



# Needs of Graduates of the Modern Languages Program of a University in Colombia<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study reports on the needs that graduates from the English-French Modern Languages Program at a Colombian University, located in the southwest of the country, face in their work environment. Theoretical considerations comprise professional development, evaluation and professional growth, the National Bilingual Program, needs analysis, and trends in teaching. The participants in the study were teachers from public, private, and language teaching institutions. The data were gathered using a qualitative approach and a case study, applying a semi-structured survey and two focal groups. It was found that teachers' needs deal with their teaching environment and with professional and personal aspects. Common issues and suggestions among the teachers emerged, which are related to school administration, academic feedback, and the curriculum. Findings made it possible to conclude that language teachers' needs should be considered in school planning to facilitate the achievement of educational goals regarding language teaching and learning.

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**Keywords:** graduates; work environment; needs analysis; professional development; language teaching.

## Resumen

**Necesidades de egresados del programa de lenguas modernas de una universidad colombiana**

Este estudio da cuenta de las necesidades que enfrentan en su entorno laboral los egresados del programa de Lenguas Modernas Inglés-Francés de una universidad

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<sup>1</sup> Artículo de investigación

colombiana ubicada en el sur occidente del país. Las consideraciones teóricas comprenden el desarrollo profesional, la evaluación y el crecimiento profesional, el Programa nacional bilingüe, el análisis de necesidades y las tendencias en la enseñanza. Los participantes del estudio fueron docentes de instituciones educativas públicas, privadas e institutos de idiomas. Los datos fueron recolectados mediante un enfoque cualitativo y un estudio de caso, aplicando una encuesta semiestructurada y dos grupos focales. Se encontró que las necesidades de los docentes tienen que ver con su entorno de enseñanza y con aspectos profesionales y personales. Surgieron problemáticas y sugerencias comunes entre los profesores, las cuales están relacionadas con la administración escolar, la retroalimentación académica y el plan de área. Los hallazgos permiten concluir que las necesidades de los profesores de idiomas son un aspecto relevante a tener en cuenta en la planificación escolar para facilitar el logro de los objetivos educativos en relación con la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de las lenguas.

**Palabras clave:** egresados; ambiente laboral; análisis de necesidades; desarrollo profesional; enseñanza de lenguas.

#### **Résumé**

#### **Besoins des diplômés du programme de langues modernes d'une université colombienne**

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Cette étude porte sur les besoins des diplômés du programme de langues modernes anglais-français d'une université colombienne dans leur environnement de travail. Les considérations théoriques portent sur le développement professionnel, l'évaluation, le Programme national bilingue, l'analyse des besoins et les tendances pédagogiques. Les participants à l'étude étaient des enseignants d'établissements publics, privés et d'instituts de langues. Les données ont été recueillies à l'aide d'une approche qualitative et d'une étude de cas, à l'aide d'une enquête semi-structurée et de deux groupes de discussion. Il a été constaté que les besoins des enseignants concernent leur environnement d'enseignement et des aspects professionnels et personnels. Des problématiques et suggestions communes ont émergé parmi les enseignants, liées à l'administration scolaire, au retour d'information académique et au programme scolaire. Les résultats ont permis de conclure que les besoins des enseignants de langues devraient être pris en compte dans la planification scolaire afin de faciliter l'atteinte des objectifs éducatifs en matière d'enseignement et d'apprentissage des langues.

**Mots-clés :** diplômés ; environnement de travail ; analyse des besoins ; développement professionnel ; enseignement des langues.

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## **HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE**

Encarnación Mosquera, C. & Idrobo Hurtado, A. (2025). *Needs of Graduates of the Modern Languages Program of a University in Colombia*. *Lenguaje*, 53(2), e20714819. <https://doi.org/10.25100/lenguaje.v53i2.14819>

## INTRODUCTION

Within the actions leading to fulfill and strengthen the mission and vision, through Consejo Superior 054 of 2017, the University of Cauca, committed to academic excellence and institutional accreditation, highlights that graduates are important subjects for education and society transformation.

The Institutional Educational Project (P.E.I) or Agreement number 096 of 1998, establishes that monitoring graduates' careers is an important strategy to strengthen the academic programs, as also stated in decrees 2566 of 2003 and 1001 of 2006. This action should aim at evaluating the social impact of academic programs, analyzing academic developments, and maintaining interaction and feedback with graduates to exchange teaching and research experiences.

To respond to this mission, this study aimed to characterize the needs that graduates of the Modern Languages Program experience in their work environment, as a contribution to potential improvement proposals aligned with the Educational Project of the Language Program (EPP, 2017), which establishes the following expectations for its graduates

-Professionals who are effectively engaged in educational, cultural and social processes of the region and the country, fulfilling tasks according to their training.

-Professionals who teach in primary and secondary schools and contribute to human development.

-Professionals able to intervene in learning environments with a humanistic and intercultural orientation for the development of communicative competences in English and French.

The methodology was based on the implementation of a semi-structured survey to characterize the population and explore graduates' needs. Additionally, two focus groups were carried out to examine their needs in greater depth. The theories supporting the study are focused mainly on teacher professional development, foreign language teaching, needs analysis, and national regulations for English teaching in Colombia.

## Teacher Professional Development

According to Guskey (2000), teacher professional development refers to those processes, actions, and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge opportunities that remain fragmented, poorly aligned with curricula and inadequate to meet teachers' needs. In the same way, Zeichner (1983) was the first to identify and describe the four paradigms of teacher professional development and he states it from the purpose of schooling, teaching, teachers, and their education that gives shape to specific forms of practice in teacher education.

Language teaching implies being updated in different fields to respond to it appropriately. According to Richards and Farrel (2005), this profession comprises changes in educational paradigms and trends and new challenges that educational institutions face, which are part of national regulations, curriculum development, and student needs.

According to Freeman (2006) teacher education encompasses permanent learning to respond to teaching and students' learning needs emerging from situations of practice which include their experiences, methodologies, their training, and how their knowledge influences their students' learning.

As for Díaz-Maggioli (2003, as cited in Gonzalez, 2021) professional development is related to how motivated and how willing teachers are to regulate their teaching to meet students' needs. The activities included in it are varied getting higher qualifications through academic programs, carrying out research projects in the language field, taking part in collaborative work activities, and carrying out evaluation processes. Unfortunately, as Kumaravadilevu (2003, as cited in Gonzalez, 2021) states, teachers' autonomy regarding how to grow professionally can be hindered by preconceived packages, which at last respond to socioeconomic agendas, rather than to teachers' teaching needs and expectations. However, this gap can be bridged when teachers' voices are heard for structuring professional development programs to support teachers and respond to their needs. Rhodes and Beneicke (2003). In addition, professional development should provide an important tactic for improving schools, increasing teacher quality, and improving student learning; without overlooking activities related to strategic teaching support, informed needed resources, classroom management, and very importantly involvement and engagement of parents (Evers et al., 2016).

As far as teachers as professionals are concerned, activities for professional development bring about a positive impact on their decisions about how to conduct their teaching actions for effective learning in a permanent reflective process.

Páez and Garcia (2012) maintain that language teachers are defined by the abilities and competences they can demonstrate and develop for the sake of society, which range from professional to personal aspects. She also points out as an important factor that teachers become evaluators of their own practices, aiming to respond to society and institutional demands.

## **Needs Analysis**

Berwick (1989) states that needs analysis is the assessable difference between a present situation and a future desired one, and he establishes objective and subjective needs. The first one applies to teachers, and it has to do with the workplace environment and the teachers' surroundings. The second one is about feelings, emotions, and the way language teaching is perceived. It is important to align the foreign language curriculum with the

teachers' professional activities and try to focus on academic and professional language skills that directly support their research, teaching, and publication activities. This should include the development of specialized vocabulary, academic writing skills, and effective communication strategies for national and international academic contexts. It is also important to incorporate feedback mechanisms, continuous assessment, and revision of the curriculum based on teachers' input and evolving needs, which will facilitate the integration of practical application opportunities within the foreign language training considering the value of situational practice.

In conclusion, analyzing needs permits to have a critical perspective on the design and implementation of foreign language programs tailored for academic professionals to align the curriculum with professional needs, effective feedback, and practical applications.

### **Trends in Teaching Training**

According to Zeichner (1983), it is relevant to enhance collaboration between schools and universities to offer an in-depth exploration of current trends and needs in foreign language teacher training in primary and secondary educational contexts. In recent times, there has been a growing demand for teacher training programs aligned with the specific needs of educational contexts at the basic and secondary levels.

The schools are asking to work harder in more context-sensitive and practice-oriented training programs and the incorporation of local educational needs and realities into the curriculum design for teacher training. They emphasize the importance of adapting professional development to reflect the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students in Colombian schools, the need for ongoing professional development and support for language teachers. The initial teacher training should be complemented by continuous, context-specific professional development opportunities, ensuring that teachers are not only well prepared to enter the classroom, but also to adapt to the evolving educational environments.

It is important to integrate innovative pedagogical approaches and technologies in teacher training programs to enhance effective teaching and student engagement in the learning process.

### **Designing Continuous Professional Development**

Luneta (2012) provides a comprehensive examination of the key elements and strategies which are essential for effective teacher professional development (PD) to identify best practices and common pitfalls in the design and implementation of PD programs. Several critical components for successful PD programs can be highlighted:

First, professional development activities and teachers' classroom needs and contexts should be aligned. This underscores that PD should be tailored to address

specific challenges teachers face, rather than to offer generic or one-size-fits-all solutions. Effective PD programs are described as those that incorporate ongoing support and follow-up, allowing for the practical application of new skills and continuous improvement.

Second, programs which foster collaborative learning environments—where teachers can share experiences and strategies—tend to be more impactful. Professional learning communities and peer coaching are highlighted as effective mechanisms for sustained professional growth.

Finally, evidence-based practices and PD programs grounded in solid research bring about both flexible and adaptive programs to better respond to the evolving needs of educators and changes in educational policies and practice.

### **Professional Development Program Based on Teachers' Needs**

Lee (2004) presents a model that addresses the core factors necessary for successful professional development. It offers valuable insights into creating effective PD programs by prioritizing a need-based approach, involving teachers in the design process, leveraging existing knowledge, and providing ongoing support and explores a framework for designing professional development (PD) programs that are directly informed by the specific needs of teachers. Lee's work, which integrates both theoretical and practical perspectives, aims to enhance the effectiveness of PD by ensuring that it is closely aligned with the real-world challenges and requirements faced by teachers. He offers and states four pillars of the model and it includes a Needs-Based Approach because conducting a thorough needs assessment before the development of PD programs is required. According to Lee, understanding the specific needs and challenges of teachers is critical for creating relevant and impactful professional development. This assessment helps to identify gaps in teachers' skills, knowledge, and practices, ensuring that PD initiatives address these areas effectively. Moreover, he refers to Participatory Design, where involving teachers in the development process of PD programs significantly enhances the relevance and acceptance of the content. By engaging educators in planning and decision-making, PD programs can be tailored to address their real concerns and interests. This participatory approach not only makes the PD more relevant but also increases teachers' motivation and commitment to the professional learning process. Also, Building on Existing Knowledge suggests that professional development should enhance and expand on what teachers already know. This approach ensures that PD is practical and manageable, allowing teachers to integrate new strategies into their existing practices without overwhelming them. Finally, Ongoing Support and Follow-Up, involves ongoing support and follow-up, developing continuous support, such as coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning opportunities, is essential for reinforcing new skills and addressing any challenge teacher's face as they implement new

practices. Lee's model highlights that sustained support helps to solidify learning and fosters long-term professional growth.

## A Glance at National Policies Regarding Foreign Language Teaching in Colombia

Foreign language teaching is about a nonnative language outside of the environment where it is commonly spoken and it comprises psychology, linguistics, language pedagogy, education, neurobiology, sociology, and anthropology. The Congreso de la República de Colombia, 1994, Ley 115 General de Educación, Artículos 20, 21, 22 y 30 establishes the development of communicative skills in at least one foreign language, to facilitate more opportunities to access higher education. Likewise, the Ministry of Colombian Education started to implement the National Bilingual Program in 2004 through curricula supported by international organizations.

### Evaluation as a Strategy to Improve Professionally

The National Ministry of Education in Colombia implemented an evaluation system through the Plan de Desarrollo and Revolución Educativa (2003), as a way to improve all the educational levels. This system comprised learning standards to measure students' basic competences, followed by evaluation processes, and finally, implement improvement plans supported by a permanent follow-up of results.

### The National Bilingual Program

According to Altablero N° 37 (2005), the Ministry of National Education, 2004–2019, included the Communicative Competence Standards in English with the Common European Framework as the benchmark for setting the levels of proficiency that must be achieved by teachers and students in Colombia. Language policies aim to graduate high school students with a B1 proficiency level in English and for high school teachers a B2 level to guarantee adequate teaching knowledge. However, as these goals have been unachieved, new language policies have emerged (Bastidas, 2017 et al., as cited in Cardona-Escobar et al., 2023). These policies pursue the implementation of a unique school curriculum that proposes actions for teachers regarding methodology and assessment guidelines, thus overlooking teaching and learning needs in particular contexts. The law establishes: "*tener ciudadanos y ciudadanas capaces de comunicarse en inglés, con estándares internacionalmente comparables, que inserten al país en los procesos de comunicación universal, en la economía global y en la apertura cultural*" (MEN, citado en *Las prácticas de enseñanza...*, p. 1).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research used a mixed approach, a study case, and exploratory design, with a selected sample of graduates from a Modern Languages Program to identify and characterize their needs in their work environment. The qualitative method describes and analyzes the mentioned needs, and the questions emerged from the researchers' experiences and the literature review. The sample population consisted of 21 language teachers from different public and private educational institutions in Colombia, most of them in the department of Cauca.

The instruments used to collect the data were a survey and two focus groups. The survey included aspects of graduates' teaching experience and teaching contexts. As for the focus groups, these aimed to get information about teachers' needs in their workplace from institutional, curricular, and personal perspectives.

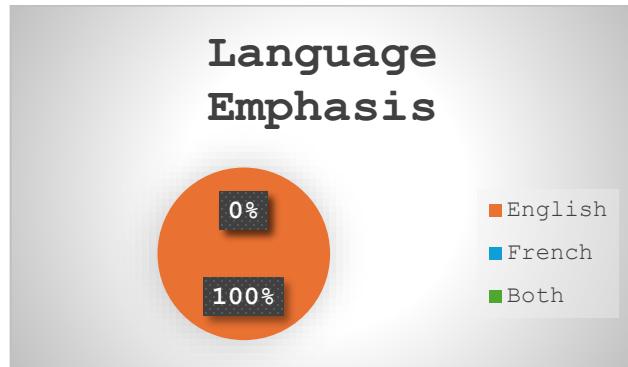
### **Data Analysis**

The results yielded in this study demonstrated the importance of characterizing teachers' needs because this factor has influenced their profession as in-service language teachers. As for the survey, it allowed gathering information about their teaching experience, professional development activities, and school activities, schools geographical location, type, sector, and level, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Participants' Teaching Experience**

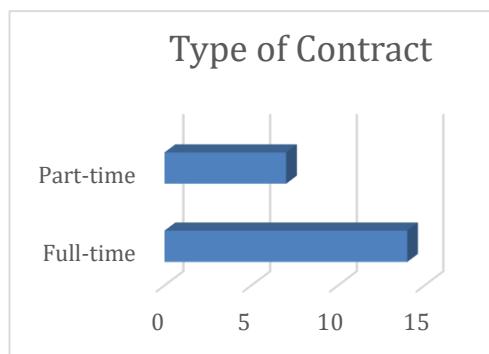
Range of year of experience	Number of teachers
1 to 5	1
6 to 10	4
11 to 15	5
16 to 20	6
21 to 25	1
26 to 30	2
31 to 35	2

According to the results, the biggest number of teachers has been working between 6 and 20 years, which might represent a teaching experience of a great impact in those schools, where English is the only foreign language taught, as shown in Figure 1.



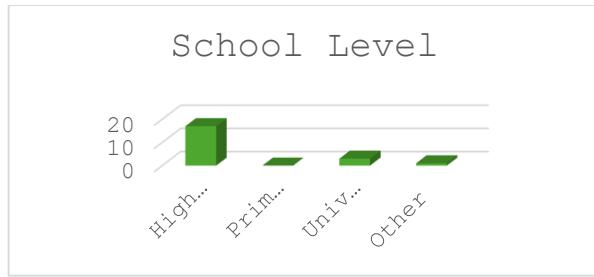
**Figure 1.** Participants' Language Emphasis

Figure 2 refers to teachers' type of contract, which was an important aspect considered in the survey in order to find out about their work stability.



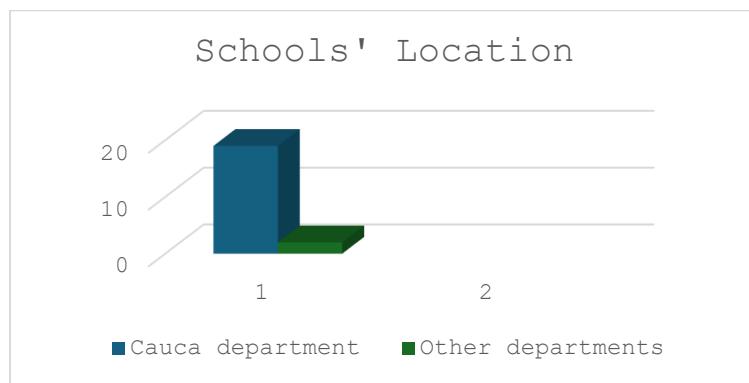
**Figure 2.** Participants' Type of Contract

Based on the results, 14 of them are full-time teachers and 7 have a part-time job. This shows that most of the teachers remain hired by the schools, either public, 81%, or private, 19%, all of them formal. In this sense, their contributions to their workplaces could be significant because of their familiarity with the institutional goals. Figure 3 refers to the school levels teachers work at.



**Figure 3.** Schools' Level

It shows that 17 teachers work in high school, three of them at university level, one teacher does not specify the school level, and none of them work in primary school. Taking into account the professional profile the bachelor's degree is intended to the population sample has fulfilled this goal, as the majority of teachers teach high school students, and the location of the schools is mainly in Cauca Department. See Figure 4.



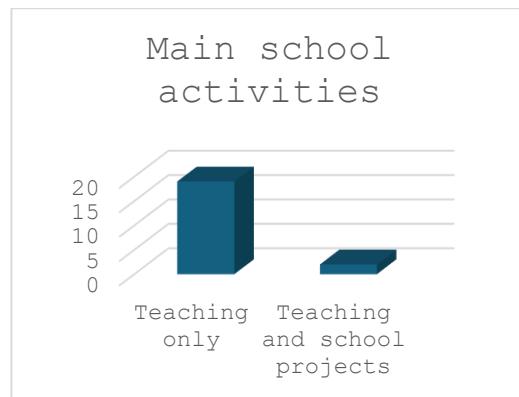
**Figure 4.** Schools' Location

It was found that nineteen teachers participating in this study, work in seven municipalities of Cauca Department, and two in another two departments of Colombia. This data shows the impact that the graduates are making in Cauca region, since 1991, which is the first cohort that appears in Table 2.

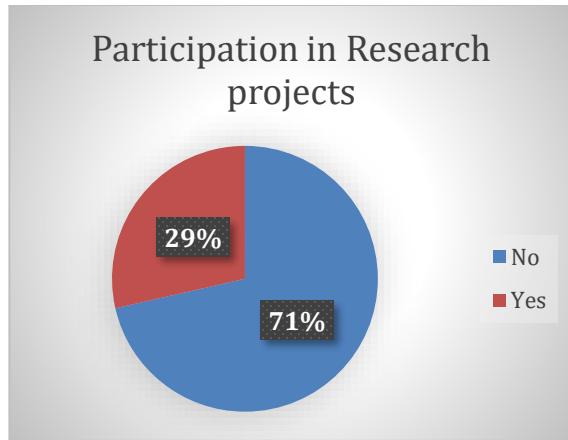
**Table 2. Year of Graduation**

Year of graduation	Number of teachers
1991-2000	6
2001-2010	8
2011-2023	7

The teachers obtained their bachelor's degree in languages at different times, 1991 being the least and 2023 the most recent. Eighteen teachers have carried out graduate studies such as specializations or master's degrees in different fields of education. Four out of 14 teachers have a master's degree specifically in language teaching and eight in other fields than teaching, and two teachers do not make the field explicit. Two teachers are PhD candidates but do not specify the field of education. Three teachers have a specialization in a field different from language teaching, two have not done any graduate studies, and one teacher does not answer the question. Figure 5 shows that the main activity teachers carry out in schools is teaching. Only one of them combines teaching with school projects. Figure 6 shows that fifteen teachers do not take part in school projects.



**Figure 5. School activities**



**Figure 6. Participation in research projects**

### **Focus- Group Interviews**

Qualitative research and focus-group interviews generate large amounts of data, and in this case, the voice of the participants is important because their feelings regarding their needs are the base of this research. Yin (1989) points out that data analysis consists of several stages, i.e., examining, categorizing and tabulating or otherwise, recombining the evidence to address the initial goal of a study. Krueger and Casey (2000) build on this concept and suggest that the purpose should drive the analysis; they believe that analysis begins by going back to the objective of the study.

For establishing themes for each focus group discussion, it was necessary to summarize the principal ones and the issues in relation to the topics to verify accuracy in interpretation. A multi-step process was used in preparing for data analysis. To begin, the interview notes from the two focus group discussions were read by the interviewer. General themes emerged after carefully examining the context of discussion, word choice and participants' comments throughout transcripts. Then, the researchers met for consensus on the themes, discussed their analysis to improve reliability of their interpretation, and refined possible inconsistencies through discussion. A final step involved the identification of subthemes, identifying actual testimonies that capture participant feelings, views and opinions, which appear within the text of this paper.

The questions that were discussed in the focus groups were the following:

1. If you had the chance to choose a professional development track to complement your teaching work, which one would it be, and why?
2. What suggestions would you make for the educational institution (school principal, coordinator) where you work to make your teaching job easier?
3. What would you change about your current situation or what do you need to say that you are a happy English teacher?

4. How does your institution or workplace organize the curriculum component (English department), what criteria do they include, how do they articulate these elements?

After the analysis, three categories regarding graduates' needs emerged: professional, institutional, and personal needs. Teachers' quotes are referred to as T1, T2, T3, and so on.

As for personal needs, the teachers mentioned that traveling to the target language culture could improve their speaking skills, and the way they perceive the second language, to better bring down to their teaching contexts aspects related to language and culture. Some authors have explored the importance of linguistic immersion and contributed key essential ideas to understanding its mechanisms and diverse forms, for example, Brondum and Stenson (1998) describe linguistic immersion as taking various forms, depending on the extent of second language use: total immersion (100% instruction in the second language), partial immersion (50%), dual immersion, and bidirectional, or two-way immersion (involving both native and non-native speakers).

Furthermore, teachers expressed that they feel their voices are not relevant enough and that they need more attention paid in their workplaces. In addition, most of the time they are overwhelmed by school activities, which are not related to school and research projects, what they consider a lack of opportunity to grow professionally. Teachers also mentioned the lack of engagement of parents in children's education, what reduces their motivation to provide better support to students on how to deal with conflict management when they are facing home and personal situations.

Regarding the language, teachers can notice that English is not an important subject in the school because sometimes it is not included in the curricular development; for this reason, it is not important for parents, kids, and even for teachers of other subjects. Therefore, it can be observed that teachers have a strong need for emotional support and work-life balance. Some of them reported feelings of burnout due to the high demands of their roles, emphasizing the importance of mental health resources. Additionally, they highlighted the need for recognition and appreciation from both parents and school administrators.

With respect to professional needs, teachers' professional development emerged as a critical area, according to Guskey (2000), teacher professional development involves processes, actions, and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge opportunities that remain fragmented, poorly aligned with curricula and inadequate to meet teachers' needs, at the same time, Rhodes and Beneicke (2003) point out that teacher performance should be intervened by schools through meaningful support in which clear standards of acceptable performance be defined and identify teachers' needs to provide accurate support. Participants expressed a desire for ongoing training in new teaching methodologies, technology integration, and classroom management strategies. They also called for better access to educational resources and materials that reflect the diverse

needs of their students. As for Díaz-Maggioli (2003, as cited in Gonzalez, 2021) professional development is related to how motivated and how willing teachers are to regulate their teaching to meet students' needs.

Regarding institutional needs, teachers pointed out the need for improved communication channels within schools. They requested more involvement in decision-making processes and policies that affect their work. Furthermore, there was a consensus on the need for better infrastructure including facilities, resource centers, teaching tools, internet connection, and a language lab to create a conducive learning environment and, as T2 mentioned: "Personally, I would need spaces to contextualize learning environments to carry out something related to total immersions."

As for collaborative work, they have found the need for better organization with primary school teachers in terms of planning that could lead to strengthening the learning processes. Increasing the hours per week and reducing the group size are other aspects mentioned, guaranteeing appropriate language learning environments, as highlighted by T3: "In my case, I would really like the number of hours to be increased ... intensifying it would be something important."

As for how happiness is related to their position, some teachers referred to getting some teaching and learning experiences abroad and being more in contact with the same group of students to make better follow-up to their learning. For other teachers, happiness refers to being recognized and supported by all parties involved in educational aspects. This situation was mentioned by T4: "Having opportunities for recognition because sometimes you see that there is some sort of contests for certain teachers or specific areas, but I feel that, for example, teachers of English, French, or any language, are somehow left behind. So, good results are expected, for example, in *Saber* Tests, but no recognition is given to us..." and T5 said: "I feel happy working in a place where all the things required to perform my teaching activities are provided [...] I cannot be happy working in an institution where, for example, we lack internet connection because I cannot fully develop my potential..."

Benesch (2017) examines the relationship between English language teaching and emotions, taking into account implicit *feeling rules* that may drive institutional expectations of teacher performance and affect teachers' responses and decisions about pedagogical matters. In her work, she analyzes ways in which teachers negotiate tension—theorized as *emotion labor*—between *feeling rules* and teachers' professional training or experience, in particular challenging areas of teaching.

Few of them mentioned if taking part in formal projects could make them happier; however, they would like to systematize their teaching experiences to carry out self-evaluation processes for better performance. Another aspect regarding happiness and its relationship with teaching is obtaining the minimum resources needed to carry out their work, really adequate infrastructure, and a genuine inclusion policy.

Participation in curriculum development has been seen by teachers as something that should imply planning on developing students' competences for the Saber Test<sup>2</sup>. However, school administrators pay close attention in the first place to math, sciences and social studies, although it is known that students' performance in English must be reinforced too, not to mention that there are no English teachers assigned to primary education in most of the schools. Regarding the Saber Test, some teachers are trying to develop project-based activities aligned to the curriculum suggested by the National Ministry of Education intended to achieve some learning standards from primary to secondary school levels. As these guidelines are ambitious and out of context according to some teachers, they try to make cross-curricular connections to organize the different areas around English. In some institutions the organization of the curriculum starts from the primary section with the use of strategies such as "evaluating to progress," considering the students' needs, as T6 expressed: "In the institution where I work, we have adopted the '*Evaluar para Avanzar*' strategy. So what we have done is to analyze the questions about where students face the greatest difficulties in order to develop pedagogical strategies and strengthen some skills where there are gaps...Throughout the year, we have been making adjustments based on the analysis of the results we have obtained, and we are trying to work as a team..."

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## DISCUSSION

In Colombia, the role of English school teachers has become increasingly important in shaping the country's educational scenery, and language teaching in Colombia has been implemented through different regulations issued by the Ministry of National Education, which proposes curricular guidelines aiming to achieve standards in a country in which English remains far from being global. According to Bonilla and Tejada-Sánchez (2016, as cited in Gómez Sará, 2017), "...changes in the plans have reflected a mismatch between the Colombian reality and the course of action drawn." As a result, language teachers find it difficult to respond to those demands no matter how resilient they might be to do their best practices.

Findings emerging from the 21 teachers surveyed show that most of them have teaching experience of more than 10 years and fourteen out of them are full-time teachers, which could imply a significant commitment and sense of belonging to their educational contexts. All the teachers participating in this study teach English, one reason being that most of them work in high school. The national government in Colombia launched the suggested curriculum for the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in official educational institutions (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN], 2024); however, this language has not been implemented in the schools where the graduates

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<sup>2</sup> Saber Test: English Test administered by ICFES to eleventh graders.

work yet. This situation has led graduates to let aside the other language they were qualified to teach as well as English.

As for the schools' location, graduates from the languages program are expected to have an impact in the region mainly, through their intervention in educational contexts. Results show that more than half of the teachers surveyed work in Cauca Department, so this aspect presented as part of graduates' profile in the PEP's mission is being fulfilled.

Finally, one of the teachers' biggest needs lies in opportunities for professional development which could be met through the opening of a master's degree in language teaching, offered by the university, since most of the teachers' graduation from the bachelor's program goes back to more than 20 years, and according to the findings, only four teachers with a master's degree did it in language teaching.

Based on the results analysis, graduates from the modern languages program participating in this study face a range of professional, personal, and institutional needs that are relevant for the improvement of their teaching practices. It was found that public schools do not have enough financial resources to support and respond to language teaching aligned with current teaching trends, such as Internet connection to articulate language learning to ICTs, not to mention the overcrowded classes, a factor that hinders personalized learning. Additionally, the opportunities to grow professionally as part of the educational institutions' improvement planning are fewer and fewer, because the foreign language is not seen as an important knowledge field inside schools.

High school English teachers need to be given the opportunity for continuous professional development to keep up with evolving teaching methodologies and language proficiency standards. Many teachers seek opportunities for training in areas such as communicative language teaching, assessment strategies, and using digital tools effectively. Different government initiatives aim to improve English proficiency, but teachers need access to resources and workshops to apply these strategies effectively in the classroom.

On a personal level, English teachers in Colombia face the challenge of maintaining motivation and passion for teaching, and even for learning, given the low wages and limited career advancement opportunities. Many teachers also seek a balance between their professional and personal lives, especially given the demands of teaching large classes and managing extracurricular responsibilities.

At the institutional level, Colombian schools often face infrastructure challenges that hinder effective language learning. The availability of modern resources, such as multimedia tools and English language libraries, is often limited. Schools need more investment in facilities and materials to enhance language learning, including access to English-speaking environments and opportunities for immersion.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the graduates' needs at their workplace are related to school support in terms of providing enough resources and opportunities to take part in curriculum development and planning. In addition, the lack of ongoing training in new teaching methodologies, technology integration, and classroom management strategies becomes a hindrance to face language teaching challenges and demands that become harder and harder when it comes to school rankings through ICFES<sup>3</sup> test results, causing a lot of pressure on teachers' shoulders and minds.

English teachers in Colombia play an important role in preparing the country's youth for a globalized world, even though the significant challenges they face, such as limited resources, varying student proficiency, and the need for continued professional development, as found in this study; there are also a number of promising policies underway to improve the quality of English language teaching, but teachers feel they need more attention to complete those expected standards, they are claiming for support, better training, more supplies, and innovative teaching methods to improve the English education system.

The graduates of the modern languages program need more opportunities for professional development, personal recognition, and institutional support to overcome challenges and deliver effective English education to their students. Addressing these needs is relevant for improving the overall quality of language education in the region.

The implications of graduates' needs in their professional practices are the lack of or poor follow-up to students' learning that could be achieved through research-based projects that effectively respond to their needs. Moreover, the lack of basic resources and materials to create appropriate foreign language learning environments may lead teachers to frustration and to implement teaching methodologies that are not aligned to current trends and requirements. Also, teachers' loss of motivation appears when they cannot take hold on their profession because it is not recognized in their teaching contexts.

Another aspect to be considered is that Colombian policies of language education should bring teaching and learning goals down to real cultures and contexts, and local boards of education should work hand in hand with universities in charge of preparing language teachers to guarantee permanent feedback to allow effective intervention in schools.

It is important to highlight that the voices of those who face daily challenges in schools are relevant. Their point of view, perspectives, and feelings carry particular weight because they possess knowledge of institutional needs, not only their own, but also the students, administrators, and the community in general. By acknowledging and

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<sup>3</sup> Colombian Institute for Education Evaluation (our translation)

integrating these lived experiences, educational stakeholders can develop more responsive, equitable, and sustainable solutions that reflect the complex realities of school life.

### **Article financing data**

Caracterización de las Necesidades de los egresados del Programa de Lenguas Modernas inglés-francés de la Universidad del Cauca, en el entorno laboral, Convocatoria Interna Universidad del Cauca, Vicerrectoría de Investigaciones, ID. 6047. Fecha de inicio 14 de enero de 2024, finalización 14 de enero de 2025. Investigadoras principales Carmelina Encarnación Mosquera, Adriana Idrobo Hurtado.

### **Authors' contributions**

Carmelina Encarnación Mosquera: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing - Original Draft Preparation, Writing - Review & Editing.

Adriana Idrobo Hurtado: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing - Original Draft Preparation, Writing - Review & Editing.

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### **Ethical implications**

The authors declare they used a consent form to invite the participants in their study. It had some information related to personal data.

### **Conflict of interest statement**

The authors declare that there are no potential financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could be perceived to influence the integrity, submission, or publication of this article.

### **Statement of use of artificial intelligence**

The authors declare they used ChatGPT for isolated terms, expressions, vocabulary, citation correction.

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