice: while TSEL establishes the emotional climate, Walqui clarifies how interactional design must function so EB students can take linguistic risks, extend thinking, and develop academic voice. Although the chapter is theoretical rather than empirical, its synthesis of sociocultural and ecological perspectives provides a strong foundation for instructional design.

Walqui, A., & Heritage, M. (2018). Meaningful classroom talk: Supporting English learners' oral language development. *American Educator*, Fall, 18–39.

The authors outline how meaningful, academically grounded classroom talk supports English learners' oral language development and clarifies misconceptions about how EB students learn to speak with confidence and complexity. This article synthesizes sociocultural research on classroom discourse and language development and draws on instructional examples from real classrooms, including scenarios from Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL) professional development work with teachers. Although it is not a single empirical study, the chapter is grounded in an extensive research base and classroom-based evidence. Grounded in sociocultural theory, the authors frame oral language as emerging through scaffolded, high-quality interaction where students negotiate meaning, build identity, and participate as legitimate contributors. The authors present six guidelines for improving interaction quality: (1) offering complex ideas worth discussing, (2) ensuring equitable access to rigorous content, (3) structuring tasks that require meaningful talk, (4) validating student perspectives, (5) sustaining extended student discourse, and (6) using student ideas to advance instruction. They emphasize that oracy grows when students feel safe to try, revise, and extend language.

What is most meaningful in this article is its emphasis on the intentional creation of a trusting classroom culture in which emergent bilingual students know that whatever language they are able to produce will be valued. For EB students, speaking is not simply linguistic output but an act of vulnerability. The authors provide concrete guidance—through six interactional principles—for designing classroom talk that affirms student identity, builds confidence, and reduces anxiety, thereby increasing participation. This focus on interaction as both emotional and instructional practice aligns directly with my framework and provides the kind of Quality Interaction pathway necessary to support language development, belonging, and oracy for emergent bilingual students.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter consistently positions language development as an emotional, social, and relational process, particularly for emergent bilingual students. Across Emotional Context of Learning Theory (ECLT), Transformative Social-Emotional Learning (TSEL), Sociocultural Theory, Quality Interactions, and Translanguaging Theory, a common understanding emerges: students are more likely to participate, communicate, and develop oral language when learning environments affirm their identities, support emotional safety, and provide meaningful opportunities for interaction. Across these frameworks, a consistent thread emerges: meaningful participation in emotionally secure, relationally grounded interactions serves as the engine of both linguistic and social-emotional development for emergent bilingual students.

At the same time, the literature reveals a limited body of research that explicitly integrates these perspectives within secondary contexts serving emergent bilingual and multilingual learners. This gap highlights the need for context-specific inquiry into how these

conditions are experienced and enacted in classroom settings. Ultimately, the literature positions language learning as a relational, emotional, and identity-driven process—one that must be examined not only in theory, but in lived classroom practice, where emotion, interaction, and language operate as interdependent dimensions of learning. The following chapter describes the methodology used to investigate how these relationships were experienced and enacted within the context of this study.

Chapter 3: Methods Guideline

Sagor (2000), citing materials from the Institute for the Study of Inquiry in Education, defined action research as "a disciplined process of inquiry carried out by and for those who undertake the action" (p. 3). In educational contexts, this disciplined inquiry helps teachers strengthen those dimensions of their practice that most directly influence student development. Rather than focusing solely on the delivery of instruction, action research supports educators in examining the relational, emotional, and interactional conditions that shape student learning.

Sagor (2000) outlined a seven-step cyclical process of action research: (1) selecting a focus, (2) clarifying theories, (3) identifying research question, (4) collecting data, (5) analyzing data, (6) reporting results, and (7) taking informed action. These steps guided the structure of this study. The inquiry began with the identification of a meaningful problem of practice and was grounded in the theoretical perspectives explored in Chapters 1 and 2 before proceeding to the systematic collection and analysis of data. Ultimately, the findings supported ongoing reflection on instructional practice and helped guide future decisions regarding classroom interaction, student participation, and engagement.

Action research was an appropriate methodology for this study because it allowed for the systematic investigation of classroom interactions within their natural classroom context. Grounded in Emotional Context of Learning Theory (ECLT), Transformative Social-Emotional Learning (TSEL), Sociocultural Theory, and Translanguaging Theory, this project conceptualized language development, emotional safety, identity affirmation, and classroom participation as interdependent processes. Rather than isolating linguistic outcomes from socioemotional experience, this study examined how linguistically inclusive, emotionally responsive, and interaction-centered instructional practices functioned together as mutually reinforcing

conditions that supported students' participation, oral language development, linguistic self-efficacy, and sense of belonging.

Guided by these theoretical perspectives, the following research question framed the study:

How do emotionally safe, translanguaging-friendly, and quality classroom interactions function as interdependent conditions supporting emergent bilingual students' participation, oral language development, linguistic self-efficacy, and sense of belonging in a high school ELD classroom?

In alignment with asset-based and translanguaging perspectives, the term *emergent bilingual students* was used throughout this study to emphasize linguistic development, multilingual competence, and language identity formation rather than deficit-oriented labels.

Contexts of the study

This study was conducted in a Language Arts Emerging English Language Development (ELD) classroom at a public high school in an urban district in Clackamas County, Oregon. The school serves a linguistically and culturally diverse student population, reflecting broader demographic shifts across the region. The classroom selected for this study supported emergent bilingual students developing English proficiency at the Emerging levels. Instruction took place on an alternating Day 1 block schedule. As a result, the class met either two or three times per week, depending on the school calendar, with each instructional period lasting approximately 87 minutes.

The focal class includes 17 emergent bilingual students ranging in age from 14 to 18, including a balanced distribution of male and female students across grades 9–12. Of these students, ten identify Spanish as their primary home language, two speak Ukrainian and Russian,

three speak Vietnamese, and two speak Amharic. Seven students are considered newcomers, as they have been enrolled in U.S. schools for less than one year at the time of the study, while the remaining students have had varying lengths of exposure to English-medium schooling.

Students also represented a range of English language proficiency levels. While many students were in the earliest stages of English language development, others ranged from emerging to more advanced levels of proficiency, with a few students approaching or meeting proficiency according to state English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessments. This range of proficiency levels contributed to diverse participation patterns and varying instructional support needs within the classroom.

Students brought diverse academic and cultural funds of knowledge to the classroom, including multilingual communication practices, family and community networks, varied educational experiences, and lived experiences of migration and adaptation. While some students entered the classroom with strong academic foundations in their home countries, others had experienced interruptions in formal education, mobility across schools or states, or recent transitions into the U.S. school system. In addition to linguistic diversity, several students also faced social, economic, and systemic challenges that influenced classroom participation and engagement, including housing instability and parenting responsibilities. These experiences contributed to varying levels of confidence, participation, and willingness to take academic risks within the classroom environment.

Collectively, the class represented a wide range of linguistic experiences, educational backgrounds, and levels of English development, creating a highly heterogeneous learning environment typical of secondary newcomer and emerging bilingual programs.

These linguistic, cultural, and experiential resources were positioned as central components of instruction throughout the study. Data were collected during the implementation of a five-lesson mini-unit centered on the graphic novel *When the Stars Are Scattered*. The mini-unit integrated language development, literacy instruction, social-emotional learning, and opportunities for meaningful interaction. Across the lessons, students engaged in classroom discussions, thematic analyses, reflection activities, collaborative learning routines, multimodal projects, and oral presentations. Instruction intentionally incorporated translanguaging opportunities, oral language scaffolds, structured dialogue routines, culturally relevant connections, and socioemotional supports designed to foster engagement, confidence, meaningful participation, and supportive peer relationships. Student interests, including music preferences and personal experiences, were also incorporated to strengthen relevance and support identity affirmation.

The researcher serves as a bilingual paraeducator at this high school and had worked in the Emerging ELD program for three years prior to the study. Since the beginning of the academic year, the researcher had assumed a primary instructional role in the design and delivery of classroom activities. This role extended beyond the implementation of the mini-unit and contributed to the development of strong relationships with students. Some students had worked with the researcher during the previous academic year, while others entered the program at the start of the 2025–2026 school year. Two additional students joined shortly before the study began. This sustained involvement provided familiarity with students' linguistic repertoires, participation patterns, and individual strengths and needs, while also contributing to a classroom climate characterized by relational trust and emotional safety.

The researcher's background as an immigrant and bilingual educator informed efforts to reduce students' affective filter by encouraging academic risk-taking, normalizing mistakes as part of language learning, and embracing translanguaging as a practice that honored students' identities and multilingual resources. The researcher's strengths included established relationships with students, familiarity with their participation patterns, and experience supporting emergent bilingual students through translanguaging and scaffolded interaction. At the same time, the researcher remained attentive to areas for growth, including ensuring equitable linguistic inclusion across all language groups and balancing emotional safety with consistent academic rigor.

This environment provided a meaningful context for examining how emotionally responsive and linguistically inclusive classroom interactions shaped students' participation, oral language development, linguistic self-efficacy, and sense of belonging.

Data Collection and Analysis

According to Sagor's (2000) framework, action research data collection should be systematic, purposeful, and triangulated to strengthen the validity and credibility of findings. In alignment with this principle, multiple forms of qualitative data were collected throughout the implementation of a mini-unit to examine how emotionally safe, translanguaging-friendly, and high-quality classroom interactions shaped emergent bilingual students' participation, oral language development, linguistic self-efficacy, and sense of belonging. The mini-unit was implemented over five instructional lessons delivered across approximately two and a half weeks of instruction.

Data sources included the mini-unit plan, lesson plans, teaching reflection journals, classroom assessments, exit tickets, student work samples, informal observations of student

engagement, and feedback from the mentor teacher and university supervisor. Instructional materials included the anchor text *When the Stars Are Scattered*, culturally relevant resources, and collaborative language activities. In addition, district-aligned English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards (Oregon Department of Education, 2019) guided lesson design and language objectives. Together, these materials documented how structured peer interaction, translanguaging opportunities, oral language scaffolds, and socioemotional supports were intentionally embedded throughout instruction.

Student artifacts included thematic analyses, structured worksheets, written paragraphs, multimodal projects, and oral presentation performances generated through collaborative interaction routines such as Think-Pair-Share, partner discussions, and structured peer dialogue. These artifacts were analyzed to examine language complexity, participation patterns, oral language production, and shifts in students' confidence over time. In addition, field notes and informal observations were collected during classroom discussions, gallery walk activities, reflection circles, and oral presentations. Observation notes focused on participation, translanguaging practices, peer support, interactional engagement, and indicators of confidence and academic risk-taking. The researcher also maintained a reflective teaching journal documenting instructional decisions, classroom climate, and emerging participation patterns throughout the study.

Data analysis followed a traditional qualitative interpretive process. After organizing the collected data, the researcher reviewed field notes, student artifacts, assessments, reflections, and observational records multiple times to identify recurring patterns across the different sources. Open coding was used to label recurring ideas, behaviors, and interactional patterns emerging from the data, including willingness to speak, peer support, translanguaging practices,

collaborative meaning-making, confidence in oral participation, and academic risk-taking. These codes were then grouped into broader themes connected to the study's research question and conceptual framework.

To strengthen credibility and reduce the limitations of relying on a single data source, findings were triangulated across classroom observations, student artifacts, reflection journals, assessments, and student self-reflections, following Sagor's (2000) emphasis on triangulated data collection in action research. The interpretation of themes was guided by the theoretical perspectives presented in Chapter 1, including Emotional Context of Learning Theory (Aguilar et al., 2024; Ferré et al., 2025), Transformative Social-Emotional Learning (Jagers et al., 2019), Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and Translanguaging Theory (García, 2019; García et al., 2017). For example, recurring patterns related to peer dialogue, emotional safety, and students' willingness to participate orally informed themes connected to engagement and linguistic confidence, while patterns related to translanguaging and collaborative interaction contributed to themes of identity affirmation and meaning-making.

Finally, feedback from my clinical teacher and university supervisor contributed to refining interpretations, identifying potential blind spots, and strengthening the overall trustworthiness of the findings.

Researcher Positionality

My layered identity as an immigrant, former English learner student, and bilingual educator shaped this study and influenced both my teaching practice and the way I interpreted classroom interactions throughout the research process. As a Cuban immigrant who experienced learning and adapting within a new language and educational system, I approached this study with a deep awareness of how emotional safety, belonging, and classroom relationships influence

language learning and participation. These experiences aligned closely with the theoretical perspectives guiding this study, particularly Emotional Context of Learning Theory (ECLT), Transformative Social and Emotional Learning (TSEL), Sociocultural Theory, and Translanguaging Theory, all of which emphasize the relational and emotional dimensions of learning. My perspective was also shaped by my broader philosophy of education and by bell hooks' (1994) view of teaching as a relational and dialogic practice grounded in participation, voice, and human connection.

Throughout the study, I intentionally prioritized dialogue, collaboration, academic risk-taking, and meaningful participation in the classroom. I worked to lower students' affective filters by normalizing mistakes as part of language learning, incorporating students' interests and culturally relevant materials, and embracing translanguaging not only as a classroom practice, but also as a pedagogy and identity-affirming approach that honored students' multilingual resources and cultural identities. Because I shared experiences of immigration and bilingualism with many students, I was able to build strong relational trust within the classroom. At the same time, I remained aware that I did not share all of the linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences represented among students in the study. This awareness encouraged me to design lessons and interactions that honored classroom diversity while fostering empathy, mutual respect, and meaningful dialogue.

My positionality also influenced how I interpreted participation and engagement during data collection and analysis. Because I strongly value emotionally supportive and linguistically inclusive learning environments, I remained attentive to the possibility of confirmation bias when interpreting patterns related to confidence, participation, and interaction. To strengthen the

trustworthiness of the study, I triangulated multiple sources of qualitative data and incorporated feedback from my clinical teacher and university supervisor throughout the analysis process.

Chapter 4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the analysis of data collected during the implementation of a two-week mini-unit in a high school Emerging ELD classroom. Guided by the research question, *How do emotionally safe, translanguaging-friendly, and quality classroom interactions function as interdependent conditions supporting emergent bilingual students' participation, oral language development, linguistic self-efficacy, and sense of belonging in a high school ELD classroom?* The study examined patterns across multiple data sources, including classroom observations, teacher reflection journals, student work samples, assessments, participation patterns, oral language observations, student self-reflections, and instructional artifacts. Together, these sources provided insight into how students experienced and responded to the classroom conditions intentionally designed to support their willingness to communicate and engage in oral language activities.

Analysis of the data revealed three interrelated themes: (1) emotional safety and sense of belonging supported language risk-taking, (2) collaborative interaction supported oral participation and engagement, and (3) translanguaging and structured scaffolds supported access and academic language development. Although presented separately for organizational purposes, these themes frequently overlapped and reinforced one another, reflecting the interconnected nature of emotion, interaction, identity, and language development within the classroom context. Across the data, oral language development was not understood solely as increased participation, but as a process supported through the interaction of emotional safety, meaningful collaboration, translanguaging opportunities, and scaffolded support, which together encouraged students' willingness to communicate, engage with others, and take linguistic risks. Each theme is discussed using multiple qualitative data sources connected to the study's theoretical framework, illustrating how these classroom conditions shaped students' experiences and appeared to support

their willingness to communicate and engage in oral language practices within this instructional context.

Emotional Safety and Sense of Belonging Supported Language Risk-Taking

One recurring theme throughout the data was that emotionally supportive classroom interactions facilitated students' willingness to participate orally and take academic language risks. As students began to feel more comfortable, respected, and emotionally supported within the classroom environment, they demonstrated greater confidence when sharing ideas, participating in discussions, and engaging in collaborative learning activities. Classroom observations, instructional reflections, and student interactions consistently suggested that emotional safety played a central role in supporting oral language development.

I intentionally worked to create a low-stress and supportive environment where students felt comfortable participating and sharing their ideas. This environment was fostered through a variety of intentional instructional practices designed to reduce linguistic anxiety and strengthen students' sense of belonging throughout the school year and reinforced during the mini-unit. For example, students were strategically seated near peers who shared their home language so they could use bilingual resources and support one another when needed. Students also worked within collaborative groups of four, allowing them to build relationships and establish trust before engaging in the final presentation activities. Classroom norms consistently emphasized that mistakes were a natural part of language learning. To reinforce the message that all students were developing language skills and that risk-taking was valued, we established a Golden Rule in this classroom: "*Mistakes Are Part of Learning.*" Students were regularly reminded that everyone in the classroom, including the teacher, was continuing to learn and develop as language users. As

an English learner myself, I often modeled linguistic risk-taking by openly acknowledging that my English was not perfect and that making mistakes was a natural part of the learning process.

One consistent pattern across classroom observations was that students demonstrated greater confidence and willingness to communicate when opportunities for oral participation were emotionally supportive and connected to meaningful discussion. Students appeared more comfortable making personal connections, sharing experiences, and participating in oral tasks when the classroom environment emphasized encouragement, flexibility, and emotional safety. Lessons frequently began with brief socioemotional prompts that invited students to connect classroom learning to their personal experiences, cultures, and identities. Classroom expectations emphasized respect, empathy, active listening, and the value of diverse perspectives. In addition, opportunities to discuss topics such as empathy, resilience, multilingualism, and cultural diversity reinforced a classroom culture grounded in respect, encouragement, and mutual support.

One particularly meaningful example emerged during a class discussion about migration and personal experiences. One student reflected, *“One of the most difficult moments in my life was when I had to cross the border from Mexico to the USA. In that moment I felt nervous and scared, and at the same time I had to manage my emotions.”* The student shared this experience openly with classmates, connecting it to themes of courage, uncertainty, and resilience discussed in the novel. Moments such as these demonstrated a level of trust and emotional openness that extended beyond academic participation alone. At the conclusion of these discussions, I intentionally acknowledged and thanked students for sharing experiences that carried significant personal and emotional meaning, reinforcing the message that their voices, identities, and lived experiences were valued within the classroom community. Reflecting on these experiences, I

noted in my teacher journal that “*the safe environment we built allowed students to take risks and share deeply personal experiences.*”

One of the clearest moments connected to this theme emerged during Lesson 3, which marked an important shift in student participation. After adjusting groupings and intentionally creating a more supportive environment, students participated more actively in small-group discussions and appeared more willing to communicate when they felt comfortable with their peers. The classroom atmosphere became noticeably calmer, more collaborative, and more focused, reinforcing the importance of emotional safety in supporting students' willingness to communicate and engage in oral interaction. This pattern continued throughout the remainder of the mini-unit.

The strongest evidence of this theme emerged during the final presentations in Lesson 5. Students demonstrated confidence and willingness to communicate as they presented their Digital One-Pager projects. Many connected themes such as migration, resilience, identity, and belonging to their own lives, suggesting that they felt comfortable engaging in both academic and personal forms of communication. For example, one student connected the theme of hope to her mother's battle with cancer, explaining, “*An example of this is when my mother had cancer; I never lost hope and stayed strong with her, helping her and giving her hope.*” Another student connected themes of uncertainty and courage to the experience of immigrating to a new country, reflecting, “*When I left Venezuela, I was scared because I didn't know what would happen to everything I was leaving behind, and I didn't know how I would fare in the future.*” while a third connected the theme of resilience to personal emotional challenges, explaining, “*I sometimes find it difficult to move forward because I get caught up in my thoughts . . . but I try to keep going.*” These personal connections demonstrated how students moved beyond surface-level

comprehension of the novel and engaged with its themes in meaningful and authentic ways. These moments reflected more than participation alone; they demonstrated trust, emotional investment, and confidence in oral communication.

Student self-reflections and classroom check-ins also reinforced this theme. Throughout the unit, students were frequently invited to reflect on how they felt about their participation and oral production. Many described feeling successful or moderately successful, even when they believed they still needed additional language support. These reflections suggested that students were becoming more willing to communicate despite linguistic insecurity. One student's written reflection captured this experience particularly well: *"It helped me a lot that the book told the story of two children who immigrated to the United States and apart from that they had classmates with whom I had a good friendship. The relationships between the story and my story also the comparison between the story of the child and that made it easy for me why my classmates had the same level of English as me."*

Although written with developing English, this reflection highlights several conditions that emerged throughout the data. The student connected personal experiences to the text, valued supportive peer relationships, and recognized shared language learning experiences with classmates. Rather than emphasizing language accuracy, the reflection suggests that emotional safety, belonging, and shared experiences appeared to support the student's willingness to communicate and participate.

Throughout the unit, I intentionally reinforced the idea that mistakes were a natural part of language learning and that oral participation mattered more than perfect accuracy. This emphasis appeared to reduce anxiety and encourage students to take greater risks with language.

These findings suggest that emotional safety and a sense of belonging functioned as foundational conditions supporting oral language development within this classroom context. Rather than reflecting participation alone, students appeared more willing to communicate, elaborate on ideas, use academic language, and take linguistic risks when they felt emotionally supported and respected. This theme strongly connects to the Emotional Context of Learning Theory and to social-emotional learning frameworks that emphasize the relationship between emotional safety, engagement, and meaningful participation.

Collaborative Interaction Supported Oral Participation and Engagement

Another major theme that emerged throughout the data was the important role collaborative interaction played in increasing students' oral participation and engagement. Instructional practices such as Think-Pair-Share, partner discussions, oral rehearsal opportunities, collaborative presentations, and intentional grouping structures created spaces where students felt more comfortable practicing language and building ideas together. Across observations and reflections, students consistently demonstrated strong participation during peer-supported interactions.

Collaborative learning structures became particularly important because many students initially demonstrated hesitation when speaking independently in English. Opportunities to rehearse ideas with peers before sharing with larger groups appeared to reduce anxiety and increase participation. These findings align with Walqui's (2019) concept of quality interactions, which emphasizes purposeful, scaffolded opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and meaning-making that allow students to rehearse language, negotiate understanding, receive feedback, and build ideas with others before participating in increasingly complex forms of communication.

Throughout the mini-unit, collaborative activities were intentionally embedded within the instructional sequence rather than occurring incidentally. These activities were designed as part of a scaffolded learning process that gradually prepared students for collaborative presentations and oral rehearsal. Students participated in partner discussions, small-group analysis of Golden Lines, collaborative theme statement construction, and oral rehearsal activities that progressively prepared them for the final presentations.

Strategic grouping practices, guided discussion protocols, sentence frames, and teacher modeling created opportunities for students to organize ideas, practice vocabulary, clarify understanding, and receive feedback from both peers and the teacher before participating in larger speaking tasks. Rather than serving as an evaluation at the end of an activity, feedback functioned as an ongoing part of the learning process, helping students refine ideas, extend conversations, and build confidence as communicators.

One particularly meaningful example of collaborative interaction occurred during the theme development activities that preceded the final presentations. Students first worked with a teacher-created Golden Lines Bank to identify possible themes from the novel before collaboratively constructing theme statements. Using graphic organizers, sentence frames, and partner discussions, students compared interpretations, justified their reasoning with textual evidence, and refined their ideas through conversation.

Students also collaborated to create character and theme posters that required them to synthesize textual evidence, discuss interpretations, and explain connections between the novel and broader themes. Working in pairs or small groups, students negotiated ideas, selected supporting evidence, and prepared explanations that later supported their oral presentations.



Figure 4.1 *Students collaborating during theme development and oral rehearsal activities.*

Student artifacts further illustrated the role of collaborative interaction in supporting meaning-making. Working with peers, students developed theme statements, connected evidence to broader ideas, and prepared visual presentations that synthesized their learning. One student-generated theme statement explained that *“Education can change a person's future. If a person possesses an education, they will be prepared to cope with whatever the future holds and enjoy a brighter future.”* Another student concluded that *“The theme of resilience in the story is that the characters face difficult moments, and even when they feel they cannot go on, they overcome those difficulties.”* These artifacts reflected how collaborative discussion and guided practice supported students in organizing ideas, connecting textual evidence to broader themes, and expressing their thinking using academic language.

Observational tools such as the Oral Language Development Checklist and the Speaking Interaction Rubric informed classroom observations and helped organize evidence related to students' willingness to communicate, peer interaction, and participation during collaborative activities. Across multiple lessons, classroom observations suggested increasing willingness to participate, elaborate on ideas, and sustain conversations with peers when collaborative support and opportunities for interaction were present. Students who initially relied heavily on prompting

often appeared more willing to contribute independently during partner and group discussions as the unit progressed.

Observations conducted by both the clinical teacher and university supervisor further reinforced these findings. Observation reports documented purposeful grouping structures, collaborative learning opportunities, explicit modeling, guided practice, scaffolded supports, and ongoing feedback designed to promote oral participation and language development. As the university supervisor noted, the lesson sequence demonstrated *"excellent modeling"* and a *"gradual release of responsibility,"* while providing students with multiple supports and clarifications throughout the learning process. External observations also highlighted opportunities for students to collaborate in small groups, discuss ideas, clarify understanding, and rehearse language before completing independent tasks.

Students' final presentations highlighted the importance of collaborative learning structures in supporting oral participation and communication. Throughout the mini-unit, students engaged in a sequence of scaffolded activities that gradually prepared them for the culminating task. Early lessons focused on identifying themes, analyzing Golden Lines, and constructing theme statements through teacher modeling, sentence frames, visual supports, and collaborative practice. Figure 4.2 presents examples of scaffolded activities that students used to identify themes, connect textual evidence, and develop ideas collaboratively before participating in oral discussions and final presentations. As the unit progressed, students increasingly assumed responsibility for explaining their thinking, connecting evidence to themes, and discussing ideas with peers.

Practice 1: Your Turn

1. READ AND WRITE THE GOLDEN LINE

"That's my best friend, Terry. I have known him practically my whole life."

2. IDENTIFY THE TOPIC

The topic is: friendship

3. EXPLAIN THE EVIDENCE

This shows that: This show that Omar has along-lasting friendship.

4. BUILD THE THEME

The author teaches us that: It tell every about a pure and lasting friendship that has stood by each other through life's ups and downs.

Practice 2: Your Turn

Theme Project Planning Organizer

Name: _____

Theme

The theme of Hope develops in the novel because Hope helps people continue during difficult times

Quote(s) (1-3)

In the text, it says:

(19) 1. "I just want the war in Somalia to end so we can go back home."

(25) 2. "As soon as the war ended in Somalia, we could go back home."

(36) 3. "Fatima is always saying everything will be okay."

Explanation

This shows that Omar and his family keep hoping for a better future even when life is very difficult.

Connection

This theme matters to me because hope helps people stay strong and not give up when life is hard

Figure 4.2. Examples of scaffolded activities used to support collaborative theme development and meaning-making.

By the time students completed their final presentations, many appeared able to explain theme development and support their ideas with textual evidence using language structures that had been introduced and practiced throughout the unit. Classroom observations, student artifacts, and presentation rubrics suggested that many students were willing to communicate, share ideas, and participate in oral academic tasks when provided with opportunities for collaboration, rehearsal, peer support, and ongoing feedback. Although this study did not formally measure changes in oral language proficiency, the qualitative data suggest that collaborative interaction functioned as an important condition supporting students' willingness to communicate and engage in oral language practices within this classroom context.

Rather than occurring through isolated speaking tasks, students' willingness to participate and engage in academic talk was most often observed through interaction with others, where they could draw upon peer support, negotiate meaning, and build confidence through shared participation. These findings align closely with Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which

positions interaction and mediation as central mechanisms in language development, and with Walqui's (2019) emphasis on quality interactions as purposeful, scaffolded opportunities that support participation, confidence, and language learning for emergent bilingual students.

Translanguaging and Structured Scaffolds Supported Access and Academic Language Development

The data also revealed that translanguaging practices and structured instructional scaffolds supported students' comprehension, academic vocabulary development, fluency, and confidence in oral interaction. Throughout the unit, supports such as sentence frames, graphic organizers, guided rehearsal, modeling, bilingual clarification, and multimodal learning opportunities reduced linguistic hesitation and increased students' access to academic content and oral participation.

One of the strongest patterns across the data was the importance of sentence frames and structured oral supports. Early in the unit, students were generally able to identify themes and key ideas, but many struggled to explain their thinking using evidence from the text. In response, I incorporated more intentional linguistic supports, including guided modeling, structured examples, visual scaffolds, and sentence frames to support academic language production. Figure 4.3 illustrates one of the scaffolded instructional tools used during the mini-unit to help students connect textual evidence, develop explanations, and construct theme statements through a clearly sequenced process. By making the thinking process visible, these supports reduced uncertainty and provided students with accessible pathways for participating in academic conversations.

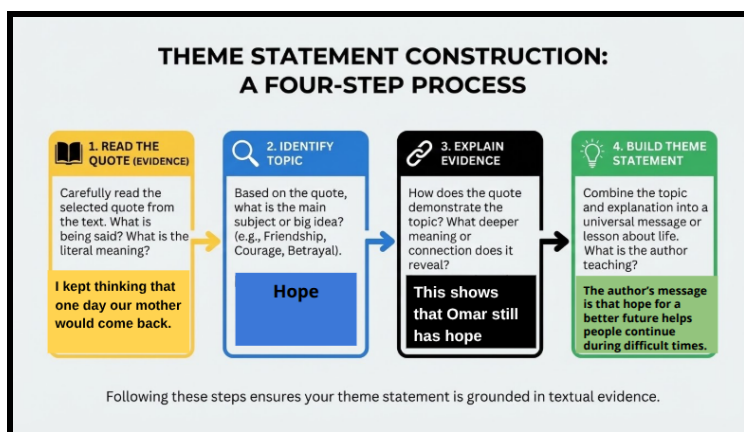


Figure 4.3. *Theme statement construction scaffold used to support academic language development.*

The use of translanguaging also emerged as an important support for comprehension and participation. Throughout the mini-unit, students were encouraged to draw upon their home languages to clarify meaning, connect new concepts to prior knowledge, and rehearse ideas before expressing them in English. During the final presentations, I intentionally shifted between Spanish and English to clarify expectations, encourage students, and reduce anxiety during oral tasks. Because Spanish was also my home language, these moments created a more personal and affirming environment where students appeared more comfortable taking linguistic risks and engaging in oral communication.

Similar practices were embedded across the mini-unit through multilingual vocabulary supports, bilingual clarification, and opportunities for peer discussion around concepts such as bravery, courage, resilience, and hope. Students frequently used their home languages to negotiate meaning, explain unfamiliar vocabulary, ask questions, and connect literary themes to their own lived experiences before sharing ideas in English. Figure 4.4 illustrates one example of the multilingual rehearsal activity intentionally designed to support collaboration, oral rehearsal, peer feedback, and oral preparation.



Figure 4.4. Multilingual rehearsal activity designed to support collaboration, oral rehearsal, and peer feedback during preparation for oral presentations.

As students became more confident in their understanding of these concepts, they also appeared more willing to contribute ideas, make personal connections, and participate in oral tasks. Viewed through this lens, translanguaging functioned not only as linguistic support, but also as an identity-affirming practice that fostered meaning-making, reduced uncertainty, and created conditions in which students felt more comfortable participating and communicating.

Together, these instructional supports helped students move from comprehension to oral expression. Graphic organizers provided a structure for organizing ideas and connecting evidence to themes, while guided rehearsal opportunities allowed students to practice responses, receive feedback, and build confidence before presenting publicly. These scaffolds appeared particularly important for newcomer and multilingual students who benefited from additional support in organizing and expressing their thinking orally.

External observations further reinforced these findings. Observation notes documented, "*Several languages used for mini discussions*" providing additional evidence that students actively drew upon their linguistic repertoires during collaborative learning activities. These external observations supported the finding that translanguaging was intentionally embedded

within instruction and that students' home languages functioned as resources for comprehension, meaning-making, and participation rather than as barriers to English language development.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that oral language development was not shaped by isolated instructional practices, but by the interaction of three interdependent conditions that consistently emerged across the data: emotional safety and sense of belonging, collaborative interaction, and translanguageing supported through intentional scaffolds. Rather than functioning independently, these conditions worked together to create learning environments in which students appeared more willing to communicate, participate in academic discussions, connect evidence to ideas, and take linguistic risks.

Across multiple data sources, students demonstrated a willingness to engage in oral language activities when they felt emotionally supported, had opportunities to build meaning collaboratively, and could draw upon their full linguistic repertoires through translanguageing and scaffolded supports. These findings align with Emotional Context of Learning Theory, Sociocultural Theory, Transformative Social-Emotional Learning, and Translanguageing Theory, all of which emphasize that language development is an emotional, relational, and socially mediated process supported through meaningful interaction and identity-affirming learning experiences.

While the findings presented in this chapter describe patterns observed during the implementation of the mini-unit, they also raise important questions about how these patterns relate to existing research and to the broader conceptual framework guiding this study. The following chapter examines these findings in relation to the literature and research question in order to explore their implications for supporting oral language development among emergent bilingual students.

Chapter 5. Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusion

The findings presented in Chapter 4 suggest that oral language development was not shaped by isolated instructional practices, but by the interaction of emotional safety, collaborative interaction, and translanguaging supported through intentional scaffolds. This chapter discusses these findings in relation to the research question, the theoretical framework, and the existing literature while considering their implications for educational practice.

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how emotionally safe, translanguaging-friendly, and quality classroom interactions functioned as interdependent conditions shaping emergent bilingual students' participation, oral language development, linguistic self-efficacy, and sense of belonging in a secondary ELD classroom. Overall, this study suggests that these conditions worked together to create learning environments in which students appeared more willing to communicate, participate in oral language activities, engage in academic conversations, and take linguistic risks.

The most significant insight that emerged from this study was that emotional safety, collaborative interaction, and translanguaging did not function as separate instructional practices. Rather, they appeared to operate as interconnected conditions that collectively supported students' willingness to communicate and engage in oral language practices. This finding reflects the integrated conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 and serves as a foundation for understanding the findings discussed throughout this chapter.

The findings aligned strongly with prior research regarding the importance of emotionally responsive and socially supportive learning environments for emergent bilingual students. Consistent with Emotional Context of Learning Theory (Aguilar et al., 2024; Ferré, Fraga, & Hinojosa, 2025) and research on Quality Interactions (Walqui, 2019; Walqui &

Heritage, 2018), the findings highlighted that language learning is deeply connected to students' emotional states, lived experiences, and perceptions of safety, belonging, and relational trust within the classroom environment. Similar to previous scholarship on culturally responsive and emotionally supportive pedagogy (CASEL, 2019; Hurd et al., 2021), students in this study appeared more willing to participate orally when classroom interactions emphasized empathy, patience, encouragement, active listening, and collaborative support. These findings suggest that emotionally safe interactions were not peripheral to learning but central to students' willingness to engage academically and take linguistic risks.

The findings also aligned with Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and research on Quality Interactions (Walqui, 2019; Walqui & Heritage, 2018). Collaborative discussions, oral rehearsal opportunities, partner work, sentence frames, and scaffolded interaction created opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, receive feedback, and build confidence through shared participation. Consistent with these perspectives, students frequently demonstrated greater willingness to contribute when they felt supported by both peers and the teacher. These findings reinforce the idea that participation is not determined solely by language proficiency, but also by the quality of the interactions through which learning occurs.

The findings additionally aligned with translanguaging research emphasizing the importance of recognizing students' full linguistic repertoires as resources for learning (García & Kleifgen, 2018). Throughout this study, students appeared to benefit from opportunities to use their home languages during collaborative interactions, comprehension activities, and oral discussions. Translanguaging practices appeared to reduce uncertainty, increase access to academic content, and support students' willingness to participate. Beyond functioning as an instructional scaffold, translanguaging also appeared to contribute to emotional safety and a

stronger sense of belonging by affirming students' linguistic identities and positioning multilingualism as an asset within the classroom community.

Although the findings suggest that emotionally supportive, translanguaging-friendly, and interaction-rich environments supported students' participation and oral communication, it is important to acknowledge that classroom instruction represents only one aspect of students' educational experiences. Throughout the study, students navigated a variety of personal, emotional, and contextual circumstances that may have influenced their readiness to participate on any given day. Participation should therefore not be understood solely as a response to instructional practices, but also as a phenomenon shaped by broader contextual factors that extend beyond the classroom. These considerations reinforce one of the central ideas underlying this study: language learning is not only cognitive, but also deeply emotional and contextualized.

A significant contribution of this study is the way these findings emerged as interconnected rather than isolated. Emotional safety, quality interactions, translanguaging practices, and students' developing sense of self-efficacy, fostered through intentional scaffolding, consistently influenced one another throughout the study. Emotional safety appeared to create conditions conducive to participation, translanguaging fostered confidence and access, and opportunities for structured interaction helped students develop a sense of competence and belonging. Together, these conditions appeared to strengthen students' willingness to communicate and engage in oral language practices.

These findings suggest that supporting the participation of emergent bilingual students requires more than isolated instructional strategies. Instead, participation and oral language development may be strengthened through classroom environments that intentionally integrate emotional responsiveness, meaningful interaction, identity affirmation, and opportunities for

collaborative language use. This interconnected relationship among the findings represents one of the most significant insights of this study and reinforces the idea that oral language development is best understood as an emotional, relational, and socially mediated process.

Limitations

One limitation of this study relates to the theoretical frameworks used to analyze classroom participation and interaction. Although the study was grounded in Emotional Context of Learning Theory, high-quality interaction research, sociocultural theory, translanguaging theory, and Transformative SEL, not all dimensions of these frameworks were explored equally throughout the research process. Certain themes, particularly emotional safety and participation, emerged more consistently than other theoretical dimensions. Additionally, concepts such as belonging, identity development, and linguistic self-efficacy were often observed indirectly through participation patterns and student reflections rather than measured explicitly through formal instruments. Future research could explore these theoretical relationships more deeply through longitudinal studies or more targeted measures of emotional development, identity formation, and self-efficacy among emergent bilingual students.

A second limitation relates to the methodological design of the study. This action research project was conducted within a single secondary ELD classroom over a relatively short period of time during student teaching. The study relied primarily on qualitative data sources, including classroom observations, student reflections, teacher reflection notes, and classroom artifacts, which involved interpretive analysis. As both teacher and researcher, my dual role may have influenced classroom interactions and data interpretation. Additionally, participation and language engagement were influenced by multiple intersecting variables that could not be fully isolated within the scope of this study. Factors such as students' emotional well-being,

socioeconomic circumstances, attendance patterns, fatigue, outside responsibilities, and prior educational experiences may also have shaped classroom participation and oral language development in significant ways.

A final limitation involves the practical application of this pedagogy across different educational settings. Although the instructional practices implemented in this study appeared successful within this classroom environment, their effectiveness was also influenced by contextual factors such as relationship-building, flexibility within the ELD setting, and opportunities for sustained interaction. Additionally, creating emotionally safe and translanguaging-friendly classrooms requires ongoing relational work, cultural responsiveness, and an awareness of students' emotional and contextual realities. These practices may look different depending on classroom demographics, school resources, and teacher preparation. Future studies could explore how emotionally responsive and translanguaging-friendly pedagogies function across different content areas, grade levels, and multilingual learning environments.

Conclusion

This action research study examined how emotionally safe, translanguaging-friendly, and quality classroom interactions shaped emergent bilingual students' participation, oral language development, linguistic self-efficacy, and sense of belonging within a secondary ELD classroom. Findings suggested that emotional safety, collaborative interaction, and translanguaging practices supported through intentional scaffolds worked together to create learning environments that encouraged students' engagement and communication.

Conducting this study transformed my understanding of participation and language learning. I learned that students do not become willing to communicate simply because they

develop greater language proficiency. Rather, willingness to communicate appeared to grow when students experienced emotional safety, meaningful interaction, and affirmation of their linguistic and cultural identities. This study reinforced the importance of creating learning spaces where students' voices, lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic resources are viewed as strengths rather than barriers.

As a result of this study, I will be more intentional in designing classroom environments that support both language development and emotional well-being. I plan to continue expanding opportunities for collaborative interaction, translanguaging, structured oral language practice, and identity-affirming learning experiences. I also hope to share these findings with colleagues through collaborative planning conversations and professional learning opportunities focused on creating emotionally supportive and linguistically inclusive environments for emergent bilingual students.

Ultimately, this project highlighted that language learning is deeply relational, emotional, and contextualized. Across this study, oral language development emerged not simply as increased participation, but as students' growing willingness to communicate, engage with others, express ideas, and take linguistic risks within emotionally safe, interaction-rich, and identity-affirming learning environments.

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