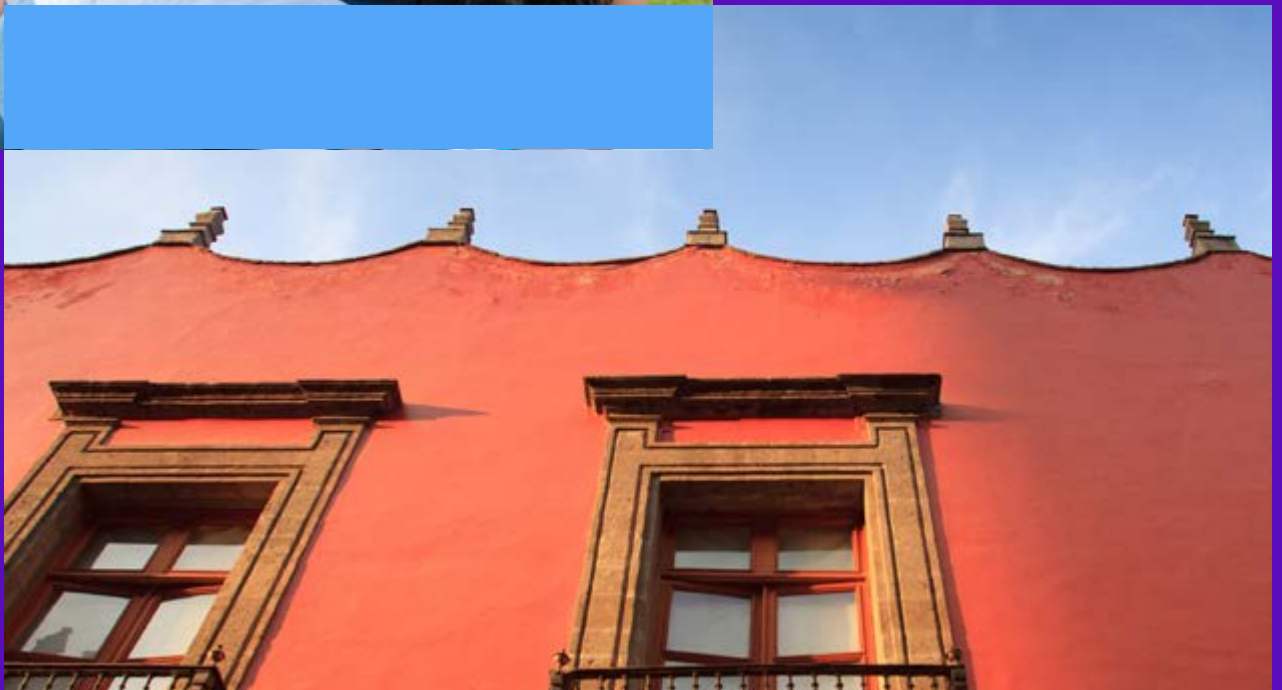


Future of English

The Economic Value of English

Mina Patel

 **Mexico**

Citation:

Patel, M. (2026). *The economic value of English: Mexico*. British Council. <https://doi.org/10.57884/T463-TZ50>

License:

The economic value of English: Mexico. © British Council 2026 is licensed under a <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International Licence.

The Future of English is a British Council research programme looking into the future of the English language and its uses, needs, and demands worldwide.

Learn more about the programme here:

www.britishcouncil.org/future-of-english

Contents

1	Background and rationale	8
1.1	Project team	12
1.2	Research questions	13
2	The stakeholder groups	14
2.1	Policymakers and policy influencers	16
2.2	Teachers	17
2.3	Employers and workforce stakeholders	18
2.4	Young adults	19
3	The Mexican ELT system: setting the scene	20
3.1	Federal–state complexity	22
3.2	Public–private divide	24
4	Governance, policy and decision making	26
4.1	Political cycles and implementation	27
4.2	Regional variation	29
4.3	Expertise and influence	30
4.4	Accountability and evaluation	31
5	System-level challenges affecting English language education	34
5.1	Strengthening the English language teaching workforce	35
5.2	Assessment and certification	40
5.3	Infrastructure and resources	42
5.4	Mexico and the Comprehensive Learning System	44
6	English as opportunity and tension	46
6.1	English is politically contingent	47
6.2	There is demand for English, but it is uneven	48
6.3	Summary: English as opportunity and tension	50
7	Future directions and opportunities for change	52
8	Conclusion	60
	References	62

Acknowledgements

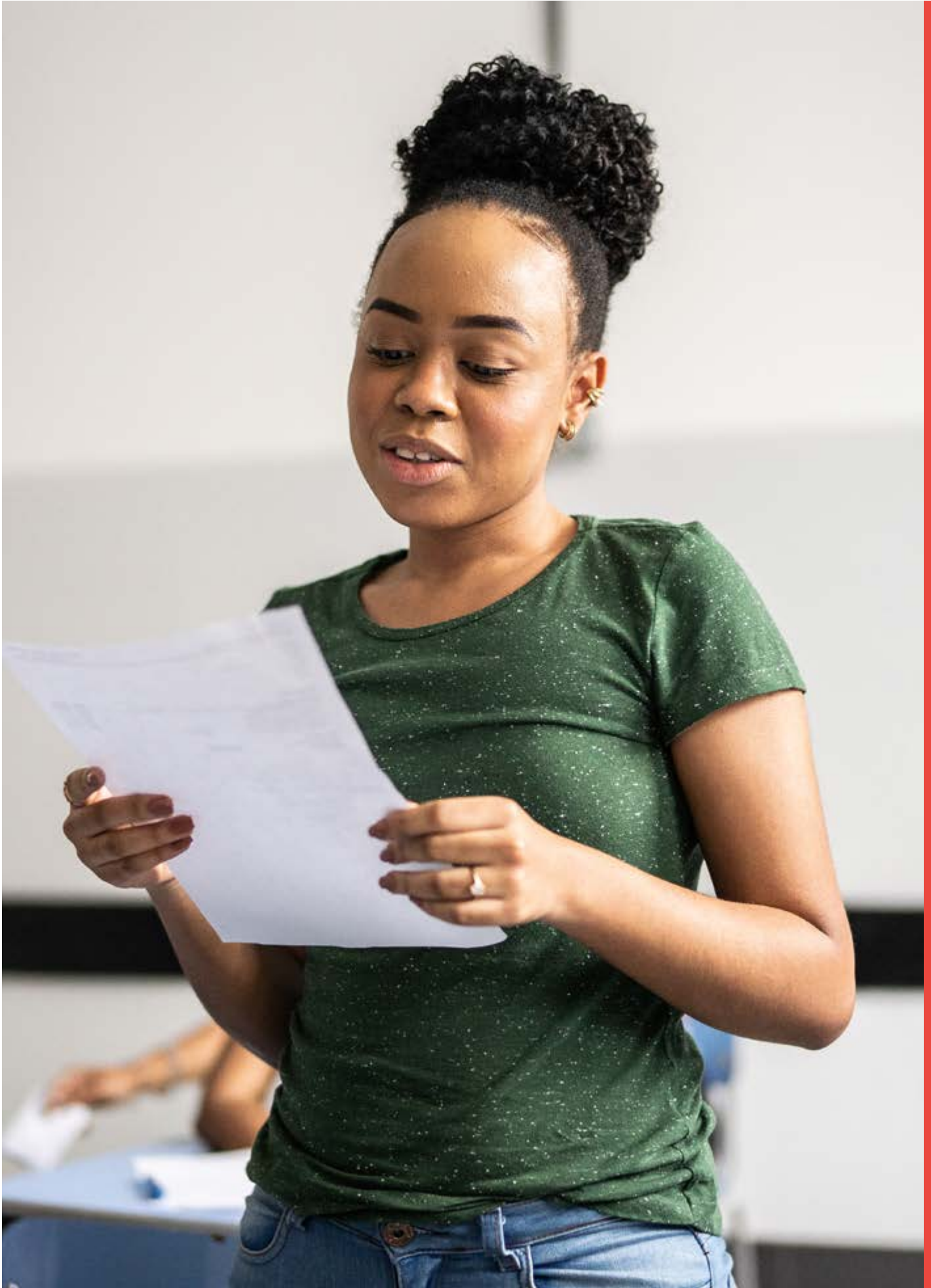
This project has been, and we hope will continue to be a truly collaborative journey. Cooperation, different and inclusive perspectives, innovation, and contextual relevance are the cornerstones of the Future of English research programme and thanks to the support of expert collaborators, we believe this study has achieved its objectives.

The Future of English team would like to thank:

- Charles Larkin from the University of Bath and Elizabeth Shepherd for their initial direction and advice and for inducting us into unfamiliar territory
- Tom Johnson, Tim Yates and Rhys Campman-Williams at Trajectory, who started exploring the concept of the value of English with us at the very beginning, and whose work was instrumental in guiding the current research design
- the individuals who participated in this study by generously sharing their time, knowledge and lived experiences, whose openness, thoughtful reflections and expert insights enriched the research process and fundamentally shaped our findings
- John McGovern, for working conscientiously on the design of the research instruments with us, for tirelessly facilitating interviews and focus groups to ensure we gathered the data needed for this report and for the many, many conversations that helped our thinking as the project progressed
- Sergio Durand, who played a vital role as project coordinator for the Economic Value of English (EVE) Mexico, working behind the scenes to ensure we achieved our targets and kept on schedule, as well as providing valuable insights throughout the project
- Darren Coyle (then Director, British Council Mexico), Liliana Sanchez, Denise Valenzuela, Eloy Maybank and Hannah Grimwood, who have supported this endeavour by giving their time, knowledge and expertise to inform our data collection
- Pearl Leung, who had an important role in the design and analysis of the survey for young adults
- Rebecca Maher and Evaluserve, who were working on a parallel project and supported us with our data collection
- the reviewers who have undoubtedly improved this report
- Jamie Dunlea, who in 2023 sowed the seed for this project, and Barry O’Sullivan, who has been its champion since then and every step of the way
- the excellent people supporting all individuals and teams who quietly move things along and do some of the heavy lifting.

This project would not have been possible without the commitment of everyone mentioned. We see this report as part of a journey and one of a range of outputs from this project. It was difficult to distil the analysis into what we think is a manageable read and we hope we have retained participants’ voices and perspectives.





Abbreviations and acronyms

AEFCM	Administración Federal de Servicios Educativos en la Ciudad de México
AI	Artificial intelligence
CLS	Comprehensive Learning System
CONALEP	Colegio Nacional de Educación Profesional Técnica (National College of Technical Professional Education)
ELT	English language teaching
EMI	English medium instruction
EVE	Economic Value of English
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
MORENA	Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement)
NEM	Nueva Escuela Mexicana (New Mexican School)
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)
PNIEB	Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)
PRONI	Programa Nacional de Inglés
RQ	Research question
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Public Education)
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and maths

1

Background and rationale



English is widely recognised as a global lingua franca (Mendes de Oliveira, 2024; Baker et al., 2026).

Globalisation and migration have contributed to increasingly multilingual and multicultural societies in which English is frequently used as a common means of communication among people from different linguistic backgrounds. While access to English is not equally distributed and its role varies across contexts, its widespread use in education, business, science, technology and international communication indicates that it is often associated with access to opportunities at individual, institutional and national levels (Lo Bianco, 2020; Tran et al., 2024).

Research into education policy reports a clear demand at a governmental and societal level for countries to provide more opportunities for their populations to acquire English proficiency (Marconi et al., 2023; Patel et al., 2023). However, there remains limited empirical evidence that quantifies the economic returns associated with investment in English language education, particularly at the national level and across different policy contexts.

To fill this gap, the British Council embarked on a project to develop a framework to highlight the potential financial benefits of a country's investment in its English language learning infrastructure. The aim of the Economic Value of English (EVE) project was to produce a flexible framework capable of being adapted to different national contexts while maintaining a consistent approach to assessing potential economic impact.

The project was designed in two phases, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 | **EVE research design**

Phase 1

Language-in-education policy landscape from different stakeholder perspectives

Phase 2

Framework for assessing the economic impact of English in different contexts



Phase 1: A mixed-methods study was carried out to investigate the language-in-education policy landscape from different stakeholder perspectives. The aim was to understand the drivers behind policies and policy change, the role and use of English, and the factors shaping demand for English within specific national contexts.

The project is titled Economic Value of English. However, understanding the potential economic impact of English requires an examination not only of economic outcomes but also of the policy environments, stakeholder motivations and implementation processes that shape English language education systems. Therefore, this is where we started.

In 2024, three countries were selected to participate in Phase 1 of the project: Mexico, Saudi Arabia and Viet Nam. These countries provide one example from Latin America, one from the Middle East and one from Southeast Asia. Their differing demographic characteristics, economic structures, educational histories and policy contexts offer an opportunity to explore how aspirations for English language development are interpreted, adapted and implemented within different national settings.

Phase 2: Building on Phase 1, the second phase of the project aims to develop a framework for assessing the economic impact of English in different contexts. We believe this is an important area for investigation. Nevertheless, methodological transparency requires us to acknowledge that it is not yet clear whether the economic impact of a language can be measured directly or attributed with confidence. Given the many factors that influence economic outcomes, establishing a causal relationship between English language proficiency and economic impact presents significant methodological challenges.

Any attempt to identify the economic impact of English would require consideration of medium- and long-term outcomes, as well as the complex relationships between language learning, educational achievement and economic opportunity. Such an analysis would depend on the identification of relevant indicators aligned with policy objectives, together with the systematic collection, storage and tracking of data over time. It would also require collaboration among education stakeholders across a longitudinal period. Therefore, the first step in Phase 2 is to identify potential indicators and assess the availability and quality of data needed to support such an investigation.

This publication reports on the findings of Phase 1 for EVE Mexico.





1.1 Project team

This project brought together experts and specialists from a range of educational areas. This unique collaboration strengthened the project's outcomes.



British Council Mexico

Darren Coyle, Director, British Council, Mexico

Liliana Sanchez, Head of English and School Education, British Council, Mexico

Denise Valenzuela, Head of Sales and Account Management, British Council, Mexico

Eloy Maybank, Sales Account Manager, British Council, Mexico

Future of English research team

Mina Patel, Head of Research, Future of English, British Council, UK

Jake Macmillan, Programme Manager, Future of English, British Council, Colombia

Katie Halley, Researcher, Future of English, British Council, UK

External consultants

Sergio Durand, Future of English EVE coordinator

John McGovern, Research partner

Evaluserve, Data collection partner

Trajectory, Research exploration partner

1.2 Research questions



Four research questions (RQs) were developed to explore language-in-education policies holistically from the perspective of different actors in the system and simultaneously build a foundation for Phase 2 of the project:

- **RQ1.** Why and when do governments invest in English?
- **RQ2.** To what extent do governments measure the impact of English language-in-education policies? If they do it, how do they do it? What are the key performance indicators?
- **RQ3.** Do English language-in-education policies contribute to economic growth and impact? If so, how is this evidenced? At what level are these impacts?
- **RQ4.** What is the role of English (and other languages) in helping young people (aged 18–23) to achieve their personal, educational and career ambitions?

The stakeholder groups and data collection methods are presented in Section 2.

2

The stakeholder groups



To answer the research questions, this study draws on evidence from six stakeholder perspectives to provide a multifaceted and holistic view of language-in-education policy and English language teaching (ELT) in Mexico.

Policy was explored through data collected from policymakers and other influential stakeholders involved in shaping or informing policy. Teachers were surveyed to gather their views on the importance of English and the changes they would make to current policy. Perspectives from the industry were obtained through focus groups with senior executives and other workforce stakeholders, who were asked to assess the extent to which language-in-education policies and the education system are supporting the development of skills and competencies required in the workforce in Mexico.

In addition, young adults participated in surveys and focus groups that explored their perceptions of the role of languages in supporting their personal, educational and career aspirations. Figure 2 illustrates how the different data sources were brought together during analysis. Findings from this analysis were integrated to

create a holistic interpretation of the Mexican English-in-education system. Table 1 lists the number of participants in each stakeholder group and the data collection methods used. All of the data was collected online. Across all stakeholder groups, data collection and analysis were informed by the broader literature on language-in-education policy and the education system in Mexico.

Figure 2 | Integration of data sources in the analysis framework

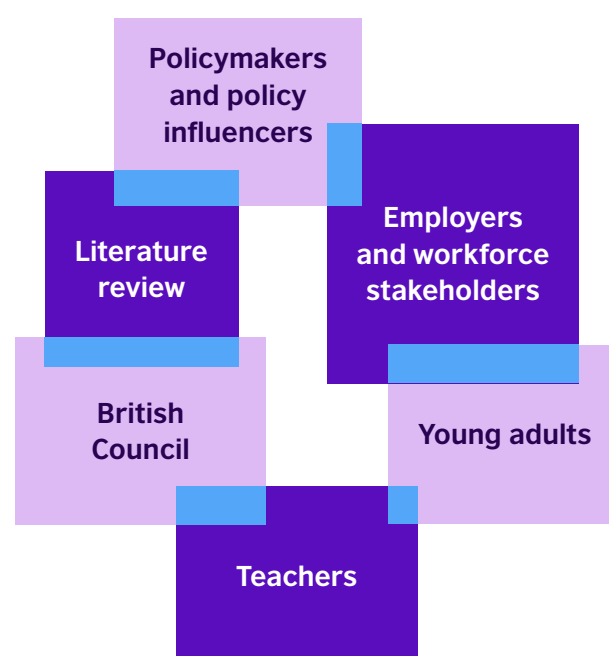


Table 1 | Stakeholder groups, data collection methods and participant numbers

Category	Data collection method	Number of participants
Policymakers and policy influencers	Individual interviews	11
Employers and workforce stakeholders	Focus groups	17
Young adults age 18–23 in university	Survey	408
	Focus groups	11
Teachers	Survey	471
British Council staff	Focus group	5

2.1 Policymakers and policy influencers



The policymakers and policy influencers in this study comprised a group of senior stakeholders involved in English language education in Mexico, operating across different levels of the education system.

These included individuals working within the Secretaría de Educación Pública/Ministry of Public Education (SEP), state-level education authorities, universities, technological education institutions – such as the Colegio Nacional de Educación Profesional Técnica/National College of Technical Professional Education (CONALEP) – and teacher development networks, as well as those with experience in international organisations and the private sector.

Participants brought a range of perspectives spanning policy design, implementation, teacher development, curriculum and assessment. While some occupied formal decision-making roles, many operated as intermediaries or policy influencers, often involved in translating policy into practice or shaping institutional responses. Across the sample, participants demonstrated extensive professional experience and system knowledge, though their insights reflected different degrees of proximity to national policymaking processes.

2.2 Teachers

471

educators in total
responded
to the survey

122

respondents were
from higher education
institutions

Across all educational
sectors, the majority of
respondents worked in
public educational
institutions

346

respondents were
teachers in basic
education

3

respondents were
kindergarten teachers

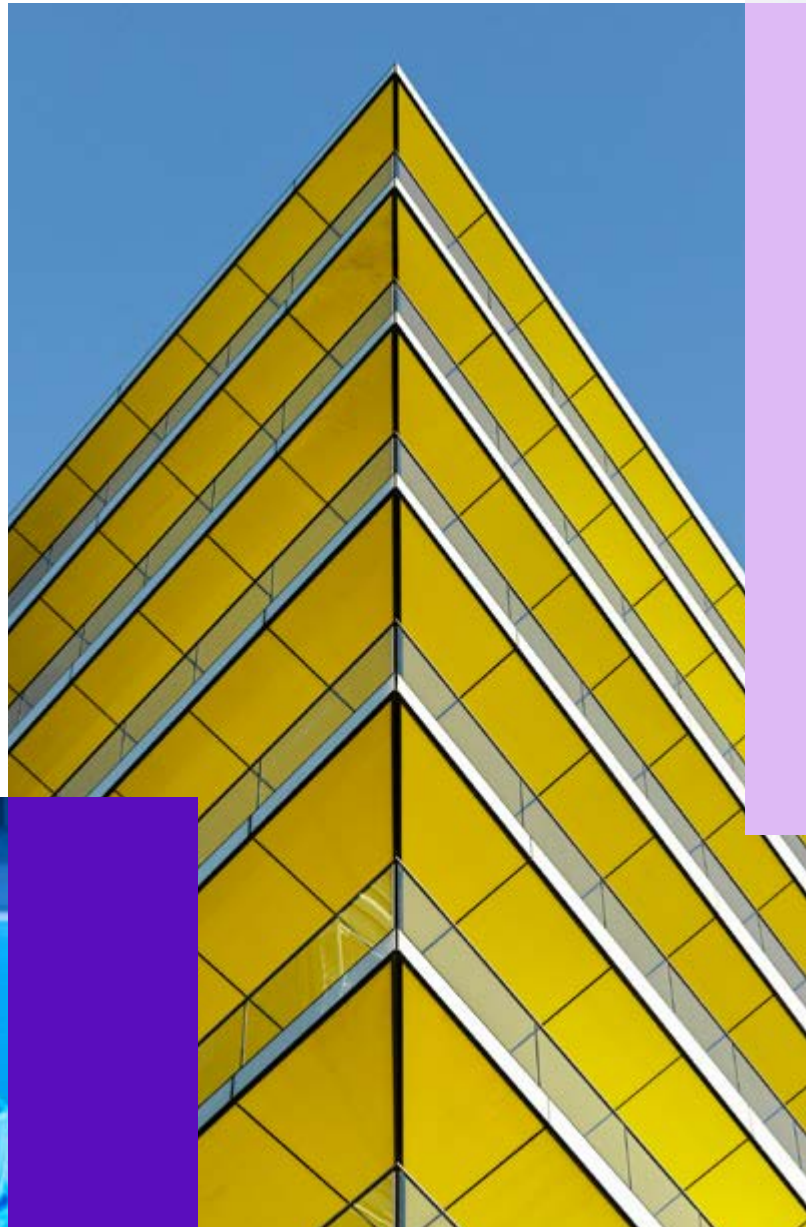
434



2.3 Employers and workforce stakeholders

The employers' stakeholder group comprised representatives from a diverse range of organisations spanning the private, public and non-profit sectors.

Participants included individuals from multinational companies, national businesses, professional associations, educational organisations, government agencies and diplomatic institutions. Roles ranged from senior leaders and directors to specialists in human resources, operations, business development, project management, education and workforce development, providing a broad range of perspectives on skills, employability and the role of English in education and the labour market.



2.4 Young adults



The young adult sample demonstrates a broad geographical spread across Mexico.

Most respondents were studying at institutions located outside the capital, particularly in the north (Nuevo León) and east (Veracruz), with additional representation from the south and southeast of the country. Therefore, the findings capture experiences from a range of regional educational contexts. Most respondents were from education and language and translation fields. There was also representation from business, science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), arts and humanities, law and psychology. About 70 per cent of the respondents were in their first two years of study.

For reporting purposes, participants have been anonymised and the following codes used instead of names for the different stakeholder groups.

Code	Meaning
PM	Policymaker
INF	Policy influencer
COR	Corporate roundtable participant
YA	Young adult participant
T	Teacher survey respondent

3

The Mexican ELT system: setting the scene



Rather than constituting a unified system, English language education in Mexico comprises multiple interacting sub-systems whose implementation is shaped by differing institutional mandates, regional conditions and resource constraints (Sayer, 2015; Sayer & López-Gopar, 2015).

The data tells us that the education system is politically driven, with policies issued from the federal core to state-level departments who then work directly with schools and higher education institutions. National coherence in English Language Teaching (ELT) is a challenge in Mexico, with the implementation of English language education policies and practices varying in both reach and quality across states. This is partly because it is a vast country characterised by considerable socio-economic, geographic and institutional diversity and decentralised priorities, infrastructure and resources for ELT. States and contexts may also differ in terms of linguistic ideology and perceptions with regard to English.

Mexico's linguistic landscape is mainly Spanish alongside substantial linguistic diversity. The country officially recognises 68 indigenous linguistic groups comprising 364 linguistic variants, many of which continue to play an important role in community, cultural and educational life (INALI, 2008). This diversity is acknowledged within Mexico's contemporary education framework, including the Nueva Escuela Mexicana/New Mexican School (NEM), which emphasises interculturality, inclusion and recognition of the country's multilingual and multicultural character (SEP, 2022).

The governance of English language education varies across different stages of the education system. In basic education, SEP determines the national curriculum, establishing a common framework for implementation across the country. At the upper-secondary level, SEP has developed a Common Curricular Framework, which is mandatory for sub-systems operating under federal authority and for private institutions holding official recognition (SEP, 2022; SEP, 2025). For state education authorities, decentralised bodies and autonomous institutions, SEP plays a coordinating role in supporting its adoption.

By contrast, higher education is characterised by greater institutional diversity and autonomy. There is no national curricular framework for English language education at this level; instead, curricula are determined by individual institutions according to their legal status and strategic priorities. SEP's role focuses primarily on coordination and evaluation, although an exception exists for the Escuelas Normales (teacher training colleges), whose curricula are established centrally.

Furthermore, some universities are granted legal autonomy, enabling them to define their own academic programmes and governance arrangements (Gobierno de México, 2021). As a result, the degree of central coordination decreases progressively across the education system, contributing to variations in how English language education is conceptualised and delivered. A significant finding that emerged from the data is the limited alignment between different stages of the educational journey. One informant reported that 'They have to start over every time they move to another level because the classes are mixed ability' (PM1). Stakeholders described discontinuities between basic education, upper-secondary education, higher education and employment, raising questions about the extent to which English language learning constitutes a coherent lifelong pathway (see Section 5.2). Within both basic and higher education there are parallel systems of public and private education (see Section 3.2).

The complexity of these governance arrangements, together with the different yet coexisting elements of the education system, contributes to variation in how English language education policies are interpreted and implemented across the country. In turn, this shapes the role of and demand for English in different contexts while raising questions about access to English and the equity of educational opportunities.

3.1 Federal–state complexity

Mexico’s education system is overseen by the SEP, the federal ministry responsible for national education policy, administration and oversight.

Within this framework, the Programa Nacional de Inglés (PRONI) supports the teaching and learning of English in selected public preschool, primary and secondary schools through initiatives including teacher development, certification and the provision of learning resources (SEP, 2022; SEP, 2025). However, the structure of the education system is characterised by considerable institutional diversity and varying degrees of autonomy across sectors and levels.

In basic education, SEP establishes the national curriculum, which is implemented through state-level education authorities. At the upper-secondary level, provision is organised through more than 30 sub-systems operating under different governance arrangements. These include general and technological pathways, of which the CONALEP represents only one example. While a Common Curricular Framework provides a foundation for upper-secondary education, implementation occurs across a diverse range of federal, state and autonomous institutions.

Governance arrangements become increasingly diverse in higher education. Although SEP retains responsibilities for coordination and evaluation, curricula are generally determined by individual institutions in accordance with their legal status and strategic priorities. Autonomous universities, including federal and state autonomous institutions, can define their own academic programmes and governance arrangements. In addition, some non-autonomous institutions, such as the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN), exercise considerable authority over curriculum design. Teacher education institutions (Escuelas

Normales) constitute a distinct sub-system whose curricula are determined centrally (Gobierno de México, 2021).

The complexity of these governance arrangements contributes to variation in how English language education policies are interpreted and implemented across the country.

As we will see in Section 4.2, states have a certain amount of autonomy within the overall framework of the national English curriculum and with sporadic monitoring and evaluation (see Section 4.4), it is difficult to assess the impact of ELT and learning in any one state.





3.2 Public–private divide

The distinction between public and private education emerged as a major lens through which stakeholders understand English language education in Mexico.

As one participant told us, ‘Children go to their official school in the morning, but then they go to English classes’ (INF10). Participants frequently associated private education with greater access to English, stronger language learning opportunities and enhanced educational and employment prospects. One informant asserted, ‘At the primary and secondary levels, only the private sector takes the teaching of English seriously’ (INF10). Roundtable participants reported that students from private schools and universities generally have a high level of English, while those from state schools are not sufficiently proficient, and that the only way people coming from the state sector or public universities have a good level of English is because they have paid extra (COR1).

Public education was described as facing challenges related to coverage, resourcing and consistency of provision. Indeed, one informant reported that ‘Some rural areas of Mexico had no electricity in the schools. Some schools even had to shut down because of the lack of electricity or even pure water, the lack of services’ (INF03). These differences were often linked to broader socio-economic inequalities including but not limited to, the rural-urban divide, language background, resource disparities and digital access. At the same time, participants cautioned against viewing the private sector as uniformly effective, noting considerable variation in quality and outcomes across institutions: ‘Some schools are good. Some students are excellent because their teachers are excellent and they do wonderful things. But some others they are just solving crosswords, drawing’ (INF05).

Stakeholders emphasised that the distinction between public and private education also oversimplifies a much more complex reality. Within the public sector, access to English is uneven, with significant variation between states in terms of policy commitment, funding, teacher availability and the resources allocated to English language education. As a result, opportunities to learn English are not distributed equally even among learners attending public schools.

Participants frequently linked private institutions with stronger teacher expertise, smaller class sizes, greater use of technology and a stronger institutional commitment to English. However, private English language provision operates largely outside national policy frameworks and is subject to limited monitoring and evaluation. As a consequence, there is little systematic evidence to confirm whether perceived advantages consistently translate into better learning outcomes.

While private provision undoubtedly expands opportunities for some learners and reflects strong societal demand for English, it also raises important questions about equity, since access is often dependent on a family’s ability to pay. Therefore, inequalities in English language learning opportunities exist not only between the public and private sectors but also within them.

These findings reinforce the notion of the Mexican ELT system as a complex configuration of systems within systems. While public and private education are often presented as parallel sectors, the evidence suggests that questions of quality, access and equity cut across both. Differences are evident between the two sectors, but significant variation also exists within them. Consequently, understanding English language education in Mexico requires looking beyond a simple public–private divide and recognising the multiple layers of inequality, opportunity and provision that shape learners’ experiences.

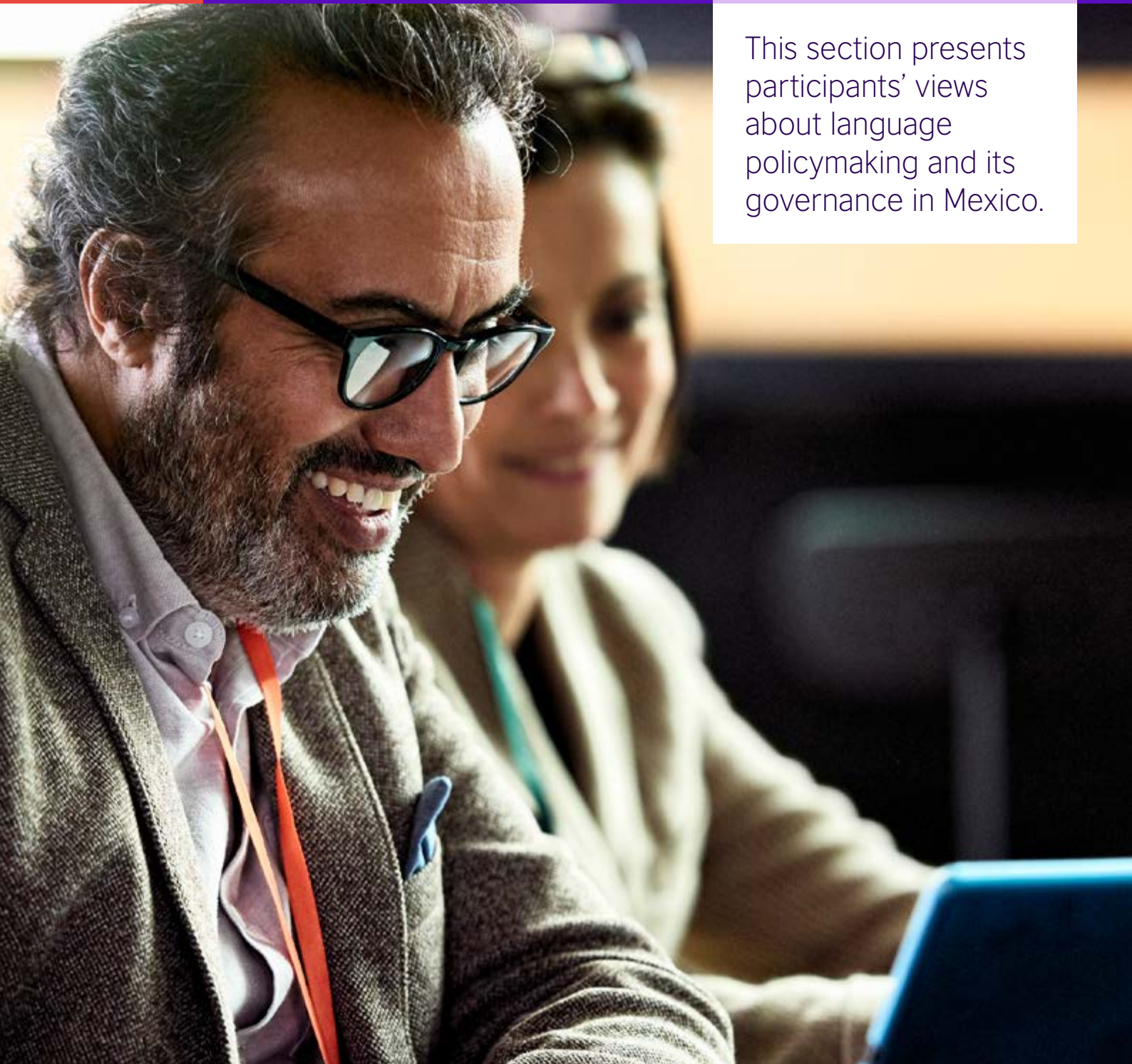


Understanding English language education in Mexico requires looking beyond a simple public–private divide and recognising the multiple layers of inequality, opportunity and provision that shape learners’ experiences.

4

Governance, policy and decision making

This section presents participants' views about language policymaking and its governance in Mexico.



4.1 Political cycles and implementation

In Mexico there is a new government every six years (INF11). Informants traced clear English language policy changes across the last three decades. The four most significant changes are outlined in Table 2.

Sources: Adapted from Sayer (2015); Sayer and López-Gopar (2015); Ramírez-Romero and Sayer (2016); Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP, 2022, 2025); and Administración Federal de Servicios Educativos en la Ciudad de México (AEFCM, n.d.).

Table 2 | Key policy developments affecting English language education in Mexico

Period and main policy development	Policy context	Implications for English language education
1990s Partido Revolucionario Institucional/ Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) administrations	Growing economic liberalisation and international integration, including the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, increased the perceived importance of English as a language of trade, mobility and global participation. Educational modernisation became a national priority.	English provision expanded through a patchwork of state-level initiatives, pilot programmes and language laboratory approaches. Provision remained uneven across states and educational levels, and no unified national framework existed. English was increasingly framed as a tool for competitiveness, internationalisation and economic opportunity.
2009 Partido Acción Nacional/National Action Party (PAN)	The Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica (PNIEB) was launched, the first national programme designed to provide English language education throughout basic education.	Representing the largest expansion of English language education in Mexico's history, PNIEB introduced a systematic model of English instruction from preschool through secondary education. The reform linked English language learning explicitly to global competitiveness, economic development and human capital formation.
2016 onwards	PNIEB evolved into the Programa Nacional de Inglés (PRONI), with increased emphasis on teacher development, certification and educational resources.	There was continued federal support for English language education, with a focus on strengthening quality, professionalisation and access across participating public schools.
2022 Movimiento Regeneración Nacional/National Regeneration Movement (MORENA)	The Nueva Escuela Mexicana/ New Mexican School (NEM) was introduced, a wider educational reform centred on inclusion, interculturality, equity and social justice.	English remains part of the curriculum but is situated within a broader multilingual framework that emphasises linguistic diversity, intercultural learning and the recognition of indigenous languages. The reform represents a shift away from predominantly economic rationales towards a more socially oriented conception of language education.

Over time, the policy rationale for English language education in Mexico has shifted from fragmented state-level initiatives associated with economic modernisation, through a period of national expansion linked to competitiveness and globalisation, towards a broader emphasis on multilingualism, inclusion and language justice.

Participants characterised this series of reforms by their discontinuity, repeatedly linking these shifts to political change. One policymaker observed that ‘policy changes largely are triggered by the politics’ (PM04), while another simply noted that ‘every single government administration, we have changes’ (PM09). A state-level policymaker similarly reflected that ‘every administration has a new vision’ and consequently ‘you have no consistency’ (INF11). These comments suggest that educational reform is often closely tied to electoral cycles and changes in leadership rather than building incrementally on previous initiatives.

Policy is formulated by the federal government and then communicated to states and educational institutions. Implementation takes place through a range of actors and governance arrangements across the education system. In basic education, federal initiatives such as PRONI provide funding and support, while implementation is undertaken

by state education authorities. In upper-secondary education, delivery occurs through a diverse range of sub-systems, including CONALEP and other general and technological pathways, many of which operate within national curricular frameworks established by SEP. While policy formulation is highly centralised, participants did not necessarily view this as problematic. Several saw central coordination as necessary in a highly diverse federal system. One participant described efforts ‘to unify, to get just one system that has the same curriculum ... to standardise’ (PM04), while another noted that federal funding mechanisms provide an important driver for coherence because ‘if as a state you want to receive funds from the central government, you have to implement the policy’ (INF07).

The effects of policy discontinuity are particularly evident in a federal system such as Mexico’s, where implementation depends not only on national direction but also on the capacities, priorities and resources of individual states. However, policy design and implementation should not be separated; rather, they should be integrated, with implementation considerations informing policy development from the outset (Braun et al., 2011; Honig, 2006).



4.2 Regional variation

Several informants argued that a degree of central coordination is necessary in a system characterised by substantial regional variation.

National policy provides a framework within which states and institutions can operate, helping to establish shared goals, standards and expectations. However, participants also noted that implementation must take different forms across contexts. As a result, tensions can arise between nationally defined objectives and local realities, requiring states and institutions to adapt policy to their circumstances. The challenge for policymakers is therefore not simply one of policy design but also involves balancing coherence with flexibility across diverse educational settings.

English language education in Mexico is characterised by considerable regional variation in learner motivation and demand, socio-economic conditions, stability of infrastructure and availability of educational resources (Padilla Rodríguez et al., 2021; Patsko, 2023).

In the more metropolitan northern states, demand for English is high, reflected in greater investment in teacher development and alignment with international standards. In contrast, the perceived value of English appears to diminish in some central and southern states. Therefore, opportunities to learn English are not distributed evenly across the country, with access shaped by local economic conditions, social ideology, educational investment and institutional capacity. Although a national curriculum exists, states operate with considerable autonomy. One participant observed that ‘everyone does what they want ... as long as they follow the national curriculum’ (INF08) and another informant suggested that ‘It is like a jungle law. Every school

does what they want to do. If they are interested, they work well. If they are not, they don’t’ (INF05). Several participants described this balance between national direction and local implementation as challenging. One policymaker characterised the system as ‘a real patchwork’ (PM04), while another noted that some states lacked ‘the infrastructure or even the local governance capacity’ required to implement policy consistently (INF08).

Participants reported that states have substantial control over budgets, textbooks, instructional time and teacher development. At first glance, this may appear to represent limited autonomy. However, these components are fundamental determinants of teaching, learning and assessment quality. Access to high-quality materials, well-prepared teachers and sufficient instructional time can shape learner motivation and influence educational outcomes across all subjects (Scheerens, 2016; UNESCO, 2014). Hence, state-level authority over these decisions provides significant scope to determine whether English is prioritised, resourced and implemented.

The 2009 PNIEB reform illustrates both the ambition and the complexity of national English language policy in Mexico. Research on implementation identified persistent challenges relating to teacher preparation, materials development and uneven local capacity, highlighting the difficulties of translating national aspirations into classroom practice across a large and diverse federal system (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016; Sayer, 2015).

In interviews with policymakers and policy influencers, therefore, the central issue was not whether English language education should be guided by national policy but how policy ambitions could be adapted and implemented consistently across diverse local contexts.

4.3 Expertise and influence

This section explores the role of sector expertise in the process of policy development, communication and implementation.

Policy decisions in many contexts globally are not only informed by evidence and expertise but are also shaped by political, economic and institutional considerations (Braun et al., 2011; Steiner-Khamisi et al., 2024).

Across the policymaker and influencer data, policymaking was frequently described as opaque, with participants perceiving a lack of transparency in how decisions were made and priorities established. One policymaker explained that ‘we don’t know what exactly happened behind that, we just know that now we need to make that happen’ (PM04). Similarly, another participant noted that the policy development process remains ‘a mystery, I think, for all of us’ (INF11). Policy influencers, academics and ELT experts felt that their experience and expertise were insufficiently recognised within policy processes, despite many having extensive professional backgrounds and detailed knowledge of language education across different regions and sectors. Participants frequently perceived a distinction between policy design and implementation, with expertise more likely to be sought after crucial decisions had already been taken. As one participant observed, ‘the experts will be there for implementation rather than for policy design’ (PM09). Another argued that many decision-making bodies were led by ‘politicians, not experts’ (INF08).

Although participants acknowledged that government bodies regularly convene consultations with representatives from the business sector, educational experts and other stakeholders, there was a widespread perception that these engagements have limited influence on subsequent policy decisions. Several participants described consultation processes as largely symbolic. One respondent characterised engagement as ‘more of a quick consultation rather than a collaboration’ (PM04), while another commented that ‘sometimes they ask researchers in universities to help. For example, in our university, we can give ideas, but not more than that’ (INF10).

Several participants emphasised that their seniority and long-term engagement with English language education enabled them to draw on lessons from previous reforms and policy initiatives, offering insights that could inform both policy design and implementation. However, participants noted that recommendations emerging from consultations were often difficult to identify within published policies or implementation plans, leading some to view these processes as largely procedural rather than influential. This perceived lack of engagement may contribute to a policy–practice gap.

Several participants occupied influential roles within state-level implementation structures, teacher development networks and professional associations. Where these actors felt excluded from policy development processes, they reported lower levels of ownership of subsequent reforms. This is significant because successful implementation depends not only on policy direction from the centre but also on the commitment and expertise of those responsible for translating policy into practice across diverse local contexts.

4.4 Accountability and evaluation



Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems play a critical role in education systems by providing evidence on implementation, outcomes and impact.

Effective MEL systems enable policymakers to understand what is working, identify areas for improvement and adapt policies and programmes in response to emerging evidence, thereby supporting more effective and equitable education provision (UNESCO, n.d.; IIEP-UNESCO, 2023).

Participants frequently described a system in which MEL is not embedded within policy development and implementation processes. Several participants reported a lack of systematic evaluation. One respondent recalled that when attempting to gather information about previous initiatives, ‘we found no information at all’ (PM04), while another noted that ‘there is no federal

indicator’ and that states often have to ‘develop [their] own local indicators’ (INF11).

Rather than building incrementally on evidence generated through previous initiatives, reforms were often perceived as responding to changing political priorities, resulting in cycles of policy replacement rather than continuous improvement (see Section 4.1). While data collection activities have occurred at various points, including during the PNIEB initiative, participants were often unclear about how evidence was subsequently used to inform decision making and implementation. Across the system, monitoring and evaluation were described as limited and, where they did occur, were perceived as focusing primarily on operational delivery and learner outcomes rather than system-level learning or quality improvement. Participants noted an emphasis on compliance with policy requirements rather than on generating evidence to support ongoing development and learning.

This distinction emerged strongly across the interviews. One participant argued that programme leaders were often ‘just administrating money but not administrating results’ (INF05). Another explained that authorities maintain ‘a very strong follow up of what we do, but mainly on the operation of the programme rather than the quality of how things are implemented locally’ (INF11).

Most participants expressed a desire to embed MEL into the ELT ecosystem. However, they also highlighted significant barriers to the development of more robust MEL practices. Constraints relating to funding, technical expertise and stakeholder engagement were frequently cited, suggesting limited capacity to design and sustain comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems. Participants identified both financial and technical constraints. One policy influencer observed that ‘there isn’t a budget that will allow us to evaluate hundreds of thousands of students’ (INF11), and also that ‘we lack experts to develop assessments’ (INF11).

Nevertheless, several examples of sporadic locally driven initiatives were identified. These included efforts to survey teachers, undertake standard-setting activities for assessment purposes and collect evidence to inform decision making. Such initiatives appeared to emerge through the efforts of local leaders, practitioners and experts linked to a specific programme or region rather than through federal policy direction, suggesting a degree of bottom-up experimentation in response to perceived gaps in national provision.

The challenges surrounding MEL also appear closely connected to the broader federal–state structure discussed in Section 3.1. Participants noted the absence of systematic national monitoring of ELT, while data collection and

reporting practices were often described as inconsistent across contexts. In some cases, reporting was perceived as serving administrative or accountability purposes rather than supporting learning and improvement. As one participant observed, ‘Without evidence of what learners can actually do in English, it becomes very difficult to know whether policies and programmes are having the intended effect’ (PM09). In the absence of clear national direction, responsibility for monitoring and evaluation frequently falls to local actors who recognise its value and seek to develop their own approaches, resulting in uneven and fragmented practices across the system.

Although participants were generally critical of existing MEL arrangements, some evidence suggests that efforts are being made to strengthen evidence collection under the current NEM reform. One policymaker reported that ‘a start was made on baseline data collection and analysis in 2023 in order to inform the planning of the implementation of the NEM reforms’ (INF07). The same participant also highlighted ongoing challenges in ensuring that evidence informs policy development, explaining that the collection of baseline data comes after the setting of vision and policy. This suggests that evidence is frequently gathered after major decisions have already been made rather than being used to shape them. Consequently, the available evidence was perceived as not really adequate for planning purposes.

Nevertheless, these developments may signal a growing recognition of the value of evidence-informed policymaking and a desire to influence future policy decisions differently. It remains too early to determine whether these emerging practices will result in more systematic MEL across the education system.

Monitoring and evaluation remain uneven and fragmented across the system.



5

System-level challenges affecting English language education



While the preceding sections have described the structure and organisation of English language education in Mexico, the data also points to a number of system-level challenges that influence how policy is translated into practice. These challenges operate across different levels of the education system and affect teachers, learners and institutions in different ways.

The main challenges of English language education in Mexico are to do with mini systems which have emerged to manage gaps or weaknesses in an already very complex national education system. Such challenges include a lack of full-time, qualified, skilled teachers, a lack of structured and systematic assessment in the public school system and irregular technological infrastructure throughout the country. This section details some of the issues raised by these gaps.

5.1 Strengthening the English language teaching workforce

- ‘An education system is only as good as its teachers. Unlocking their potential is essential to enhancing the quality of learning’ (UNESCO, 2014, p. i).

This observation highlights the central role of teachers in shaping educational quality and learner outcomes. The importance of teachers was also evident in the accounts of the young adult participants, who frequently described teachers as influential figures in their language learning journeys. For some, an inspiring teacher sparked and sustained their interest in English:

- ‘The first time that I had a real English teacher and she was my inspiration’ (YA526).

Others emphasised the role of teachers in maintaining engagement and persistence:

- ‘The great majority of my teachers were very committed, and they helped me a lot to reach the level that I now have’ (YA520).

These accounts suggest that teachers influence not only learners’ linguistic development but also their motivation, confidence and long-term engagement with language learning.

Across the data, stakeholders consistently identified teachers as central to the quality and effectiveness of English language education in Mexico. However, discussions focused less on individual teachers and more on the conditions that enable them to succeed. Figure 3 outlines some concerns about the teaching workforce.

Participants highlighted challenges relating to teacher supply, professional preparation, language proficiency, pedagogical support and employment conditions. These issues were frequently described as interconnected and shaped by wider policy, funding and governance arrangements. Together, the findings point to the importance of strengthening the ELT workforce through coherent systems of recruitment, preparation, professional development and career support.

Figure 3 | Some teacher constraints

Capacity

Are there enough teachers?

Proficiency

Do teachers have sufficient language competence and confidence?

Pedagogy

Can teachers translate that competence into effective classroom practice?

Employment conditions

Are teachers working in conditions that enable them to succeed?



5.1.1 Capacity

Available evidence indicates that the capacity of the ELT workforce is unevenly distributed across Mexico's educational system. Previous research has documented variation in teacher preparation, qualification profiles, employment arrangements and access to professional support across different states and educational contexts (Ramírez-Romero et al., 2014; Sayer & López-Gopar, 2015).

Participants reported an insufficient supply of qualified English language teachers across parts of the education system. Participants repeatedly linked teacher shortages to broader workforce challenges. According to one interviewee, persistent shortages of qualified English teachers often required student teachers on teaching placements to take on substantial teaching responsibilities within schools (INF02). These observations suggest that expanding access to English provision has, in some contexts, outpaced the development of a fully qualified teaching workforce.

Several informants suggested that the rapid growth in demand for English language education has created challenges in recruiting sufficient numbers of qualified teachers. One participant who noted, the lack of qualified teachers added that sometimes schools employ people because they know English, not necessarily because they are trained as teachers (INF06). While such arrangements can help address immediate staffing needs, participants expressed concerns about their potential impact on learning outcomes and the consistency of provision. For example, one informant observed that while some schools benefit from excellent teaching, in others 'there is little, how can I say, speaking skills developed' (INF05). Participants also described a system in which certification and qualification requirements play an important role in recruitment, although certification alone was not viewed as sufficient evidence of teaching effectiveness.

5.1.2 Proficiency

Informants also identified teacher proficiency as a continuing concern in some contexts. They reported that some teachers lacked confidence in their own English language abilities, particularly in relation to spoken communication. This was perceived to influence classroom practice, with speaking activities sometimes receiving less emphasis than other areas of learning: 'Teachers do not promote speaking, not because they don't want to, because of the number of students in large classes, and the other because they were not trained to' (INF07). Informants also noted regional differences. In states where English is considered less important or where opportunities for language use are limited, proficiency may be viewed as desirable rather than essential. Consequently, variation in teacher proficiency may contribute to variation in learner experience and outcomes across the country. Proficiency in a language does not always indicate effective teaching (TESOL, 2003, Yusuf & Novita, 2020), which also depends on pedagogical knowledge, classroom practice, assessment literacy and the ability to engage learners.

Nevertheless, teachers' proficiency can influence their confidence, which is reflected in classroom practice, particularly in relation to teaching speaking. Two influencers observed that large mixed-ability classes are common and that teachers who lack confidence in their own proficiency often struggle to teach speaking skills in these settings (INF05, INF02). This suggests that concerns about proficiency are not limited to language knowledge itself but also influence teachers' willingness and ability to facilitate communicative classroom practices. Teacher confidence may have implications beyond instructional choices. As one young adult participant observed, 'the role of the teacher comes in to bring you back to that motivation' (YA 526). If teachers are central to sustaining learner motivation, variations in teacher confidence and proficiency may also shape learners' engagement with English language learning.

5.1.3 Pedagogy

Policymakers, policy influencers and educators identified three pedagogical challenges in particular: supporting the development of learners' speaking skills, conducting assessment and integrating technology effectively into teaching and learning. Participants frequently emphasised that pedagogical choices are shaped by the realities of the classroom. One influencer observed that methodology is influenced greatly by class sizes of 40–50 students (INF02), suggesting that teachers may struggle to implement communicative approaches even when they understand their pedagogical value.

Participants often linked these challenges to broader issues of teacher preparation and professional development. Difficulties in teaching speaking were frequently associated with teachers' own confidence in English, which participants felt could have a knock-on effect on the development of learners' speaking skills. Challenges relating to technology reflected both uneven infrastructure and perceived generational differences in digital competence. Assessment was similarly identified as an area where teachers would benefit from additional support. Participants noted a growing policy emphasis on formative assessment but suggested that teachers often receive limited training in how to design, implement and use assessment effectively to support learning. As a result, assessment practices may vary considerably across contexts. The implications of current assessment arrangements are explored further in Section 5.2.

In the teacher survey, teachers were asked to identify areas in which they would value additional professional development and support. The survey findings suggest that teachers' primary professional development needs relate to classroom practice. Support for teaching productive skills ranked highest, followed by teaching receptive skills. Technology (including AI) was the third-ranked area, reflecting growing interest in the opportunities and challenges presented by digital innovation.

Differentiation for mixed-ability classrooms and inclusive teaching practices were also identified as priorities, highlighting the importance of meeting the needs of increasingly diverse learner populations.

5.1.4 Employment conditions

Participants consistently highlighted the demanding employment conditions experienced by many English language teachers. Large class sizes emerged as the most frequently cited challenge and were perceived to affect both teaching quality and workload. For less experienced teachers, or those lacking sufficient training and support, managing large classes was described as particularly challenging. The teacher survey shows that teachers do what they can, but with sometimes 40 students and no resources and only three hours of English a week, conditions can be very challenging (T20, T180, T226). Participants suggested that such conditions make it more difficult to provide individual feedback, monitor learner progress and develop speaking skills.

Responses to the teacher survey echoed these concerns. Teachers repeatedly called for an increase in instructional time, with comments such as 'three hours a week are not enough' (T20), 'increase the time to use languages at school' (T30) and 'more hours a week and less students in each classroom' (T35). Others argued that teacher development should be prioritised, noting the importance of 'train[ing] the teacher before demanding results from the student' (T35), and recommended 'prioritizing teacher training and retention over standardized curriculum expansions' (T136).

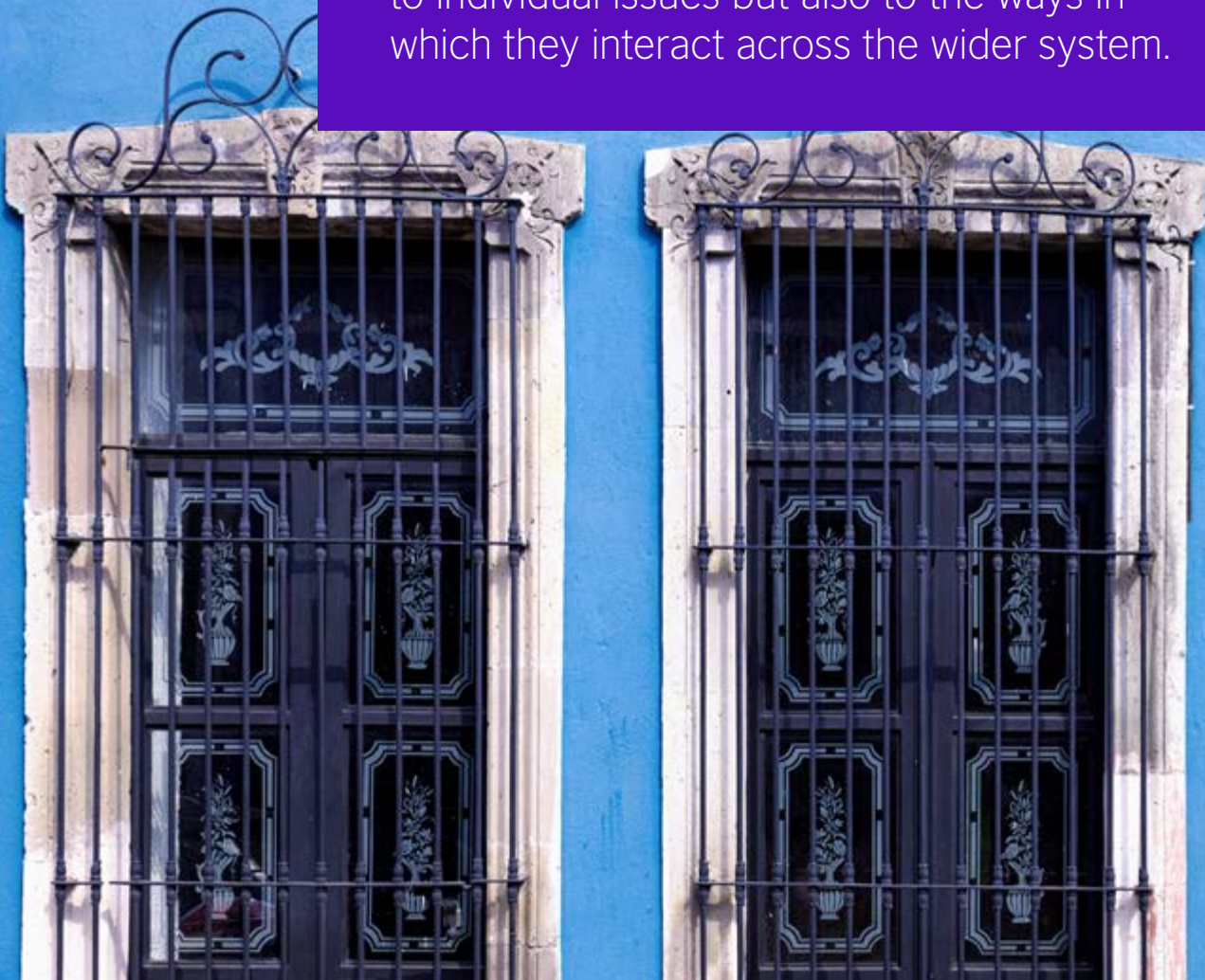
These observations highlight how teacher effectiveness is shaped not only by individual capability but also by the broader conditions in which teaching takes place. Across interviews, the findings pointed to a close relationship between working conditions, teacher well-being and the quality of classroom practice. As a result, investment in teacher development alone may be insufficient unless accompanied by attention to the conditions in which teachers work.

In summary

Individually, each of these challenges may appear manageable; however, participants emphasised the cumulative effect of multiple constraints operating simultaneously.

A teacher may be working in a large class, with limited resources, uneven technological infrastructure, restricted opportunities for professional development and varying levels of confidence in their own English proficiency.

Taken together, these conditions create a complex set of interrelated challenges that can be difficult for any education system to overcome. Consequently, improving English language education requires attention not only to individual issues but also to the ways in which they interact across the wider system.



5.2 Assessment and certification

The data suggests that assessment represents another important sub-system within the broader educational ecosystem. There is no formal national assessment of English. The current education policy advocates a focus on formative assessment, which is implemented variably depending on the context (Diaz-Barriga, 2026; Rivera Ceseña et al, 2026). Assessment in the public system is therefore sporadic and uneven. Information from informants lacked clarity on how learning outcomes are measured. It seems that assessment is not fully integrated into curriculum design or delivery in the state system but instead treated as a separate component of the learner's journey. Meanwhile, formal certification and international examinations such as IELTS, TOEFL and Education First (British Council, 2015) are provided by the private sector.

Assessment functions as a connecting mechanism between curriculum, teaching and learner progression (O'Sullivan, 2021). Several participants suggested that learners struggle to develop a clear sense of progression through the education system. As one interviewee observed, learners often have to start over every time they move to another level because the classes are mixed ability (INF11). This was perceived to reduce motivation and undermine continuity across phases of education.

Where assessment systems are weak or fragmented, the effects extend beyond measurement of learning, influencing motivation, progression pathways and the ability of the system to monitor educational outcomes.



‘There is no real evidence available of whether the students are learning ... English is never assessed. The government doesn't know the results’ (INF08).

This overview of assessment in the Mexican education system raises several concerns. First, it has an impact on the motivation of learners. If learners lack a sense of progress or achievement, motivation may be affected. Over time, reduced motivation could in turn influence learning outcomes. As one young adult participant observed, ‘Motivation can basically be the engine’ (YA526). This suggests that learners' perceptions of achievement and progression may play an important role in sustaining engagement with English learning over time.





Second, the absence of structured and systematic assessment in the public sector creates difficulties for both instructional planning and system-level monitoring. Without reliable evidence of prior attainment, teachers may have limited information about learners' strengths, weaknesses and progress. One informant reported that 'Most of the internal testing that schools are doing ... is only in the areas of reading and listening. There's no writing, no speaking' (INF08).

At the system level, policymakers similarly lack evidence regarding the effectiveness of English language education provision. Reliance on the private sector for assessment and certification intensifies concerns regarding equity and fairness. Learners with the financial means have access to standardised assessments and internationally recognised qualifications.

They are therefore better positioned to demonstrate their proficiency, progress through educational and employment pathways and access wider opportunities. Those without such resources may face additional barriers despite having comparable levels of ability.

For those who pursue English seriously, a recurring practical obstacle is certification. Because the national system does not undertake structured, systemic assessment, it leaves young people and their families to fund external certification themselves, often at significant cost, simply to convert classroom study into a credential that employers or universities will recognise. One interviewee talked about a student who 'had to take a TOEFL test because she is already a nurse, but she can't get her degree or her licence as a nurse until she gets a certain amount of points in the TOEFL' (INF08).

5.3 Infrastructure and resources

Technology and artificial intelligence (AI) were widely regarded as valuable resources with the potential to support learning, teaching, and workplace communication.



Across stakeholder groups, participants described using AI to increase efficiency, access information and support communication. Policymakers and policy influencers reported using AI to manage heavy workloads and administrative tasks, while representatives from the corporate sector described its role in supporting spoken and written communication in the workplace. Young people similarly viewed technology as an important resource to support their language learning. Participants described using digital media, online resources and AI-powered tools to practise English, obtain feedback and review learning. One participant explained that they use AI to support independent study, noting that ‘normally also artificial intelligence [is used] in which I can learn myself or find someone to give me feedback’ (YA520). Others described using AI to personalise their learning, with one participant explaining that ‘I ask AI to create tests with many questions to be reviewing myself and like that to correct everything that I have [done] wrong and did not understand’ (YA526). These accounts

suggest that young people see technology not merely as a source of information but as an active learning partner that can support practice, feedback and self-directed learning.

Despite this generally positive outlook, participants consistently emphasised that technology should be viewed as a tool rather than a solution. As one policymaker observed, ‘Schools and teachers see AI as a resource, a tool, but not as a solution’ (PM01). This perspective reflected a broader recognition that the benefits of technology depend on the contexts in which it is used and the resources available to support its implementation.

Concerns about access and infrastructure emerged consistently across the data.

Participants highlighted substantial variation in the availability of digital resources across Mexico, with inequalities reflecting wider social, economic and geographic differences. As discussed in Section 4.2, resources and educational provision



vary considerably across regions and contexts. In some areas, challenges relate to reliable internet connectivity and access to digital devices, while in others, there remain more fundamental infrastructure constraints. One participant noted that ‘some schools have no connectivity, and there are wide disparities in access’ (PM01). These challenges were described as particularly acute in some rural areas as described in Section 3.2. Participants highlighted the broader implications of these disparities, arguing that technology can either help develop democracy or create more inequity. The challenge is not to leave vulnerable communities behind (COR5).

Young people also recognised the relationship between access, resources and opportunity. Survey respondents identified both financial constraints and access to technology as barriers to language learning, with one participant stating

that ‘Money and technology are the most important barriers’ and another noting that ‘it is hard to have opportunities to learn if there is no money or time.’

These findings suggest that the opportunities afforded by technology and AI are not available equally to all learners and teachers. While participants generally viewed technology use positively, they also recognised the risk that existing inequalities could be reinforced if access remains uneven. As a result, issues of infrastructure, connectivity and digital inclusion were seen as critical considerations for the future of English language education in Mexico. Realising the potential benefits of technology and AI will therefore require not only investment in digital tools but also sustained investment in infrastructure, connectivity, teacher capability and equitable access across diverse local contexts.

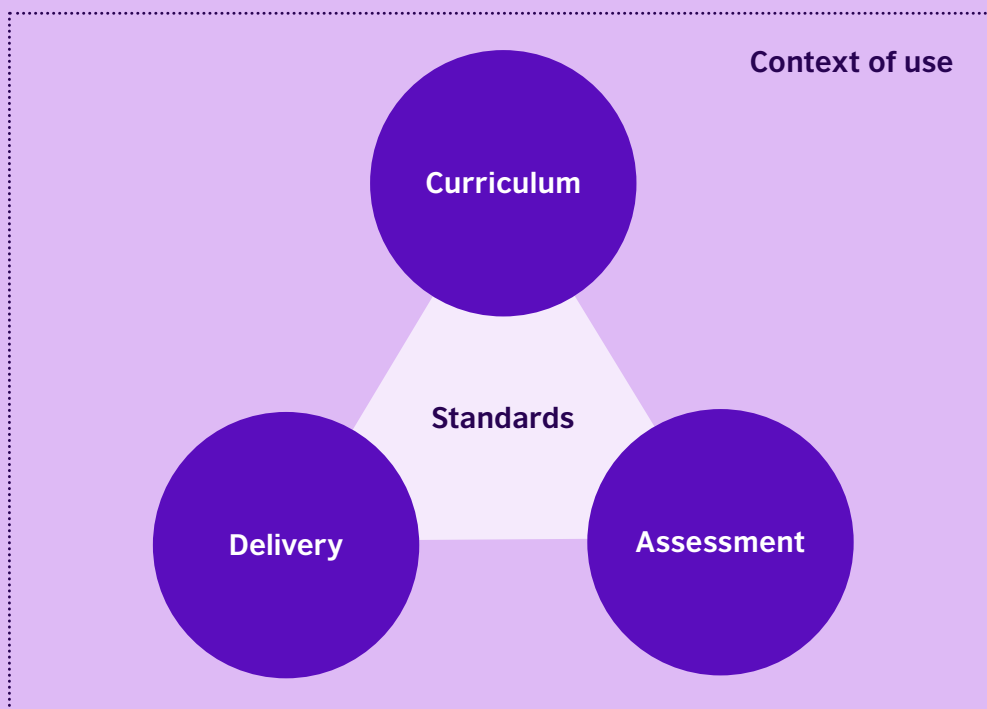
5.4 Mexico and the Comprehensive Learning System

The constraints identified by participants can be further understood through the Comprehensive Learning System (CLS) framework (O’Sullivan, 2021).

The framework conceptualises language learning as the interaction of curriculum, delivery and assessment within a broader educational and social context. Effective learning systems require alignment across all three components, supported by clearly defined standards and progression pathways.

‘The CLS proposes that for learning programmes to function efficiently they should be seen as one comprehensive system. Within the system the three core elements (curriculum, delivery, assessment) must be based on a single philosophy of learning, supported by clearly defined models of language ability and progression, and underpinned by a measurement model. Failure to ensure that all three are fully in harmony is likely to lead to the failure of the system.’ (O’Sullivan, 2021, p. 2) The system itself does not exist in a vacuum but instead is situated within a specific educational and social context, which is defined by its main stakeholders. The findings from our data mapped onto the CLS are summarised in Table 3.

Figure 4 | **The Comprehensive Learning System (O’Sullivan, 2021)**





Applying the CLS framework to Mexico (see Table 3) suggests that curriculum provision is more firmly established than the supporting systems of delivery and assessment. Section 5.1 highlighted challenges relating to teacher preparation, proficiency and pedagogical support, while Section 5.2 identified limitations in assessment and certification. Section 5.3 further demonstrated how variations in infrastructure and access shape learning opportunities. Taken together, these findings suggest that weaknesses in the alignment of delivery and assessment with curriculum objectives may constrain the effectiveness and equity of English language education across the country.

Table 3 | Findings from EVE Mexico mapped on the CLS

CLS component	Mexico findings
Curriculum	National curriculum and policy direction exist through SEP
Delivery	Challenges relating to teacher capacity, proficiency, pedagogy, support and resources
Assessment	No national assessment system for English; fragmented certification landscape
Context	Federal–state complexity, public–private divide, regional inequalities, infrastructure differences
Standards	Variable evidence of progression and achievement

6

English as opportunity and tension



6.1 English is politically contingent

English occupies a complex position within the Mexican education system.

While it is widely associated with economic opportunity, international engagement, and labour market competitiveness, its policy prominence is shaped by broader political and ideological priorities. As discussed in Section 4.1, the status of English has fluctuated across administrations. It received heightened attention during periods when educational policy emphasised international competitiveness and economic modernisation, while under the current NEM framework it forms part of a broader multilingual and social justice agenda that also seeks to strengthen indigenous languages and linguistic diversity.

This changing policy environment generates differing interpretations of the role of English. Some stakeholders perceive a reduction in its prominence, with one informant suggesting that English has become ‘just one part of a bigger programme’ (INF10). Others view its integration within a wider multilingual framework as a natural evolution of educational priorities rather than a diminution of its importance. As one participant observed:

●● ‘It’s not about stopping teaching English, but to invest more in finding the best approach ... that can be applied to the linguistic realities of the people, whether it is Yucatán or it’s Mexico City or it’s any other state’ (COR5-3).

This view – that English should sit alongside local linguistic and cultural priorities rather than displace them – reflects wider discussions within the literature that emphasise the increasing localisation of English and the emergence of multiple Englishes shaped by local linguistic and cultural contexts (Crystal, 2019).

The evidence suggests that the concern is less about the symbolic position of English within policy discourse and more about the practical consequences of policy change. Where shifts in priority are accompanied by reductions in funding, teacher development opportunities, resources or instructional time, achieving learning outcomes may become more challenging.

However, positioning English within a multilingual framework need not imply a reduction in opportunities for English learning. Research increasingly suggests that pedagogical approaches drawing on learners’ full linguistic repertoires, including translanguaging approaches, can support both language learning and educational inclusion (British Council, 2026; Li Wei, 2024; Prilutskaya, 2021).

The central policy question therefore is not whether English should take precedence over other languages but how language education can respond to the diverse needs and aspirations of learners. This requires consideration of who needs English, for what purposes and how educational provision can support different linguistic, educational and economic goals simultaneously. The place of English in Mexico is continually being negotiated between economic aspirations, educational realities, social justice and linguistic objectives, and individual and organisational demands.

6.2 There is demand for English, but it is uneven

Evidence from interviews, focus groups and survey responses consistently indicates demand for English, although the nature and intensity of that demand vary considerably across contexts.

For many young people, English functions as a gateway to educational, professional and personal opportunities. Reflecting a view frequently expressed across the data, one young adult participant stated, ‘If you know Spanish and you master English, I think the job is almost guaranteed’ (YA518). For these participants, English was associated with access to higher education, international mobility, employment opportunities and participation in global networks. This perspective was echoed in survey responses, with one respondent describing English as ‘a fundamental tool to reach my professional and academic goals because it allows you to access global resources and opportunities’ (YA731). Another linked English to personal development and future aspirations, explaining ‘I honestly like it and I’d like to learn more because I would love to travel to other countries and bring that to my children’ (YA879).

However, young people’s perceptions were not uniform. While many participants regarded English as important for future study, employment and mobility, others saw it as less relevant to their lives and aspirations. One survey respondent stated simply, ‘I don’t consider English very relevant’ (YA288). These contrasting views suggest that perceptions of English are shaped by individual circumstances, aspirations and anticipated opportunities, even among young people.

The demand for English in Mexico is similarly uneven across geographical contexts. Some demand is closely linked to local economic conditions. Northern states often benefit from stronger international economic links and greater foreign investment. As one policymaker explained, ‘In our state especially, English is very closely linked to the economy and the attraction of foreign investment’ (PM01).

This relationship between English and economic opportunity was also emphasised by participants from the corporate sector. One commented that English proficiency is increasingly important in sectors linked to tourism and international business, with higher levels of proficiency expected for management positions (COR3-1). Similarly, another participant argued that a professional who speaks English and is working for an international company earns up to three times more (COR2-1).

However, participants were careful not to overstate the universality of demand. In many Mexican small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), English was described as having limited relevance to day-to-day operations. As one roundtable participant observed, ‘Seventy per cent of companies are SMEs, usually small family businesses, and 90 per cent of the workforce do not need English. It is not a priority’ (COR5-1).

Regional variation in demand for English was also linked to socio-economic conditions and the opportunities available to learners. In some rural areas, participants questioned the relevance of English where opportunities for international mobility or higher education were perceived to be limited. As one interviewee relayed some student perceptions:



‘I never use English because I work in Hidalgo, I study in Hidalgo, and I have no opportunity to travel ... Why do I have to learn this language and why is it important to improve my level or speak this language well?’ (PM02).

This perspective resonates with the views of some young people who questioned the immediate relevance of English in their everyday lives. In contrast, others viewed English as a means of expanding opportunities beyond their local context, particularly in relation to higher education, international communication and future employment. These contrasting perspectives suggest that demand for English is influenced not only by existing opportunities but also by how learners imagine their future trajectories.

Several participants argued that policy responses should reflect these differences in context. One roundtable participant commented that ‘Not everyone needs or wants English. Only 10 per cent of Mexicans have a passport’ (COR3-3). Others argued that Mexico has a very complex social structure and that in rural areas, students are lucky to have a teacher (INF07, INF08).

At the same time, participants highlighted considerable variation in priorities across states. One policymaker noted, ‘At the federal level, the priority given to English is very low, but in our State it is one of the key priorities of this administration. Evidence of this is the fact that we have an English department to which we belong. You do not find this in other States’ (PM01). Similarly, another participant observed that ‘In Mexico, we have western Mexico, Bajío,

the Bajío area where there is a lot of car production. That’s where we focus on degrees related to the auto industry. It’s different in the north and different in the south. We are constantly paying attention to the needs of the country, and we update our programs in line with this’ (INF06). One interviewee discussed how the demand for English influences methodology: ‘We have to integrate in different ways, like EMI, like CLIL.

We have now in this period of our university, we are improved (PM02). English medium instruction (EMI) refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects other than English itself in contexts where English is not the primary language of the majority of learners (Dafouz & Gray, 2022). In recent decades, EMI has expanded rapidly worldwide, particularly in higher education, where it is often associated with internationalisation, student mobility and institutional competitiveness (Agnew & Neghina, 2021; Lasagabaster, 2022).

In summary, demand for English exists across Mexico but is neither uniform nor driven by a single set of motivations. Demand arises from employment and business aspirations, particularly in the tourism and service sectors, access to higher education, international mobility and participation in global networks. For many young people, English is viewed as an investment in future opportunities and personal development. However, its perceived relevance varies considerably according to local economies, educational opportunities, geographic location and individual aspirations. As the contrasting views of young people themselves demonstrate, English may be seen as either ‘a fundamental tool’ (YA731) for achieving future goals or as having little immediate relevance. In some states and rural communities, where opportunities to use English are limited and more immediate priorities exist, demand is lower. Demand for English is therefore widespread but highly variable and shaped by local contexts, circumstances and aspirations.

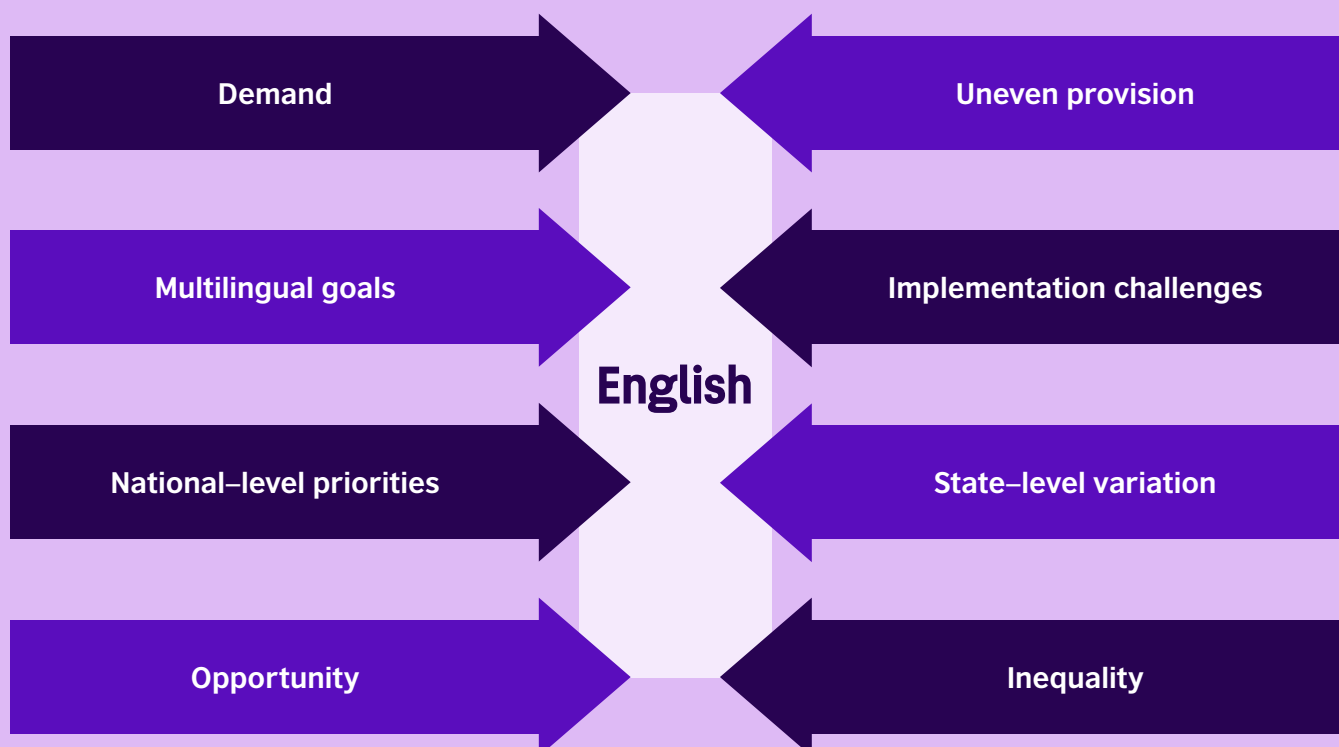
6.3 Summary: English as opportunity and tension

English in Mexico represents both opportunity and tension.

It is widely valued for the educational, economic and international opportunities it can provide, yet its role remains politically contingent and access to learning opportunities is uneven. The challenge for policymakers and implementers alike is not whether English should be promoted; rather it is how equitable access can be achieved while balancing broader multilingual, educational and social justice objectives.

The findings point to several interconnected tensions: between global aspirations and local priorities, between demand for English and uneven provision, and between multilingual policy objectives and implementation capacity. Figure 5 summarises some tensions that have surfaced. It highlights the central challenge facing English language education in Mexico: balancing global aspirations with local priorities while ensuring that opportunities are distributed equitably across different regions and populations. These tensions will be explored in more detail in Section 7.

Figure 5 | Tensions around English in Mexico





7

Future directions and opportunities for change



The preceding sections have highlighted a complex and evolving picture of English language education in Mexico. Figure 6 synthesises Mexico's language education system, showing how it comprises diverse geography, stakeholders and opportunities. In this figure, 'national policy and coordination' are represented by the borders between the states, indicating that even though every state differs in terms of the role of and demand for English, national policy guides decisions and implementation.

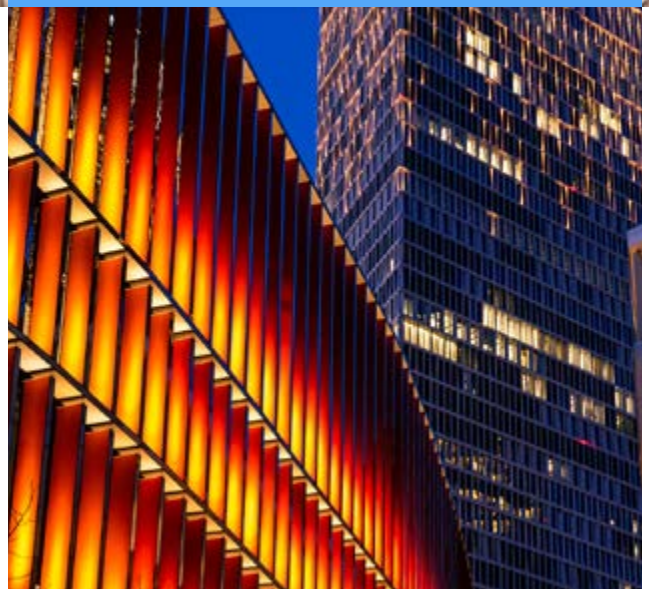


Figure 6 | Mexico's language education ecosystem



**A shared national system.
Diverse states, stakeholders and languages.**

While these components are interconnected and context-dependent, they point towards a number of strategic questions that may help inform future discussions about the role and development of English within Mexico's education system. Taken together, the findings suggest three broad questions (see Figure 7). These concern the future role of English, the equitable distribution of opportunities to learn English and the conditions required for sustainable implementation of English language education. A recurring theme throughout the study was that the future of English cannot be considered in isolation from the wider language education ecosystem. Participants' reflections repeatedly highlighted the interconnected nature of language education, where policy decisions, resource allocation, teacher development, curriculum design and educational infrastructure influence the teaching and learning of all languages. Strengthening these wider conditions may therefore support not only English language education but language education more broadly. Seen in this way, the findings suggest that questions about the future of English are also questions about the future of language education in Mexico.

Figure 7 | Questions arising from the findings

What is the role of English within Mexico's multilingual education system?

How can opportunities to learn English be distributed more equitably?

What conditions are needed for sustainable implementation of language education in Mexico?



To explore these questions further, the findings are considered through three interconnected perspectives: macro, meso and micro. Together they move from questions about the purpose and positioning of English within the wider language ecosystem, through the distribution of learning opportunities across regions and populations, to the practical conditions required for successful implementation.

1. Macro

What is the role of English within Mexico's multilingual education system?

English is part of the national language-in-education policy. However, the status and demand for English is not equal across Mexico. This results in uneven implementation, particularly as states have some autonomy over budget and other resources. While views differed on where resources should be prioritised, the findings consistently highlighted the importance of aligning provision with local contexts' needs, as suggested in Section 6.2. This question seeks clarity about the integration and interaction of languages in national education policy. More significantly, it seeks to understand the demand for and use of English in individual states to inform strategic planning and implementation so that resources can be targeted to relevant languages and the infrastructure needed to support them.

2. Meso

How can opportunities to learn English be distributed more equitably?

Building on Question 1, the second question considers the systemic changes required to provide increased and better opportunities to more students in Mexico and therefore seeks to look at provision on a regional level. Equity may not require uniform provision across all regions, but it does require that learners have access to language learning opportunities that reflect local needs, aspirations and economic realities (Reimers, 2024).

If language-in-education policy is targeted geographically – and therefore more strategically – towards the regions with most demand and use, the interventions of the public education can be significantly strengthened. This will ensure that more students, including those who may not be able to afford private tuition, have access to quality learning opportunities and subsequently to better employment prospects.



3. Micro

What conditions are needed for successful and sustainable implementation of language education in Mexico?

This stage of questioning takes us from considering regional focus to the practical requirements of implementation. Having identified the scope of provision required across the country and which regions to target, what does successful and sustainable implementation of language education look like? This question is connected very strongly to MEL. To plan successful implementation, we need to know the objectives and success indicators we are aiming for so that we can measure against them. MEL is therefore not simply about establishing mechanisms of accountability but about developing essential tools for understanding what works, for whom and under what conditions.

Figure 8 provides a framework to use with the three questions posed in Figure 7 to support decisions about future directions and opportunities for change. The components of this framework are not new: they have been included in recommendations for improvements in Mexico's education system in previous literature (OECD,

2020, 2021; Padilla Rodríguez et al., 2021; Sayer, 2015; Steiner-Khamisi et al., 2024). However, we propose this framework to bring together components which perhaps have been considered in isolation but should ideally be integrated. Future interventions should be guided by consideration of context, purpose, beneficiaries and delivery conditions, rather than assuming a single model of English language education is appropriate across all contexts. We propose that the questions and framework guide decision making about English and other languages but not propose that these decisions are made by policymakers or leaders alone. Throughout the report we have heard from policymakers, educators, employers, researchers and learners. We believe that the questions and framework should be discussed and unpacked with relevant stakeholders from different parts and levels of the education system and from varied contexts. Each stakeholder group in this study brings valuable experience, insights and perspectives regarding both the opportunities and the constraints associated with language education. Their engagement is therefore critical, not only for informing policy and implementation decisions but also for fostering the shared ownership necessary for sustainable change.



Figure 8 | The foundations that sustain the language education ecosystem



**Strong foundations enable a resilient system.
Strong foundations support the whole system.**

Figure 9 puts the diversity of languages, cultures and contexts at the core of sustainable change. The different stakeholder groups are represented by government and public institutions, schools and teachers, learners and students, communities and families, private sector providers, universities and research institutions, and industry and

employers. These different groups are connected by collaboration, shared ownership, evidence-informed decision making and continuous learning. This cohesion is built upon the seven components presented in Figure 8 that are recommended to create a connected and sustainable education ecosystem.

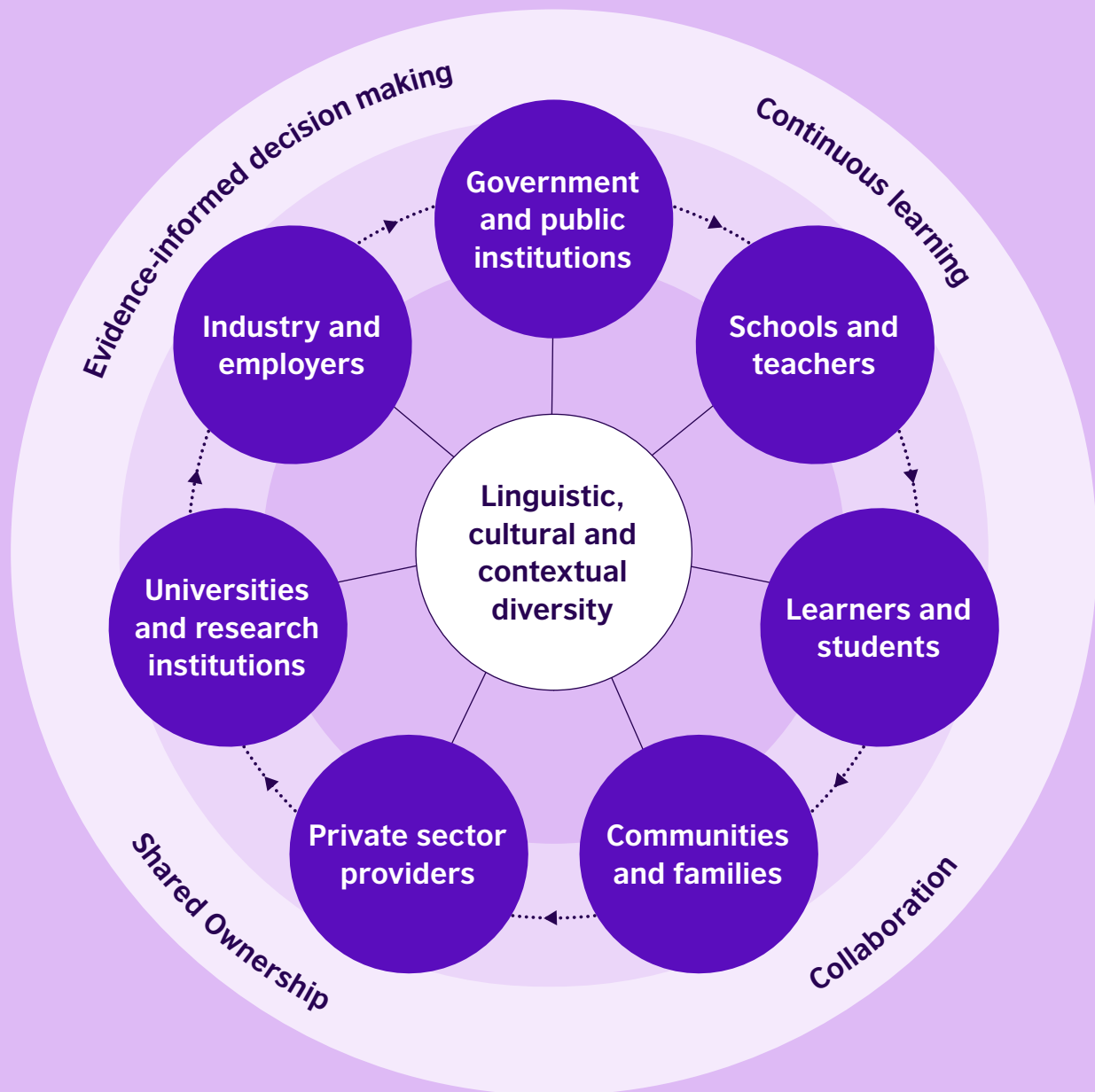


The future directions presented here are therefore framed as questions to be used with a framework rather than recommendations. This reflects a central finding of the study: the complexity of Mexico's English language education ecosystem, and the tensions that characterise it, do not lend themselves to a single solution. Rather, future approaches are likely to depend on considerations of who English

is for, why it is being learned and how opportunities to learn it can be delivered in ways that are relevant, equitable and sustainable.

If these questions are explored and the framework operationalised, a stronger evidence base may begin to emerge, including evidence capable of informing future discussions about the social, educational and economic value of English in Mexico.

Figure 9 | A connected language education ecosystem for sustainable change



Built on	Contextual needs and priorities	Funding and investment	Leadership, governance and coordination
	Implementation planning and support	Teacher education and professional development	Relevant materials and resources
			Monitoring, evaluation and learning



8

Conclusion

This study explored why and when governments invest in English, how the impact of English language-in-education policies is measured and whether such policies contribute to economic growth and impact.

The findings suggest that investment in English in Mexico has been shaped by shifting political priorities, economic considerations and local realities (Section 4); that measurement of impact remains limited and fragmented (Section 5.2); and that while English can generate significant personal and economic benefits for individuals and organisations, evidence of broader societal and economic impact remains incomplete (Section 6). Considered individually, the research questions provide insights into investment, measurement and impact. Considered collectively, however, they point to a deeper conclusion: that the future of English is inseparable from the wider language education ecosystem and can be better understood through the contexts, priorities and lived experiences of the stakeholders who participate in it.

Mexico's education system operates within an extraordinarily diverse social, linguistic, economic and geographic context. The complexity identified throughout this report is therefore not a consequence of policy alone but reflects the challenge of designing educational provision capable of responding to varied local realities and needs. The study suggests that this diversity should not be viewed as a barrier to effective policy but as a reality that must be recognised and accommodated within future decision making. The study also highlights the need for stronger evidence regarding the educational, social and

economic impacts of English language education, particularly at system level.

Efforts to strengthen language education in Mexico are more likely to achieve desired outcomes when they are responsive to contextual needs and priorities and take account of geographical, socio-economic, structural and individual factors. In a country characterised by such diversity, a single solution is unlikely to meet the needs of all learners and communities.

Across stakeholder groups, English was consistently associated with educational, economic and social opportunity. Participants highlighted higher wages, employment opportunities, international engagement and access to further study as important benefits. The increasing emphasis on internationalisation within higher education has also raised the prominence of English, with some universities expanding their provision of English-taught courses and programmes (Despaigne, 2019).

However, access to English learning opportunities remains uneven, with barriers including cost, time and motivation. This raises an important question for policymakers: how can English be made more accessible to those who want or need it, and how can it better support them in achieving their goals?

One of the strengths of this report has been the inclusion of a range of stakeholder groups. The diversity of perspectives reflected the fact that participants were positioned at different points within the language education ecosystem, each experiencing and interpreting policy, implementation and outcomes through a different lens. One emergent thread was the absence of communication or collaboration across stakeholder groups. Within such a complex educational ecosystem, one recommendation is to provide a collaborative forum for stakeholders to

discuss their perspectives and to collectively unpack and examine some of the tensions and questions foregrounded in Sections 6 and 7. Pivotal to these discussions is the place of English in Mexico's multilingual vision and how it works alongside other languages to benefit its users. English should be understood as part of a broader language education ecosystem and not as an isolated subject. Sustainable change in English language education is achieved when diverse linguistic, cultural and contextual realities are placed at the centre of the system, stakeholders collaborate around shared goals, and action is supported by appropriate governance, resources, professional development and learning.

This report therefore contributes a question-led framework for exploring the future of English within Mexico's wider language education ecosystem. Rather than proposing a single solution, the framework places contextual needs

and priorities at its foundation and encourages consideration of interconnected macro, meso and micro questions to support evidence-informed decision making.

The findings suggest that the future of English in Mexico is likely to lie not in isolation but as part of a broader multilingual tapestry. This need not diminish the value of English. Rather, it presents an opportunity to reconsider how English can complement other languages in supporting educational participation, economic opportunity, social mobility and personal aspirations.

Ultimately, the question is not whether English matters but how learners can be supported to draw on their linguistic repertoires to achieve their goals, and how education systems can create the conditions that enable them to do so.



References

- Administración Federal de Servicios Educativos en la Ciudad de México (AEFCM). (n.d.). *Programa Nacional de Inglés (PRONI)*. <https://www.aefcm.gob.mx/programas-federales/proni/>
- Agnew, M., & Neghina, C. (2021). *The changing nature of English-taught programmes*. British Council & Studyportals. https://studyportals.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/British-Council_Studyportals_The-changing-landscape-of-English-taught-programmes-in-2021.pdf
- Baker, W., Fang, F., & Gimenez, T. (2026). Global Englishes: Research agendas and tasks in English as a lingua franca. *Language Teaching*, 1-19. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444826101281>
- Braun, A., Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Hoskins, K. (2011). Taking context seriously: Towards explaining policy enactments in the secondary school. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(4), 585-596.
- British Council. (2015). *English in Mexico: An examination of policy, perceptions and influencing factors*. British Council Mexico.
- British Council (2026). Language-responsive education: The British Council's position on inclusive language policy and practice. British Council. <https://doi.org/10.57884/9MJB-N264>
- Crystal, D. (2019). The future of Englishes: Going local. *English Today*, 35(2), 10-15.
- Dafouz, E., & Gray, J. (2022). Rethinking the roles of ELT in English-medium education in multilingual university settings: An introduction. *ELT Journal*, 76(2), 163-171. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccac010>
- Despaigne, C. (2019). EFL teachers' perspectives on the role of English in two Mexican private universities. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 21(1), 43-57. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v21n1.69239>
- Díaz-Barriga, Á. (2026). *Pensar la evaluación formativa para la educación básica en México* [Thinking about formative assessment for primary and secondary education in Mexico]. *Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa*, 31(108), 217-242
- Gobierno de México. (2021). *Ley General de Educación Superior*. Diario Oficial de la Federación. https://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LGES_200421.pdf
- Honig, M. I. (2006). Complexity and policy implementation: Challenges and opportunities for the field. In M. I. Honig (Ed.), *New directions in education policy implementation: Confronting complexity* (pp. 1-24). State University of New York Press.
- Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas. (2008). *Catálogo de las lenguas indígenas nacionales: Variantes lingüísticas de México con sus autodenominaciones y referencias geoestadísticas*. INALI. <https://www.inali.gob.mx/sitios/clin-inali/>
- International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO). (2023). *Monitoring, evaluation, and learning strategy 2022-2025*. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384786> [unesdoc.unesco.org]
- Lasagabaster, D. (2022). *English-medium instruction in higher education*. Cambridge University Press.
- Li, W. (2024). Transformative pedagogy for inclusion and social justice through translanguaging, co-learning, and transpositioning. *Language Teaching*, 57(2), 203-214.
- Lo Bianco, J. (2020). A meeting of concepts and praxis: Multilingualism, language policy and the dominant language constellation. In J. Lo Bianco & L. Aronin (Eds.), *Dominant language constellations* (Educational Linguistics, Vol. 47, pp. 35-56). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52336-7_3
- Marconi, G., Vergolini, L., & Borgonovi, F. (2023). *The demand for language skills in the European labour market: Evidence from online job vacancies* (OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 294). OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/e1a5abe0-en>
- Mendes de Oliveira, M. (2024). English as a lingua franca and interculturality: Navigating structure- and process-oriented perspectives in intercultural interactions. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 24(2), 105-117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2023.2254285>
- OECD. (2020). *An implementation framework for effective change in schools*. Policy Perspectives No. 9. OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (2021). *PISA 2025 foreign language assessment framework*. OECD Publishing.
- O'Sullivan, B. (2021). The Comprehensive Learning System. British Council. <https://doi.org/10.57884/ZDEC-CK78>

- Padilla Rodríguez, B. C., Armellini, A., & Traxler, J. (2021). The forgotten ones: How rural teachers in Mexico are facing the COVID-19 pandemic. *Online Learning*, 25(1), 253-268. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v25i1.2453>
- Patel, M., Solly, M., Copeland, S. (2023). *The Future of English: Global Perspectives*. British Council.
- Patsko, L. (2023). *Continuing professional development through mobile messaging apps*. British Council.
- Prilutskaya, M. (2021). Examining pedagogical translanguaging: A systematic review of the literature. *Languages*, 6(4), 180.
- Ramírez-Romero, J. L., & Sayer, P. (2016). The teaching of English in public primary schools in Mexico: More heat than light?. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 24, 84. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.24.2502>
- Ramírez Romero, J. L., Sayer, P., & Pamplón Irigoyen, E. N. (2014). English language teaching in public primary schools in Mexico: The practices and challenges of implementing a national language education program. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 27(8), 1020-1043. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2014.924638>
- Reimers, F. M. (2024). The Quest for Educational Equity in Mexico. *Daedalus*, 153(4), 206-220.
- Rivera Ceseña, K. P., Cordero Arroyo, G., & Ceballos Escobar, F. I. (2026). *Evaluación formativa en la Nueva Escuela Mexicana* [Formative assessment in the New Mexican School]. *Educación y Ciencia*, 15(65), 11-22. <https://doi.org/10.32776/EyC.v15i65.856>
- Sayer, P. (2015). Expanding global language education in public primary schools: The national English programme in Mexico. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 28(3), 257-275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2015.1102926>
- Sayer, P., & López-Gopar, M. E. (2015). Language education in Mexico. In W. E. Wright, S. Boun, & O. García (Eds.), *The handbook of bilingual and multilingual education* (pp. 578–591). Wiley Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118533406.ch37>
- Scheerens, J. (2016). *Educational Effectiveness and Ineffectiveness: A Critical Review of the Knowledge Base*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Secretaría de Educación Pública. (2022). *Fundamentos del Marco Curricular Común de Educación Media Superior*. Subsecretaría de Educación Media Superior. <https://dgb.sep.gob.mx/storage/recursos/marco-curricular-comun/ci3oHBtKrB-FundamentosDelMCCEMS.pdf>
- Secretaría de Educación Pública. (2025). *Acuerdo número 21/08/25 por el que se establece y regula el Marco Curricular Común de la Educación Media Superior*. Diario Oficial de la Federación. https://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle_popup.php?codigo=5765757
- Steiner-Khamsi, G., Faul, M. V., Baek, C., Hopkins, A. N., & Iwabuchi, K. (2024). Improving the use of evidence for education policy, planning and implementation: Strategic review. *UNESCO*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388747>
- TESOL International Association. (2003). TESOL position statement on teacher quality in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages. TESOL International Association.
- Tran, L. T., Nghia, T. L. H., & Ngo, M. T. (2024). The nexus of English education and graduate employability: The need to re-position and modify the approach to English education. In T. L. H. Nghia, L. T. Tran, & M. T. Ngo (Eds.), *English language education for graduate employability in Vietnam* (pp. 1–21). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-4338-8_1
- UNESCO. (2014). Teaching and learning: achieving equality for all. (*EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4*). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000225660>.
- UNESCO. (n.d.). *Education management, monitoring and evaluation*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/education-management>
- Yusuf, F. N., & Novita, O. E. (2020). EFL teachers' perceived language proficiency and teaching effectiveness. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 9(3), 580-588.



© British Council 2026

The British Council is the United Kingdom's
international organisation for cultural relations
and educational opportunities.

www.britishcouncil.org/future-of-english