

English Pre-Service Teachers' Decisions on Working as Bilingual Agents at Call Centers and Their Perspectives for Future Employment

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Abstract

Currently, there is a growing trend for pre-service language teachers to work as bilingual agents due to the increase in call centers as a means of customer service. This research investigates the reasons why pre-service language teachers, choose to work as bilingual agents in call centers instead of pursuing a career in education as teachers of foreign languages which is part of the essence of their professional training. The results indicate that the main reasons for their interest were related to payment, flexible schedules, opportunities to improve their communicative competencies in the target language and enhance their cultural awareness. When asked about their future employment prospects, they expressed a desire to become language teachers. However, a significant group is uncertain about their decision to become teachers, and some are more interested in continuing to work as call center agents. Following a mixed research design, the researcher developed the present study integrating qualitative and quantitative data for more reliable results. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, surveys and focus groups. Participants were 55 pre-service language teachers currently working as agents at a call center. The data was analysed using thematic analysis to identify categories that emerged. In addition, the research is comprehensively discussed, and the conclusions of the study are presented. The results obtained provide an opportunity for discussion and reflection on the conditions of teachers in educational contexts compared to other job offers.

Keywords: Pre-Service Teachers, Bilingual Agents, Call Center.

INTRODUCTION

Bachelor's degrees in Colombia aim to train professionals to strengthen academic processes, develop teaching-learning processes, and shape the future of educational institutions. Those who pursue a bachelor's degree in pedagogy will receive comprehensive training in didactics to ensure they are well-prepared to take on roles in educational fields, such as teaching, curriculum design, and instructional support. Through their studies, they will become knowledgeable in the principles and practices of educational theories, research methods, and the development of educational material. They will also gain a thorough understanding of the underlying principles of education and how to apply them in a variety of context. Betancourt (2023a) states that the primary emphasis of teacher training institutions for foreign languages is on cultivating pedagogical skills to empower teachers to create positive change in their country's educational and social setting. The assumption is that teachers should undergo training to lead and transform the teaching and learning process using innovation and research.

Degree programs in foreign languages include in their training process competences that enable students to perform as qualified teachers. Cely-Betancourt (2023a) asserts that foreign language teacher training programs include areas of foreign language pedagogy, specific didactics, linguistics, and research. As can be seen, the main purpose of degree programs in foreign languages is to train teachers to work in education. Nowadays, however, there is a tendency for pre-service language teachers to work as bilingual agents in a call center rather than as language teachers in schools because of the growth of call centers (CCs) as customer service centers requiring bilingual agents. In recent years, the growth of new technologies has been rapid, such as the emergence of call centers that provide remote services online or by phone, Charbotel et al., (2009). Many companies now depend on Call Centers to engage with customers, providing sales, support, and resolving billing problems. In this sense, Call Centers have gradually become a job opportunity for students of foreign language degree programs.

It is important to examine why pre-service prefer to start their work experience by working as agents in call centers rather than as teachers in the educational field. This exploratory research comprised a mixed-methods project conducted in Bogotá- Colombia. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the researchers aimed to provide better insights and enhance the quality and explanatory power of the data. Participants were

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55 Pre-service teachers from bachelor's degree of foreign languages in Bogotá who were engaged at a call center as agents.

Findings that show a variety of factors influencing their decisions. These include the salary, flexible working hours that allow them to alternate their work with other academic or family responsibilities, the opportunity to keep in touch with the foreign language in real contexts that allow them to gain communicative skills in the language. In general, participants mentioned that working in a call center can be a very rewarding experience since call center agents gain valuable experiences in answering customer inquiries, assisting in problem-solving, and ensuring the delivery of the best possible service to them. Agents also develop competencies in product promotion products and services and be able to communicate clearly, effectively, and assertively which help them top gain new skills in customer service.

This research makes contributions both to the higher education institutions responsible for the training of foreign language teachers and to the educational institutions where the new English teachers will work. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the future of teacher training and the realities of the workplace, particularly in terms of financial remuneration and the responsibilities that teachers have as part of their job. It also contributes to new teachers of English and opens a space for reflection on their professional vocation and their professional future.

Theoretical Aspects

To better understand the essential ideas related to pre-service teachers working as agents in a multilingual call center, we will discuss the theory underlying the study. Firstly, a broad definition of pre-service teachers will be discussed, then the term call centers and finally call center agents. Very little research has been found associated with the decision of young people to work in call centers. Research on working in call centers has mostly focused on the field of psychology where research has been done on stress, burnout, and psychosocial risk factors. Ramírez et al., (2022). This research presents significant findings as it addresses an underlying issue in the field of education.

Pre-Service Teachers

The term "pre-service teachers" is used to refer to undergraduate students who are being trained to become future teachers. Pre-service teachers receive training to become qualified educators who can impart their knowledge to future students Ulla (2016). Jiménez, A. & Betancourt, B. (2024) mention that pre-service teachers have a high level of training in pedagogy and didactics to teach foreign languages, according to the Ministry of Education guidelines contend in resolution 18583 of September 15, 2017, which states that degree programs in Colombia must define training profile for pre-service teachers including a high component of pedagogy and didactics of the disciplines. During the practice teaching period, it is an ideal time to assess a teacher's knowledge and skills as it serves as the induction into the teaching profession for pre-service teachers. According to Botha & Reddy (2011), pre-service teachers should have the necessary skills, attitudes, and dispositions to cope with the ongoing adaptations in the classroom environment.

Call Center

We can define a call center as a centralized office or facility equipped with telecommunication infrastructure, computer systems, and personnel dedicated to handling a large volume of inbound and outbound telephone calls. Sato (2018) defines call centers as a division that focuses on dealing with consumers and can potentially play an important role as a contact point for gathering customer information in a company.

Table N. 1 provides information on the call centers and their working conditions. As can be seen, there are a variety of open-ended contracts with salaries in the range of 2 to 3 million pesos, plus additional bonuses. Working hours range from 24 for part-time to 40 for full-time. Some offer the option of working from home, and none require previous experience.

Table 1. Call Centers and working conditions.

Call Center	Type of contract	Salary	Bonuses	Schedules	Work at home	Work on site	Previous Call center experience required
Asurion	Indefinite	2.600.00 3.300.000	-Uncapped commissions	40h 36h 24h	No	Yes	No
Teleperformance	Indefinite	2.660.000	Capped commissions	40h 36h 24h	Yes	Yes	No
Foundever	Indefinite	3.079.998	Capped commissions	40h 36h 24h	Yes	Yes	No
Scotiabank	Indefinite	2.500.000	Capped commissions	40h 36h 24h	No	Yes	No
Concentrix	Indefinite	3.000.000	Capped commissions	40h 36h 24h	No	Yes	No
Accedo	Indefinite	2.500.000	Capped commissions	40h 36h 24h	No	Yes	No
IGT solutions	Indefinite	3.000.000	Capped commissions	40h 36h 24h	No	Yes	No

Note: The table shows information about Call Center were preservice teacher currently work and its working conditions.

Call Center Agents

An agent in a call center refers to an individual hired by the organization to handle incoming and outgoing calls with customers or clients. These agents receive training to help, answer inquiries, resolve issues, and perform various tasks related to customer service, sales, technical support, or other functions, depending on the specific needs of the organization. Call center agents are required to perform the functions of active listening, demonstrating empathy, typing/documenting, navigating systems, formulating responses, de-escalating emotionally charged customers, and moving the calls forward quickly and repetitively (Jacobs & Roodt, 2011; Molino et al., 2016; U.S. Contact Center, 2016). The high call volumes, compounded by continuous multi-tasking and emotional labor, can be exhausting work (Molino et al., 2016; U.S. Contact Center, 2016; Valle & Ruz, 2015; Zhan, Wang, & Shi, 2016).

Call center agents are professionals employed by companies to handle customer communications. Their primary responsibility is to assist customers with inquiries, resolve issues, provide product or service information, and ensure a positive customer experience. Peyravi & Keshavarzi (2009). Call center agents typically undergo training to familiarize themselves with company policies, products, and services, as well as communication and problem-solving skills to effectively address customer needs. They play a crucial role in maintaining customer satisfaction, building brand loyalty, and contributing to overall business success by serving as the frontline representatives of the company. Mehrotra & Samuelson (2011).

METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed a mixed methods research design, integrating qualitative and quantitative data collection. Qualitative tools such as semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used, while quantitative data was collected through a survey. The survey included both closed-ended questions with fixed Likert scale responses and open-ended questions where respondents could give their answers and opinions. A representative purposive sample of 55 pre-service teachers from bachelor's degree of foreign languages in Bogotá participated, all of them were engaged at a call center as agents. The main objective if this research was to analyze pre-service teachers' perceptions and decisions when working at a call center as bilingual agents instead of performing in the educational field.

FINDINGS

After analyzing interview data, we have found an answer to the initial research question: *Why do pre-service teachers choose to work as bilingual agents in call centers instead of pursuing a career in education?* Using descriptive and thematic coding (qualitative), the data was analyzed. This section presents qualitative and quantitative data to answer the research question.

To identify the categories of analysis based on the collected data, we conducted a process of triangulation using data from interviews, focus groups, and surveys. The analysis revealed two major categories and four subcategories, as illustrated in the following figure.

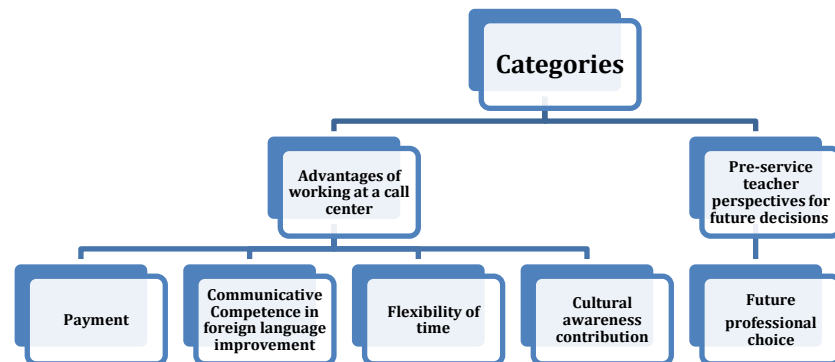


Figure 1. Categories of analysis.

Note: The figure represents the resulting categories based on the data collected.

Advantages of Working at a Call Center Based on Preservice Teachers' Experiences.

Based on the data collected through interviews, focus groups and surveys, the categories that emerged were: 1) benefits of working in a call center and 2) prospects for future choices. In the first category, there were four subcategories related to economic income, the opportunity to improve useful skills for their professional development, such as communicative skills in the language and intercultural skills, and flexibility during the working day. They also show little interest in continuing to work as call center agents and in continuing their careers as teachers, but there is a significant difference between the views expressed in the survey and those expressed in the interviews and focus groups.

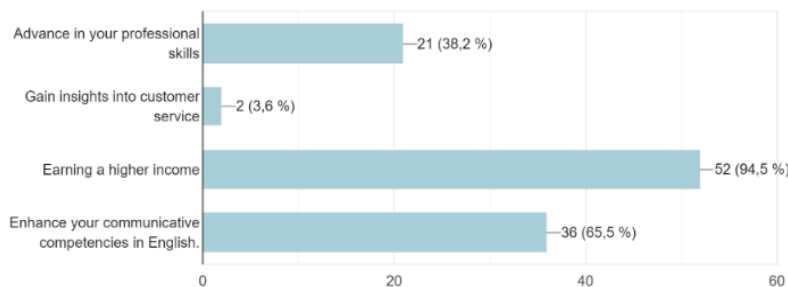
Payment

Financial remuneration versus working hours is crucial for teachers, as it affects their motivation to teach and their decision to remain in the profession. According to Lopez (2021), citing Satizabal et al. (2020) mention that salaries in the teaching profession are influenced by the type of institution (public or private) and the location (urban or rural). Low payments and long working hours have been identified as reasons for leaving the profession. The author also notes that uncertainty surrounding future employment, low pay leading to impoverishment, and lack of stability due to contract levels are among the reasons that make teaching an unattractive profession for many teachers.

Based on the findings, the primary motivation for pre-service teachers working at call centers is to earn a steady income. 94.5% of respondents indicated that the main reason for starting work at a call center is to earn a higher income. This suggests that financial compensation is a significant determining factor for individuals seeking employment in this field. It is worth noting that many students who work at call centers often seek employment opportunities that provide them with a flexible schedule, allowing them to balance their studies and work responsibilities. However, the most critical factor in their decision to pursue this career path is the need to earn a living.

What are your expectations of working in a call center?

55 respuestas



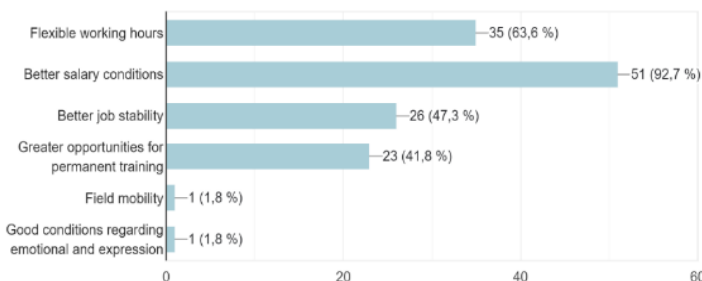
Graphic 1. Students' expectations when working at a call center in surveys.

Note: The graphic represents the data collected on the surveys based on the research category.

This is in line with another survey question regarding the necessary improvements for educational institutions. The respondents answered: better salary conditions (92.7%); better job stability 47.3%) and great opportunities for permanent training (41.8%).

What working conditions do you think educational institutions should improve for teachers?

55 respuestas



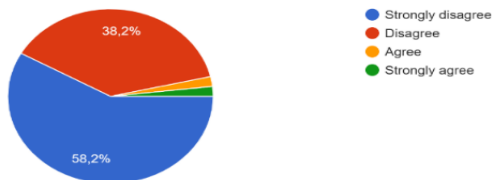
Graphic 2. Students' considerations about areas that can improve for teachers, in survey.

Note: The graphic represents the data collected on the surveys based on the research category.

The surveys revealed that participants acknowledge the fact that an educational institution would not offer the same financial compensation as a call center. When asked if they believed they would receive better pay in a school, 58% strongly disagreed; 38.2 % disagree, only 5% answered in a positive way (agree and strongly agree).

"I believe that if I worked in a school as a teacher I would receive a better salary than what I earned in the call center"

55 respuestas



Graphic 3. Students' consideration regarding payments for an agent at a call center and as a pre-service teacher, in surveys.

Note: The graphic represents the data collected on the surveys based on the research category.

In the interviews, one participant mentioned: [My process lasted about a week, and I was already in training. And on the other hand, the payment is higher; I think] (November 12, 2023). Another interviewed answered [money, money, simple money, and experience].

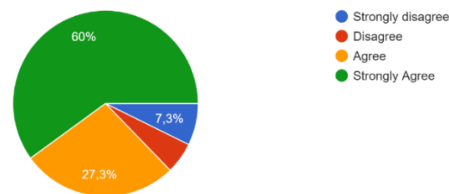
The focus group revealed that the average payment for call center workers is between \$2.6 million and \$3.3 million COP, excluding performance-based bonuses. In contrast, pre-service teachers working in schools earn an average salary between the minimum wage of \$1.3 million COP and \$1.8 million COP. This represents a significant difference in compensation between the two professions.

Communicative Competence in Foreign Language Improvement

Communicative competence refers to the speaker's ability to effectively send and receive information. Both the sender and receiver must perceive a clear message for communication to be effective. This ability is comprised the four language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. León et al., (2024). Regarding the development of communicative competences in foreign languages, the policies of the MEN in Colombia state that teachers of foreign language degree programmes must achieve a C1 level of language proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Cely Betancourt, B. L. (2020 a).

In the survey, participants were asked whether working in a call center helped them improve their communication skills. It was found that a 60% strongly agree and 27.3% agree. The results indicate that participants were aware of this fact and are seeking to improve their communication skills in a foreign language. They consider working in a call center as an opportunity to enhance their communicative abilities. In the interviews, the participants mentioned that their language proficiency was not good, and their level of proficiency did not meet their desired standard in the past, however, now they have experimented a significative improvement. In the focus groups, participants agreed that they could improve their speaking skills due to the experiences working as agents in calla centers. They enhanced fluency, pronunciation, intonation, and listening skills. They also mentioned that the practice of receiving calls and having conversations with native customers was an excellent opportunity to learn idioms and new vocabulary in real contexts, as well as technical vocabulary related to business.

Based on my experience working as an agent at a call center, "I believe that my proficiency in the use of foreign language has improved"
55 respuestas



Graphic 4. Students' experiences regarding proficiency when working at a call center in surveys.

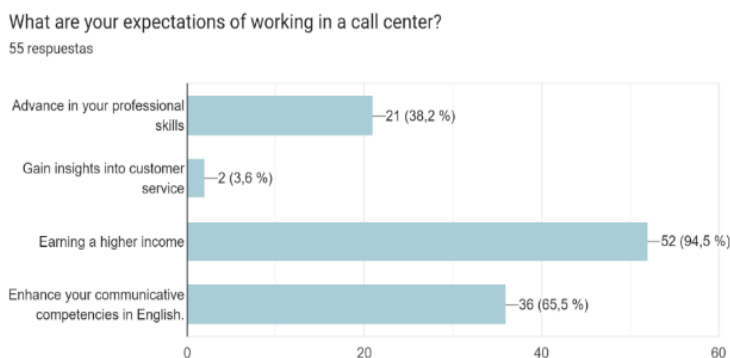
Note: The graphic represents the data collected on the surveys based on the research category.

During the interview, a participant expressed that they did not want to feel like they were solely working for monetary gain. Instead, he saw the opportunity as a chance to improve their English communication skills. The participant felt that the experience was beneficial and contributed positively to their personal growth. He cherished the experience, even though it was not the most important. [The interview took place on November 12, 2023.]

This result indicates that working at a call center could offer valuable opportunities for language learning and skill development. It suggests that students who work at call centers may have greater exposure to different cultures and languages, leading to improved language acquisition. The ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language is an increasingly valuable skill in today's globalized world, and the experiences gained through call center work may provide students with an advantage in their future careers. It is important to note that the

specific language level of the students surveyed was not mentioned, but the results suggest that students with varying levels of proficiency may benefit from the language development opportunities provided by this type of work.

The following graph shows that 65.5% of respondents cited improving their communication skills in the language as a benefit of working in call centers. As Cely Betancourt, B. L. (2020 b.) states, the development of foreign language communication skills in higher education has become a priority in most countries because of new trends brought about by globalisation and its impact on education. It is the reason participants are evidently aware of these demands. According to the guidelines and basic standards of competence in English in Colombia, the minimum level for professionals from other professions is B2, while the minimum level for new language graduates is C1, Cely Betancourt (2020 b.). It means that the participants know the requirements to get their diplomas as teachers of English in Colombia nowadays.



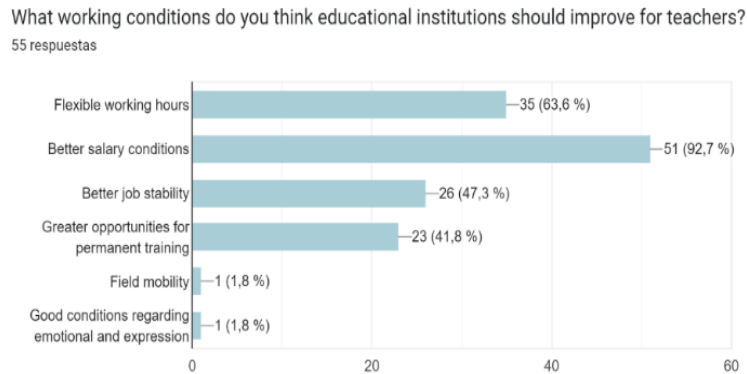
Graphic 5. Communicative Competence in foreign language improvement.

Note: The graphic represents the data collected on the surveys based on the research category.

Flexibility of Time

According to the ILO (International Labor Organization) (1986), labor flexibility can be defined as the ability to adapt to economic, social, and technological circumstances. Numerous studies have shown that labor flexibility affects the quality of life of workers. Therefore, it is crucial to reconsider the necessity of flexible working hours, enabling employees to balance their work and personal life. This guarantees a better emotional compensation, which undoubtedly enhances motivation, concentration, and performance, ultimately facilitating productivity and profitability, Llano Restrepo (2014).

On the surveys 63.6% indicated that one of the main reasons why the choice to work at a call center is due to the schedules call center offers. This availability of flexible scheduling ensures that these students can manage their work alongside their academic studies without compromising the quality of either. Additionally, call centers may provide certain accommodations to their workers, specifically for those who are pursuing their bachelor's degree, to better assist them in balancing their work and academic requirements. This may include the option to adjust work hours to 36 or even 24 hours per week, significantly lowering the impact of call center work on their academic pursuits. Owing to the benefits of the flexible scheduling and other accommodations provided, working at a call center could be an optimal way for students to improve their financial well-being whilst concurrently advancing their education.



Graphic 6. Flexibility of time.

Note: The graphic represents the data collected on the surveys based on the research category.

During the focus groups, one participant mentioned [There are jobs that have benefits, but they do have benefits like flexibility in hours, I would assume] (Nov 12, 2023). In the interviews the participants agreed that even though the hours in the call centers are heavy because sometimes the working hours are at night and even in the early morning, this job not only allows them to earn a good salary but also to alternate the working hours with other responsibilities they have with their academic commitments and with their family.

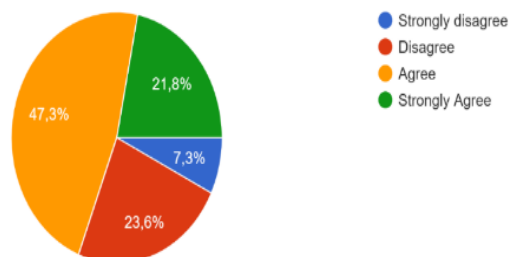
During the interview, one participant emphasised the advantage of working in a call centre and in a college. He explained that in the call centre he could finish his work without having to continue it at home. In a school, he must continue working at home to complete his schoolwork, which takes time away from his family and other responsibilities at the university. The research uncovered that one of the primary reasons why students are inclined to work at call centers is because of the flexibility of the schedules and other associated benefits. Call center work often provides students with the ability to choose convenient hours of work, which can range from early morning to overnight shifts, depending on their preferences and availability.

Cultural Awareness Contribution

Cultural differences can have a big impact on communication, especially in international collaborations, Beagan, (2003). Cultural awareness becomes essential mainly when we interact with people from other cultures. People need to recognize the challenge of navigating between cultures and staying authentic to their own, Constantin et al., (2015). The development of cultural sensitivity is necessary given the dynamics of today's world. Santana, & Betancourt, B. (2021) affirm that it is insufficient to merely acknowledge the validity of others' differences. Supporting the development of this skill in contemporary society is necessary to encourage cultural diversity in a tumultuous world, Santana, & Betancourt, B. (2021).

Based on the survey results, pre-service teachers place significant value on the development of intercultural awareness and communication skills. To the statement in the survey, *I believe that the experience in a call center gives me opportunities to improve my intercultural awareness and communicative skills*. 21.8% said they strongly agreed and 47.3% said they agree. These findings also provided valuable insights into pre-service teachers' motivation and perception of language proficiency as an important aspect of their professional development.

"I believe that call center experience contributes to my cultural awareness and multilingual abilities for future teaching opportunities"
55 respuestas



Graphic 7. Cultural awareness and communicative competencies in surveys.

Note: The graphic represents the data collected on the surveys based on the research category.

To develop cultural awareness, respondents mentioned that working with clients from different cultural backgrounds had helped them to become more tolerant, understanding, and respectful of cultural differences. Besides, they were more confident, avoided conflict, ensured accurate communication, and learnt more about other cultures and had the chance to correct false stereotypes. It is important to mention that intercultural competence involves having the necessary and relevant knowledge about different cultures when interacting with others, as Hernández et al., (2024) suggests.

From this category, it can be concluded that working in a call center provides students with skills that are useful for the demands of today's world. Students find the opportunity to work in call centers valuable in developing skills that are useful in their professional performance. Hernández et al., (2024) state that

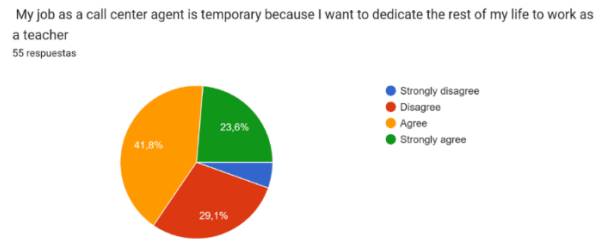
The challenge for teachers in the face of the new dynamics of education is to respond to a society immersed in a process of globalization and influenced by technological change. The dynamics of today's world require citizens with intercultural and foreign language communication skills (p. 514).

The development of intercultural competences can be observed through effective communication, treatment of others, and problem-solving abilities. Call centers can serve as a valuable training ground for these competences as agents are required to attentively listen to customers and respond effectively to their service needs.

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER PERSPECTIVES FOR FUTURE DECISIONS

Although participants have clear reasons for working in call centers, as mentioned above, they indicated that their work in the call center was temporary; it is clear from the data collected that, despite the benefits they receive and the advantages they observe, they plan to continue their teaching career in the future. The most important reasons are the economic remuneration, followed by the benefits of developing skills that are useful for their future teaching work and the possibility of integrating other activities, it seems that these are reasons that solve their current financial problems and to have a remuneration that allows them to cover the costs of their professional career, despite this they express interest in their teaching profession and their vocation towards teaching.

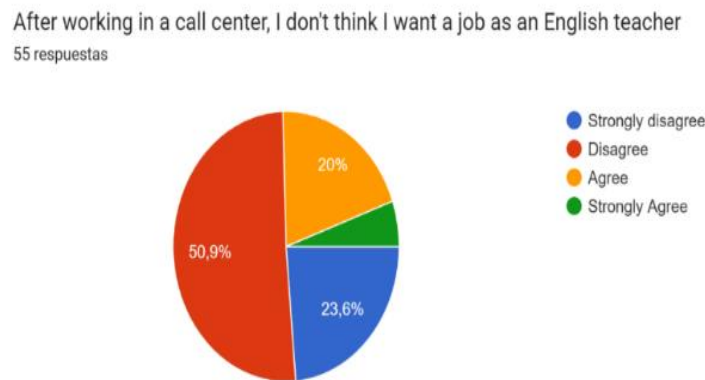
In the survey, respondents answered the statement, *my job in the call center is temporary because I plan to continue my career as a teacher*: 23.6% were strongly agree; 41.8% agree. However, around 36% disagree, this means that this group plans to continue in a call center and not in teaching.



Graphic 8. Students work future decisions for their life in surveys.

Note: The graphic represents the data collected on the surveys based on the research category.

The above responses are consistent with another response included in the survey, *after working in a call center, I no longer want to be a teacher*. 50.9% disagree and 23.6% strongly disagree. However, around 26% the answers were: strongly agree and agree. It can be concluded that there is a group of participants who are considering leaving their teaching careers and working as agents in a call center. It is possible that this decision will change over time, but it provides a pause for reflection for this group who are considering continuing as agents rather than teachers for the time being.



Graphic 9. Students work future decisions for their life in surveys.

Note: The graphic represents the data collected on the surveys based on the research category.

In the interviews, the participants mentioned having this source of employment as an alternative to their teacher training, but it is not a projection they have for the future. To the question: *Do you want to be a teacher in the future, or how long do you plan to work as an agent in a call center, have you thought about your professional future?* responses did not express confidence.

[I feel like an English teacher, I don't know if all my life, but at least part of it, that is, I want to have a career, I just don't know for how long or when it will happen] (Nov 12, 2023).

Another two participants mentioned:

[Yes, I started to value that a lot, and I remember that when I was in the call center I said, I want to be a teacher, I want to, I mean, yes, this is not my thing, like offices, I mean, I don't know], (Nov 12, 2023).

[No, because I see call centers as a separate alternative, it is not something that I want to do all my life or that I plan to advance- And yes, I see myself].

It is important to mention that the work in call centers is demanding due to the work pressure and the working hours set for this job. Romero Gutiérrez (2021) mentions that working at a call center can be a stressful job due to the added pressures and expectations. It requires a high level of alertness and responsiveness. Call centers have high turnover rates, with some sources claiming that as many as 50% of new hires leave. This is due to the high-pressure and thankless nature of the job, Romero Gutiérrez (2021). Although a large number say they do not plan to continue working as agents in a call center, there is a significant group that says they are comfortable with the job and continue in this type of business, some of those interviewed were not very sure of their future decision.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The data collected helped to establish a foundational understanding of the perspectives and experiences of pre-service language teachers in a call center context. These data provided useful insights that would inform the rest of the research process and help to develop a more comprehensive picture of the research topic.

It was found that there are several reasons why students prefer to work in a call center rather than in education. Among these reasons, low salaries in the education sector remain a significant barrier to pursuing a teaching career. In addition, students may perceive better opportunities for growth in the call center industry. It is important to address these factors because government investment in education is critical to the long-term success of society. Educational institutions need to raise wages, create opportunities for career progression and make the sector more attractive overall to compete effectively with other sectors. In doing so, they will attract and retain talented people and create a stronger and more sustainable workforce capable of meeting the needs of future students and communities.

It is well known that salaries in educational institutions are very low considering that teachers do not yet have a professional degree. The salary in job offers are not comparable to those offered in call centers. On the other hand, it is common for schools to ask for professional experience to start a job and sometimes this is a justification for offering low salaries. Call centers do not require any prior experience and entry to these companies is relatively easier, and they offer opportunities for promotion in a shorter period. Most of the participants expressed their intent to leave call center roles and continue their careers as teachers. A significant number (36%) find the job agreeable and opt to stay in this industry. Several of those interviewed were doubtful about their professional future. Here there is a questioning and struggle between salary, profit, and professional vocation.

These findings are consistent with those found in research conducted by Ramírez et al., (2022) in Colombia where it was found that financial remuneration was the most important reason for joining call centers, with respondents stating that what attracted them most to the job was the salary on offer. Ramírez et al., (2022) state that for some young people, money is attractive because they are going through complex situations that required it almost immediately and for others, money was a means to satisfy personal tastes or goals.

On the other hand, participants find it valuable to improve their communicative skills in the target language, as well as the opportunity to interact with native speakers through telephone calls, which exposes them to the language in a more natural way, giving them the chance to improve their fluency, intonation, learning new idioms and vocabulary. They also highlight the opportunity to improve their intercultural skills by interacting with different cultures around the world, understanding their ways of communicating and acting, and developing the ability to solve problems through respectful and assertive communication, eliminating stereotypes or misconceptions about some cultures.

This second part is a reflection on the part of the training programs for graduates in foreign languages. On the one hand, the pre-service teachers are aware of the skills they need to develop as professionals for the 21st century, but if the reason they come to the call center is to strengthen these skills, what does this mean? Surely, they are not satisfied with the training they have received in the graduate programs. This would give the

institutions the opportunity to reflect on strategies to be included in the academic program to meet the expectations of the pre-service teachers.

Another reason given by the participants is the flexibility of time, which allows them to integrate different responsibilities, whether academic, family, or work. Although the working days at call centers are hard, with some working early in the morning or late at night, they feel that they have hours during the day that allow them to continue their academic studies and to take care of other responsibilities.

Despite the above-mentioned advantages of working at the call center, most of them still see themselves as teachers and do not rule out the possibility of continuing as teachers in the future. However, a significant group (36%) seems to be satisfied with their jobs and are not yet convinced that they want to continue working as teachers in schools. Some, according to the interviews, are uncertain about their future choices.

Regarding the teaching profession, it is worth mentioning that their lack of certainty about their future decision may be linked to their vocation for education or may be influenced by the economic income they receive as agents in call centers compared to the income they would receive as teachers in a school or training centers. For this reason, it would be wise to reconsider some of the salaries offered in education, considering the responsibilities assumed in teaching. If this is the reason, the education sector could risk losing great professionals because of the low salaries offered.

The reasons given by the participants and the advantages they mention for working in call centers and not in educational institutions as teachers are not minor and unimportant. They are well-founded reasons that should be considered and should initiate reformulating working conditions in the education sector. In the first place, this research only proposed to find out the reasons why pre-service teachers decide to start their work in a call center and not in the institutions for which they are professionally trained.

This phenomenon also occurs in other countries around the world. The call center industry has experienced extensive growth and is now a major sector in Sweden's labor market as Norman et al., (2004) mention. The purpose of their study was to investigate the working conditions and symptoms among employees at a call center in Sweden. In recent years, call centers have become popular with the younger population in Costa Rica, a generation with a high level of technical and social skills, as well as other characteristics such as the ability to multi-task. Hernández (2024). This suggests that this is a global trend and that vocational training programs could be rethought for the professionals of the future.

As a further investigation, it would be interesting to hear from qualified teachers working in call centers about the reasons why they chose to work there rather than go into teaching. It would also be interesting to know what the administrators of educational institutions think about this reality. It is also important to know what the training colleges think about this situation and how they have been able to help students to keep their vocation and enter teaching as prepared professionals. Many professionals, after some time as agents in Call Centers, may gain some language skills, improve their intercultural skills, and increase their economic stability, but they may lose their teaching skills for which they are being prepared. Cely-Betancourt (2023b) states that the complexity of training future teachers is increasing because they need to be prepared for multilingual contexts, emphasizing linguistic and intercultural skills. Besides these, they must demonstrate pedagogical and research skills that will lead them to better articulate their teaching performance in the best possible way, Cely-Betancourt (2023b). This suggests that pre-service teachers need spaces where they can develop their teaching skills first and foremost.

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