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Elementary Teacher's Conceptions towards the Incorporation of English in Their Teaching Practices

Concepciones de Docentes de Primaria hacia la Incorporación del Inglés en sus Prácticas de Enseñanza

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Abstract

Teacher´s beliefs and conceptions of teaching English are an important area for the professional development path of primary teachers. Giving primary teachers opportunities to grow professionally and support their learning belongs to the wide variety of practices that can be implemented to foster early education today. To do that, the Colombian government has implemented different initiatives; however, through the exploration of literature, primary public-school teachers need more professional development opportunities to fulfill the objectives stated by the Ministry of National Education. This is why, the present study aims to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of elementary rural teachers involved in the incorporation of English in their teaching practices. A total of ten teachers were selected to be involved during a semester that lasts the implementation of the project. Through qualitative

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research under the exploratory paradigm, we identified frustration, motivation, and lack of expertise as the main perceptions that interfere the teaching practices of the selected population. Findings suggest that professional development strategies should be incorporated as an eventual strategy to foster the teaching practices in the classroom.

Keywords: professional development, primary education, public education, teacher perceptions

Resumen

Las creencias y concepciones de los docentes sobre la enseñanza del inglés son un área importante para el camino del desarrollo profesional de los docentes de primaria. Brindar a los maestros de primaria las oportunidades para crecer profesionalmente y apoyar su aprendizaje pertenece a la amplia variedad de prácticas que se pueden implementar para fomentar la educación temprana en la actualidad. Para ello, el gobierno colombiano ha implementado diferentes iniciativas; sin embargo, por medio de la exploración de la literatura, los docentes de escuelas públicas primarias necesitan más oportunidades de desarrollo profesional para cumplir con los objetivos planteados por el Ministerio de Educación Nacional. Por ello, el presente estudio tiene como objetivo investigar las percepciones y actitudes de los maestros rurales de primaria involucrados en la incorporación del inglés en sus prácticas docentes. Un total de diez docentes se seleccionaron para participar en el proyecto. A través de una investigación cualitativa bajo el paradigma exploratorio identificamos la frustración, la motivación y la falta de experticia como las principales percepciones que interfieren en las prácticas docentes de la población seleccionada. Los hallazgos sugieren que las estrategias de desarrollo profesional deben incorporarse como una estrategia eventual para fomentar las prácticas docentes en el aula.

Palabras clave: desarrollo profesional, educación primaria, educación pública, concepciones docentes

Introduction

Public education in Colombia faces a lot of issues such as class size, students' background, socio-economic conditions of schools, and lack of efficient professional development programs directed to primary teachers (Correa & Gonzalez Moncada, 2016; Le Gal, 2019). This situation is clear when primary teachers must teach English without enough preparation. The lack English teachers at the rural elementary level is frustrating because "there is a palpable lack of methodological and pedagogical precision that allows the design and implementation of training experiences not only in the teaching-learning of English as a foreign language but also in the teaching-learning of content through English (Fandiño-Parra, 2014; p. 232). If the Ministry of National Education (MEN as for its acronym in Spanish) expects increasing the English language proficiency level of students to be part of a globalized world, then, the local secretariats and schools need to support elementary teachers not only at fostering the English language skills but also in current didactic and pedagogical strategies to foster English teaching and learning. From that sense, Bermudez Jiménez et al. (2021) argued,

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Teacher training should be committed as early as possible not only to programs oriented towards the successful acquisition of a foreign language and the relevant mastery of its teaching, but above all to the effective knowledge of the construction of educational and linguistic policy agendas. (p. 21)

Consequently, elementary teachers face significant disadvantages in rural settings. First, a few rural elementary teachers must teach English without being trained. Second, the lack of the availability of technological resources; and third, the implementation of the bilingual programs of the MEN which impacts all primary teachers, especially in the department of Boyacá. These disadvantages likely make public schools get low results at *Pruebas Saber*[3] comparing to private schools. According to a report about Saber test from the local Secretariat of Education in Boyacá, the results in 2019 at Firavitoba school showed that the 32 students who took this test were on average 48 %.

In an early interview with the thirteen teachers of this institution, they argued that the government has left teachers alone trying to figure out by themselves how to carry out all the goals and requirements of the MEN; especially for those who are not English language teachers, which is the case of this rural school. Besides, the lack of appropriate materials and resources, and poor socioeconomic conditions of this population make teaching a foreign language a challenging situation. Consequently, hearing the voice of those teachers who face bilingual policies and challenging teaching conditions, affecting not only the teaching context but also students' performance in class, is needed to provide rural students with high quality education and break the gap between private and public schools. Based on that, the idea of bearing in mind elementary teacher's attitudes and perceptions about teaching English was born. Therefore, this study explored the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of a group of 10 primary teachers about the fact that they must teach English without any preparation.

The research questions that guided this study were: How do teachers working in a rural public school perceive teaching the English language? This study springs from its main purpose of knowing elementary teacher's perceptions of teaching English which may affect their performance in class and students' learning process of this language because the elementary teachers who participated in this study are not English language graduated teachers, their major is in elementary education. Despite the enormous efforts of the MEN to implement a variety of bilingualism programs to meet international standards, not all primary teachers have received English training, especially in the department of Boyacá. Gomez Sará (2017) argued "many teachers have pointed out the pitfalls and improvement opportunities of the plans, but their voices have not been heard by the governments'

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[3] *Pruebas saber* is an annual examination conducted by the Instituto Colombiano para la *Evaluación de la Educación* -ICFES which evaluates the performance achieved by students according to the basic competencies defined by the Ministry of National Education.

policymaker. They have imposed their points of view and have focused on political and economic aspects" (p. 151). Based on that, professional development programs are needed to fulfill not only the MEN requirements but also to carry out the goal to give students the best quality of education.

Professional development programs should be a continuous process so teachers can expand their knowledge base and their teaching procedures to have a real impact in the classroom. According to Buendía and Macías (2019) "the design, planning, and implementation of professional development programs should consider aspects such as local contexts, teachers' knowledge, practical personal theories, beliefs, and socio-cultural issues" (p. 105). From that sense, giving importance to what teachers think and perceive about their profession becomes imperative because teachers re-think their professional process and evaluate their real student`s progress in the classroom. Due to the importance of teaching English nowadays, teachers must be updated not only on how language education has changed because of globalization and cultural patterns but also on career advancement. Therefore, to enhance the English language teaching and learning process to primary teachers, it is necessary to have a deep understanding of their attitudes and perceptions to build a continuous professional development program that impacts early English education in the context of this study.

Since early education plays an important role in ELT, teachers should be considered the most important medium to influence positively early education in our country, especially language teaching. We are convinced that the research outcomes will provide valuable information on strengthening language development programs for primary teachers in the department of Boyacá. Furthermore, this study may contribute to continue enhancing the research of foreign language programs not only for primary teachers but also for language educators and policymakers in general.

Literature Review

Bilingualism Programs in Colombia

Like many other Latin American countries, Colombia has done many tries to foster English language learning. Those efforts have been in charge of MEN that has been adapting policies and launching different bilingualism plans to insert Colombia in a more globalized world. However, these plans and efforts have had an impact not only on language teachers but also on the academic community in general. According to Gomez Sará (2017) "Although the objectives have become more realistic with each new plan, the constant changes have affected the continuity, consistency, and articulation of the strategies, resulting in a slow work pace and a feeling of low-achievement and frustration" (p. 148). From that perspective,

bilingual policies in Colombia, implemented since 2004, have shown a gap between what the government plans and the reality Colombian students and teachers face in the classroom. Among the difficulties we can list: "(large classes), the lack of appropriate and available materials, or the lack of proficiency on the part of teachers (classes conducted by other professionals, not by foreign language teachers)" (Sánchez Solarte & Obando Guerrero, 2008, p. 190). Researchers such as González Moncada and Quinchía Ortíz (2003), Cárdenas (2006), de Mejía (2006) and González (2007) have provided a deep analysis of the foreign language teaching policies in Colombia. As a result of their analysis, it seems that bilingualism policies need to be readdressed to achieve better results. We are going to review these policies and provide a little analysis of each.

National Plan of Bilingualism 2004-2019

In 2004, MEN launched the National Plan of Bilingualism (NPB) which aimed at offering Colombian students the possibility to become B1 English language level speakers according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which was adopted in 2005 in the country. Its main aim was:

> To have citizens who are capable of communicating in English, to be able to insert the country within processes of universal communication, within the global economy and cultural openness, through [the adopting of] internationally comparable standards. (MEN 2006b, p. 6)

Based on that objective; MEN adopted the Guide 22: Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages booklet (MEN, 2006) to place the Colombian educational system at an international level. However, these standards have generated a lot of criticisms because Colombian real teaching and learning context in public and rural schools is different from the European. González (2007) questioned the validity of choosing a particular model to teach the foreign language in Colombia because of the diversity of contexts, socioeconomic conditions, teachers' preparation, and students' motivation to accomplish MEN standards. For example, many students have no internet access or a computer. MEN also adopted ICELT (In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching) and the TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test language) as international examinations for teachers to accomplish at B2 or C1 proficiency levels. Unfortunately, many teachers performed unproperly during the massive Quick Placement Test (QPT) by Oxford University Press Testing in 2003 and 2004. From our point of view, the problem was not the English language skills of teachers in Colombia. The main issue in applying this program is justifying the reason MEN chose CEFR and the British Council as its main evaluator framework. As a result, teachers have been exposed to programs they scarcely understand; besides, the Colombian teaching and learning context cannot be compared to the European. To illustrate this, Ayala Zárate and Álvarez (2005) stated:

Imported standards not only deal with language policies of foreign countries but also with foreign curricula, syllabi, teaching-learning methodologies, testing, assessment, evaluation, and instructional materials. They usually come from educational systems belonging to North America or Europe. Sometimes these standards are adapted or adopted because of their popularity or achievements in another context. (p. 12)

The Colombian educational system has adopted a European framework, which is distant from our context. Standardizing language teaching based on international standards represents a challenge considering the geographical, socioeconomic, and cultural conditions in Colombia. Cárdenas (2006, p. 3) postulates that,

The reality established in the CEF would have to be contrasted with the conditions of Colombian educational institutions, namely infrastructure, curriculum organization, use of foreign languages in the academic and cultural domains of the country, working hours and competencies of language teachers.

For the most part, Fandiño-Parra et al. (2012), Mejia (2011), Guerrero (2008), among other academics, have criticized the bilingual program with respect to the lack of readiness to achieve the bilingual goals based on real students and teachers' needs, the use of massive proficiency international tests, and lack of consideration of the socioeconomic conditions among regions. However, MEN has established other alternatives to fulfill its objective as the inclusion of English language native speakers in public schools, immersion programs for English language teachers, the insertion of minimum three hours of English instruction, among others. These strategies highlight a big opportunity to provide Colombian students with a door to the bilingual and globalized world that they deserved.

Program for Strengthening the Development of Competencies in Foreign Languages 2010-2014

In 2010, the government announced to continue the National Bilingual Program. However, MEN endowed other powerful objectives such as:

- A 100% of English teachers in service reach level B2.
- A 40% of 11th-grade students reach level B1.
- An 80% of English Bachelor students reach the level B2.
- And that a 20% of the students from other careers other than the Bachelor's degrees in languages reach level B2.

At this point, we wanted to highlight that ICFES (the organism in charge of evaluating Colombian students to have access to higher education) has designed an English language test that does not include listening and writing skills in English. This program also set up lines to reach the objectives mentioned before. (1) Training and enhancement to teachers;

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(2) Pedagogical aspects; (3) Evaluation and follow-up; and (4) Management for institutional strengthening. Regarding pedagogical aspects, the program designed "*Aprendamos Inglés con las aventuras de Bunny Bonita", Estrategia "My ABC English Kit", "English, please" 1, 2, 3, 9°, 10°, 11°*" MEN (2014a). Concerning teachers' training, local secretariats of education should have striven for opportunities to re-train language teachers. Regarding follow-up and evaluation, MEN adopted *Teach Challenge* which consisted of a study to characterize the population of Colombian English teachers from public schools.

Despite the multiples alternates that MEN provided to help Colombian citizens to develop communicative competencies in foreign languages; results showed a different situation:

> Only 17% of their 11th graders obtained a B1 level in the non-bilingual schools, which account for 24% of the total of 11th graders. In the bilingual institutions 80% of their 11th graders achieved a B1 level or superior, but they represent 1% of the total population of 11th graders in the country. The follow-up evidenced that, in 2013, there was a reduction of 3% in the students who obtained an –A level. (Gómez Sará, 2017, p. 145)

Consequently, factors such as school's infrastructure, student's motivation, class size, hours of exposure to the language, lack of consistency of the policies, omission of teachers' perspectives, teachers training, among others, interfere in the low English language proficiency level of students. In contrast, a positive point of the government implementation to this extent is the fact that many English teachers received extra English training through immersion programs, online courses, workshops, etc. According to the MEN (2014), in a socialization document of *Colombia Very Well*, the government "trained more than 9,500 teachers, held workshops in the 94 education secretariats, accompanied the consolidation of 45 regional projects". Some of the initiatives held by MEN were:

- 'Let's Learn English with the Adventures of Bunny Bonita',
- English for Colombia-ECO,
- My ABC English Kit: Supplementary Materials for English Learning and Teaching in Primary Schools in Colombia,
- 'English, please!' (MEN, 2014a, 2014b),
- Teach Challenge
- Pedagogical principles and guidelines: Suggested English curriculum 6th to 11th grades (MEN, 2016b) and
- Basic learning rights: English 6th to 11th grades (MEN, 2016a).

However, there is no evidence along with the MEN information and in the literature exploration that elementary teachers in rural areas (who teach all subjects including English) are included in those pedagogical interventions established by MEN.

Bilingual Colombia 2014-2018

Right after the implementation of National Bilingual Program, the government re-structured it by reinforcing the concept of bilingualism. Bilingual Colombia was guided by three components: English teachers continued to be diagnosed, expecting to hire only B2 language teachers to the public sector. Native trainers were selected only to work in 9th, 10th, and 11th grades. For the first time, higher education was included; all undergraduate programs must adopt the necessary strategies to guarantee that students graduate with B2 English language proficiency level. For the pedagogical component, MEN constructed a curriculum following the communicative approach Pedagogical principles and guidelines: Suggested English curriculum, 6th to 11th grades (MEN, 2016b) and Basic learning rights: English 6th to 11th grades (MEN, 2016a).

Law of Bilingualism (Law 1651 of July 12th, 2013)

In 2013, Juan Manuel Santos, President of Colombia, and the Colombian Congress launched the Bilingualism Law to modify the articles 13, 20, 21, 22, 30, and 38 of the General Education Law 115 of 1994 prioritizing the use of English in public institutions including higher education. The purpose of the Law 1651 of 2013 was "developing communicative skills to read, understand, write, listen, speak, and express correctly in a foreign language" (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 2013, p. 1). Besides, Colombian congress added "developing skills to converse, read and write in at least one foreign language" (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 2013, p. 1). The relevance of this modification was the fact that the government prioritized teaching English in public institutions leaving behind indigenous languages that also played a second language role in Colombia.

National Plan of English: Colombia Very Well! 2015-2025

After the presentation of the bilingualism law, the administration of Juan Manuel Santos, re-oriented the bilingualism policies making emphasis on three important areas: teacher education, use of materials, and pedagogical design. A controversial issue presented at that time was the incorporation of more than 300 English language foreign speakers. English speakers named "foreign native trainers" who had the objective to promote authentic speaking opportunities for students and teachers. This initiative was not accepted as MEN expected; many teachers showed their discomfort because of the lack of didactic of the native trainers. Colombian teachers kept the feeling of imposing policies without considering the real context, class size, and student's background in public schools (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016; Correa & Usma Wilches, 2013).

These programs show the commitment of MEN to foster learning English in Colombia. Nevertheless, many researchers have pointed the multiple weaknesses of these programs and the lack of professional development possibilities, especially for primary teachers. According to Correa y Usma Wilches (2013):

> Making changes on the solutions requires going beyond the offering of a series of isolated and unarticulated professional development courses, which try to raise the level of English and pedagogical knowledge of teachers. These changes require for policymakers to begin taking actions that respond not to the often-uninformed views of their international service providers about what could work in our context but to the local needs of each region and community. (p. 234)

From that point of view, to offer language and primary teachers with real possibilities to grow professionally, consideration should be given to teachers' interest and voice, a real contextualization of the public schools in rural and urban settings, real guarantees of materials, equipment and living conditions of teachers, incentives, and motivation.

English Language Education at Primary Level

MEN has launched a variety of strategies among official schools to foster the use of the English language. Basic Standards for Foreign Languages: English (MEN, 2006) and the Ley de Bilingüismo or Bilingualism Act (Congreso de la Republica, 2013), first to fifth grades (MEN, 2006) policies have influenced the secondary school level to higher education. However, the primary level (especially rural schools) has not had the expected significance. Rural schools' conditions are not the same as in a big city. Miranda (2016) established that "throughout the first years of the BCP implementation, it was proven that the country did not have the necessary conditions to provide primary students the solid bases that they needed to reach the target competence levels" (p. 26). The number of graduated English language teachers hired in rural areas is very low. A low number of hours of English, lack of motivation, lack of didactic, physical, and technological resources makes learning English a difficult process. Cardenas and Miranda (2014) also argued that "Those who are teaching English in primary education do not have university training in language programs, which is especially notorious in the public sector" (p. 58).

Official Colombian teachers have accepted the MEN challenge; those who have had the opportunity to participate in workshops, immersion of just English courses have improved by their English language proficiency level. Nevertheless, students' communication in English is very poor. Múnera et al. (2004) found in a research study that "English that is being taught to children in public elementary school is rather limited, or is composed of basic vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation" (p. 45). This means, despite the multiples strategies to increase the English language proficiency level; the acquisition of the language in rural areas is not

seen. Thus, language policies should consider real teaching context in rural areas, student's real interests, and teacher's perceptions.

Because of this, an analysis of the main elements in rural primary education that put learning English off is imperative. For this analysis, there is a necessity to understand what rural primary teachers face in the classroom, what resources they need to work with, and what professional development paths are the most appropriate to them. Additionally, Correa and Gonzalez Moncada (2016) suggested several actions to support the primary level:

These actions could have included the building of more schools that could host the students who were left out in the switch from two to only one schedule, and the hiring of permanent English primary school teachers who could offer the two additional hours of English a week. They could have also incorporated the splitting of English classes into smaller groups so that students could have real interactions with their teachers and peers, or the improvement of the poor socioeconomic conditions affecting the lives of most students and preventing them from focusing on their education. (p. 10).

From that sense, rural elementary education must be enhanced by all the agents involved including teachers, parents, administrative staff, local secretariats, MEN, and academics from higher education institutions.

Professional Development

According to the MEN's objective, becoming bilingual is to have citizens capable of communicating in English, with internationally comparable standards that insert the country in the processes of universal communication, the global economy, and cultural openness. It has been the MEN's purpose for the last 10 years and one of the key elements of the Colombian educative system in the professional development of teachers. Villegas-Reimers (2003) notes "the professional development of teachers is considered a long-term process that includes regular opportunities and experiences planned systematically to promote growth and development in the profession" (p.11). The main point here is the fact that very few rural primary teachers have not been involved in the professional development strategies launched by MEN because these programs have been focused specifically on English language teachers. Studies conducted by Cárdenas and Chaves (2013), Cadavid et al. (2004), and González and Montoya (2010) demonstrated that the most part of primary teachers could not have access to MEN's initiatives because they do not have English language teaching degrees. However, rural schools have a huge potential and opportunities to foster not only the English language but also other skills such as language development, learning and teaching, evaluation procedures, research and technology incorporation, leadership, and problem solving. A primary teacher requires a special professional development program because of the multiple challenges that a classroom full of children faces. There are innumerable challenges in a classroom, class

size, students' background, the poor living situation of students, bad physical conditions of schools, reduction in the number of didactic materials, etc. Moreover, Bonilla Medina and Cruz Arcila (2014) showed that:

> The cultural reality lived by students in rural areas differs from the teachers' view and does not show them a possible goal that includes the use of a foreign language. Within the classroom interactions, a struggle for the importance of the language comes into play. On the one hand, teachers adopt a defensive view of the language as a life goal. On the other hand, rural students mainly have an ate ambition of fulfilling a personal goal—finishing their secondary studies—and not a professional one. (p. 123)

From that perspective, primary teachers need to understand students' needs, interests, and skills to optimize learning styles under those conditions. There is a widespread agreement of the multiple's advantages of the incorporation of professional development for teachers. Indeed, policy makers are forced to reinforce teacher`s professional competencies to provide quality education for students to reach academic success. Providing primary teachers with opportunities to expand their knowledge in pedagogy, content areas, and in this case, English is essential to improve teacher's motivations, commitment, and student's performance in class.

Another important insight to have in mind is the process of reflection that teachers should do in trying to improve their professional practices due to the multiple benefits that being critical of oneself has. Teachers need an ongoing set of activities to reflect upon their teaching practices to assure an effective teaching instruction. According to Olaya Mesa (2018), "In this process of reflection teachers may start creating their teaching materials and transforming their classroom into possible research projects" (p. 157). It means primary teachers can take advantage of the findings they encounter during their classes to make projects that foster the language process acquisition of the learners.

Teacher's Perceptions and Attitudes

Many types of research support the importance of analyzing teacher's attitudes and perceptions because they are connected to student's performance and motivation to learn a language, and it would become an essential part of designing a professional development program for primary teachers. Pickens (2005) mentioned, "Attitudes are a complex combination of things we tend to call personality, beliefs, values, behaviors, and motivations" (p. 44). Attitudes help us see how teachers act towards certain events or phenomena. When researchers talk about teacher's attitudes it refers to their behaviors in a classroom not only towards teaching but also towards students and colleagues.

Ahen (2009) stated that "Perception involved more process of thinking as a result of the information received from the sensory systems regards certain thing or events. It is the output

process where the judgments or beliefs were produced by an individual and it influenced the way they think and feel" (p. 11). At this point, prior knowledge and experiences construct meaningful information that plays an important role in the perception process. However, people`s perceptions are sometimes far from reality.

Through research exploration on professional development programs for teachers and their attitudes and perceptions on language education, the characteristics of what an effective teacher should have appeared as an important component of their perceptions of education to improve the quality of their teaching. According to Mullock (2003) "having positive relationships with students, and the majority of comments revolved around the teacher taking a personal interest in each student, knowing their strengths and weaknesses, interests, needs and expectations, and being empathetic towards them" (p. 14). It can be inferred that the perceptions of teachers towards students are a vital element of the way teacher's performance and motivation in class.

In the success of any professional development activity, having a deep understanding of where teacher's attitudes, perceptions, and experiences come from is essential. Several factors influence teacher`s actions in a classroom: class size, physical, and technological resources, student's background, teacher's motivations, relationships with parents and administrators, etc. Those factors are crucial to be reflected in bilingual policies directed to primary teachers because the teaching conditions are quite different from secondary or higher education.

Múnera et al. (2004) developed research called "Elementary English Language Instruction: Colombian Teachers' Classroom Practices". This study focused that "Public school teachers consider themselves lacking an adequate level of proficiency in English, background knowledge of the subject matter and previous training" (p. 38). This study shows the reality that rural primary teachers feel about themselves and the fact that movement policies must be made through a reflective perspective allowing the participation of the teachers. They also suggested that "In Colombia, it is important for elementary school English teachers and policymakers to gain an understanding of our reality if we are to attend our real needs and the specific challenges of teaching English as a foreign language in elementary public schools"(p. 45).

Correa and González Moncada (2016), Colombian researchers, provide a critical overview of the bilingualism programs that the Colombian government has launched since 2004. They presented a series of conclusions and recommendations for language policy design and implementation in Colombia such as "to hire English licensed teachers for primary schools and pay them fair wages to incentivize them to stay; to design PD programs that have coverage, articulation, continuity, and appropriate contents; to provide teachers with sufficient physical and technological resources, smaller classes, and more time of instruction" (p. 18). This study focused on the challenges primary teachers have faced along

with the implementation of bilingual policies. Among the challenges they mentioned: lack of enough teachers prepared to teach English in primary schools, poor design of PD programs, lack of opportunities for primary school teachers to attend the PD courses, disarticulation, and discontinuity, inappropriate content, scarce physical and technological resources, large classes, insufficient time of instruction per week, students' lack of motivation to learn English. This study revealed the need to provide primary teachers with real opportunities to learn the language and also learn how to teach it. Correa and González Moncada (2016) concluded: "to design its policies based on local needs, taking into account contextual and historical factors, with the agreement of all stakeholders, using local knowledge and expertise, using responsive materials, and employing accountability measures that go beyond standardizing tests" (p. 18). Thus, the real conditions of rural students and the impact that learning a language would bring to their lives are aspects to consider.

Mora et al. (2019) critically analyzed bilingualism policies in Colombia highlighting that there is a lack of knowledge and reorganization of curricula. They proposed the inclusion of cultural competences in the language learning process to make meaningful contributions to the Colombian cultural diversity. Further, Morales-Llano (2022) conducted a literature review on the bilingualism policies in Colombia. This research depicted three main perspectives: First, the structural in which a textual analysis of the regulations the government has launched and executed in terms of learning English. Second, Colombian academics have focused their critical discourse analysis of the bilingualism policies on "the social inequalities, in addition to endangering the use of minority languages" (p. 214). Third, the theoretical analysis based on the sociocultural perspectives of those who implement and interpret directly the MEN policies which are not aligned to the real needs of the communities.

Regarding the above, the teaching profession has a social and moral responsibility with rural young students. Primary teacher's perceptions and attitudes influence student's performance in the classroom, attitudes, and motivation to learn. Furthermore, professional development programs should be directed to this population with a focus on different methodologies, methods, didactic, reflection, and support of administrators including local secretaries. Teachers have a significant role in developing and enhancing learning a language more actively and dynamically.

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Method

Participants

At the beginning of the project the target population of this study intended to include all classroom teachers serving at 1-5 grade levels in rural schools. However, a participatory survey was implemented at the end of the year 2019 in five rural schools near Sogamoso.

Results showed that for accessibility and disposition to participate in a project of this nature, only ten primary teachers from a rural school in Firavitoba town accepted to get in. There are eight females and two males. Six of them are around 40-60 years old. Two of them are already retired and the other Two are around 30-40 years old. None of these teachers have English language preparation, which means, their majors are in social sciences, Spanish, biology, math, physical education, and the rest of them were primary education graduated teachers. Each of them is a headteacher of a level, and they oversee teaching English at that level too. They have never been trained in teaching English, didactics, pedagogy, and assessment. They have never participated in any of the MEN bilingual programs. However, they are willing to improve not only their English language proficiency level but also their knowledge in pedagogy through the future professional development program implementation.

Context

The implementation of this project took place in a rural public school in Firavitoba town. It is a small school five kilometers away from the town. This school trains students in the morning. In the afternoon, most of the students dedicate their free time to activities related to farming, milking cows, livestock, onion, and potato crops. The conditions of the school are very low; the infrastructure is old and humid. This school is only equipped with classrooms, chairs, and boards. The parents are primarily peasants and belong to a lower socioeconomic status.

Type of Research

This qualitative research is based on the exploratory paradigm. Burns and Groove (2001) defined exploratory research "as research conducted to gain new insights, discover new ideas, and for increasing knowledge of the phenomenon" (p. 374). In addition to describing teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards the incorporation of English into their teaching practices, the purpose of this study is to have a better understanding of this issue to design a professional development program that suits the real needs and interests not only of primary teachers but also to enhance English language learning of the students.

Data Analysis Procedure

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All the data gathered from interviews were transcribed. Data analysis started by reading the information collected through the three instruments. We started the analysis by coloring key ideas, then we grouped and contrasted common ideas into subcategories that were named. Finally, data were reduced into broader topics and categories emerged. The information collected was analyzed using triangulation which is widely used in qualitative studies. According to Carter et al. (2014) "Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative

research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources" (p. 545). For the application of this technique; clearly, more attention should be paid recording what happens in each classroom when primary teachers had to teach the English language.

After that triangulation, an open content analysis was implemented to classify the data that were summarized into core categories (see results section). These core categories were supported by previous research studies. Forman and Damschroder (2007) established:

> It is a generic form of data analysis in that it is comprised of a theoretical set of techniques which can be used in any qualitative inquiry in which the informational content of the data is relevant. Qualitative content analysis stands in contrast to methods that, rather than focusing on the informational content of the data, bring to bear theoretical perspectives. (p. 40)

These categories appeared as the most important factors that should be considered to design the professional development program for the population selected. The first step was the identification of the teacher's needs. Second, establishing the foundations of the program. Third, structuring the program by setting realistic goals and objectives. Fourth, building a teacher community to receive help from other teachers and share experiences to enrich the professional practices in the classroom. Finally, implementing ad evaluating the program (This professional development program will be implemented the next year for further research).

Data Collection Instruments

Data were gathered through surveys, interviews, and classroom observation.

Surveys: Ponto (2015) stated that "Survey research can use quantitative research strategies (e.g., Using questionnaires with numerically rated items), qualitative research strategies (e.g., using open-ended questions), or both strategies (i.e., mixed methods)" (p. 168). For this study, surveys were used to explore teacher's attitudes and perceptions towards the incorporation of English into their teaching procedures.

Interviews: Fox (2009) mentioned that "The interview is an important data gathering technique involving verbal communication between the researcher and the subject. Interviews are commonly used in survey designs and exploratory and descriptive studies" (p. 5). This study used semi-structured and structured interviews to understand in what aspects teacher perceptions do and attitudes vary.

Classroom observation: Vidhiasi (2018) stated that "Classroom observation and research also have some methods; those are the formal experiment, stimulated recall, observation schemes, and interaction analysis. Those methods are the most common methods used by researchers who are interested in teaching and learning development" (p.

7). The method selected to use classroom observation as an instrument to collect data is stimulated recall. This method is based on what happens during a lesson. The researchers used transcripts of the class, and the teachers explain them. This type of observation was vital for this study because student's comments were allowed too.

Findings

The coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) resulted in the development of preliminary categories, from which emerged subsequent categories that produced the core categories. Data analysis as shown in Table 1 revealed the substantial need to understand what primary teachers in Firavitoba face day to day during the English classes and how they perceive their teaching practices as is explained in the first core category "Teacher`s perceptions and challenges on teaching English" and the factual need to improve not only their English language skills but also their didactic and methodological procedures to teach the language as it is developed in the second core category " expanding training opportunities".

Table 1. Establishment of core categories

Preliminary Categories	Categories	Core Categories
Classroom size	Training in language and teaching	Teacher`s perceptions and challenges on teaching English
Insufficient preparation to teach another language	Challenges towards teaching English	Expanding training opportunities
Ineffective ways of teaching	Perceptions on students' performance	
Current policies are not helpful	Perceptions on teacher`s needs	
Inadequate English level		
Lack of confidence and motivation		
Poor possibilities to improve teaching English		
Training in language teaching methods /techniques		

Preliminary Categories	Categories	Core Categories
Real challenges primary teachers face daily		
Little support by parents		
Students' performance Lack of resources		

Source: Own

Teacher`s Perceptions and Challenges on Teaching English

The findings presented here report on the ways primary teachers perceive the incorporation of English in their teaching practices. The first finding of the study revealed that primary teachers are worried about the number of students in English classes. Those descriptions offered by the teachers suggested that there are conditions inside classrooms that must be implemented for a better learning atmosphere. All participants agreed that large classes with 45 and 50 students and the lack of more hours of instruction is challenging. These aforementioned factors are the most highlighted difficulties they face to teach effectively not only the English class but also the others. Khan and Iqbal (2012) claimed: "that effective teaching was not possible in overcrowded classes and most of the teachers were facing instructional, discipline, physical and evaluation problems; this problem is magnified when dealing with language education, where acquisition of a foreign language is the expected outcome" (p. 162). From that perspective, it can be stated that to achieve positive learning results teachers should deal with and manage lessons using different strategies which are not familiar to them. For example, the population of this study did not know anything about language acquisition, formative assessment, task, and project-based learning, CLIL, among other strategies to include in the daily teaching practice. They focused only on grammar and vocabulary translation because they see language as a subject but not as a socio-linguistic practice for communication. From the following excerpt, the reader can appreciate a perception during the intervention.

> *I have a degree in social and teaching management in the area. However, I know that there are different methodologies used in each approach. In the case of English, I don't know much about the subject, and the large number of students in the classroom makes the process difficult. (S, T5)*[4]

The second finding showed that current programs and standards by MEN are not helpful; this group of primary teachers has not received any training from MEN or the local secretariat of education. González Moncada and Quinchía Ortiz (2003) points out that

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[4]   Author`s translation. Participant's interviews and surveys were conducted in Spanish.

teachers also face challenges such as "improving their language proficiency, being prepared to teach in diverse contexts, teaching with and without resources, implementing classroom-based research, having access to professional development, networking, and educating teacher educators" (p. 88). To elaborate on this point, it can be said that there is a need to re-structure bilingualism reforms and curricula as well as give elementary teachers more space to train not only in English but also in pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment. It means, policy makers should understand the difference in terms of socioeconomic conditions between the rural and urban areas, the ideology of rural students and their specific learning needs. Many rural parents do not even know how to read which make schooling harder for them. Bonilla Medina and Cruz-Arcilla (2014) established "Due to the fact that rural language contexts do not offer ideal conditions to learning a second language, teachers highlight the fact that very little is known about the national policies in their context and consequently progress goes more slowly than expected" (p. 128).

Another key point found during data analysis is the use of the mother tongue when teaching considering it as the only resource they have (teachers just translated the vocabulary to be learnt during the lesson; explanations, feedback, and classroom management was conducted in Spanish). Besides, the poor use of didactic strategies (teachers just used activities focused on vocabulary from websites) to foster oral and speaking production, and the lack of extra training to foster their pedagogical practices in the classroom. In this regard, the following quotes pinpointed:

I have found a lot of material on the internet on topics in English. The problem is that I don't know how to apply it or use it in class. (S-T1)

I try not to focus too much on grammatical issues, because I don't know much about the subject and it's not my background. Instead, I translate the vocabulary that I am going to teach them about the topic that we are going to work on. (I, T4)

The teacher focuses on teaching vocabulary. It seems there is a lack of information about how to pronounce certain words. Likewise, there are some words with spelling mistakes. (CO)

With Beautiful Teacher

The quotations above show how teachers combined vocabulary (translation) and Spanish explanations and directions as the only strategy they know to teach a subject they were not prepared for. Basically, it indicates the need for training on methods and methodologies to teach the English language.

The third finding showed little support from school's administrative staff. The ten teachers indicated insufficient equipment and facilities to support the teaching practice. There are not computers for students or teachers, there are not TV sets or video beams, there is not a place to make copies, there is no Wi-Fi, and the library is too small with no updated

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books. The participants also emphasized that funding is needed to obtain updated teaching books and didactic and digital material. Braslavsky (2018) affirmed, "There is no educational quality without an environment rich in materials that can be used as learning materials" (p. 95). Besides lacking material, inevitably and unfortunately, teachers felt guilty for student's performance making feel more frustration as educators. A teacher said during the interview:

> The problem is that the government does not hire English teachers because we don't have the resources, the material, or the training to give good English classes. I studied to be a social teacher not to teach English, that is why students do not have a good level and their results are bad. I felt anxious, it is not motivating to teach something you don't know. (I, T4).

Lastly but no less, confidence and motivation appeared as the most significant perception; teachers know they have insufficient training to teach English so their attitude and frustration to teach without enough knowledge affects students` development too.

> I felt terrible when I must teach the class. I felt boring, frustrated because I am not an English teacher. Sometimes I just gave them an image to color because I don't know what else to do. (I, T7)

Additionally, work satisfaction highly influences teaching performance inside the classroom. According to Erkaya (2013):

> What would increase the teachers' motivation the most would be their colleagues; that is to say, what they needed was supportive colleagues, colleagues that would be there for them when they needed them, that would guide them if they needed guidance that would work with them when and if necessary. Moving to the main campus (working conditions) would also boost their motivation. (p. 59)

Considering this, it can be stated that the feeling of support by colleagues, parents, and administrators, the feeling of playing an important role among the academic community, and taking responsibilities become a vital factor to enhance teacher's development and motivation in their daily teaching practice.

Expanding Training Opportunities

Surveys, interviews, and observations aided the identification of primary teacher's needs. Data revealed a high interest in further qualification in English language didactics as well as English language training. Linked to the previous core category the possibilities to teach English and improvement of techniques or methods to facilitate and enhance the teaching procedures in rural contexts is highly needed. Class observations and interviews indicated the lack of confidence to teach English. However, the participants are aware of their interests, needs, and weaknesses when trying to teach the language. They are interested in learning English and taking some certifications to start communicating in English during their classes. They claim the local government to equip the institution with WiFi and computers

so their students can also foster the ICT skills. They also accept that sometimes they become conformist because they understand the difficult conditions of their students. For instance, in an interview a teacher said:

I would like there to be training not only for the fact of orienting the language well, but also for complementing it with my area of knowledge, and thus being able to promote interdisciplinarity (I, T2)

Furthermore, teachers also explained the poor support given by the local secretary to overcome the low English level in the department, especially in this rural context. In most cases, primary teachers do not have resources that could contribute to a significant improvement in the classroom.

The presence and support of secretaries or the MEN itself with bilingualism projects or immersions that facilitate the process would be important. Unfortunately, the bilingualism programs that have been created have been focused on secondary education and primary education has been left aside, even more so in the rural sector. (S, T3)

It is paramount to have enough sources (material, books, audios) and even the presence of English teachers to improve speaking and listening skills (CO)

At this point, rural education needs support in the Colombian education system and the participants affirmed that an urgent pedagogical implementation is needed not only for English purposes but also to promote a meaningful and contextualized advancement of educational goals. Besides that, "the complex economic situation experienced by some families in Colombia requires that minors also participate in the production chain in many cases" (Soler et al. 2019; p. 68). It means a way of making some money to survive. In addition, violence, lack of job opportunities, and inadequate infrastructure of schools make rural areas a difficult setting to work on. Basically, those areas need improvement and support not only by MEN but also by academics, politicians, and the community in general.

During class observations, technology also appeared as a significant opportunity to expand. Throughout online sessions, teachers showed enthusiasm to teach. However, it was evident the lack of expertise in using online tools as a complementary teaching strategy. 50% of the teachers did not know how to share a video, download worksheets, or edit a Microsoft Word and Adobe PDF document. Although technology is widely used for teaching purposes, it needs training to select appropriate material and resources to implement with learners. This can be evident in the following extract where a teacher affirmed:

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I believe that the use of technologies with software specialized in language learning would help us to learn ourselves and thus be able to better guide the area and would even help us create evaluation strategies. (S, T7).

In sum, participants agreed that the lack of a pedagogical intervention based on what they need and their context of teaching is affecting not only their motivation to work and the students' performance in class but also the evaluation process of their school.

Marian Lissett Olaya-Mesa,
Willian Alexander Mora

Conclusions

The present study attempted to find primary teachers' perceptions and attitudes of primary teachers towards the fact that they must teach English without having enough preparation. Teachers' perceptions and attitudes profoundly influence their teaching practices. For instance, Coloring activities were done when teachers felt frustrated. In contrast when they feel confident and motivated in a topic, optimal classes were addressed. The study discovered that most primary teachers face frustration because of the lack of resources, class size, and lack of parents' support, English teaching training and inadequate curriculum. Consequently, low students' performance in class. Besides, the sense of inequality to bridge the gap between the private and public sector is notorious. Rural teachers should be engaged to construct local policies based on the rural scenario.

The participants understand that the implementation of bilingual policies in rural context go slow because of the socioeconomic and geographic conditions, cultural believes among others. As it was found in this study, teaching in rural areas must be re-considered and re oriented understanding each context needs. Teachers in rural areas do not have access to audio materials and those teachers do not often use English in class, both of which result in a lack of development of students' listening and speaking skills. Self-esteem and self-realization and motivation appeared as a paramount factor that affects teacher`s performance which in turn is related to student`s motivation and achievement in the English language. A constant dialogue among the local government plays a key role in achieving MEN's expectations.

MEN, local secretariats, and higher education institutions must provide teachers with opportunities to participate in professional development projects to foster not only language but also language teaching didactics, the incorporation of ICT skills, assessment, the inclusion of critical pedagogy, classroom research and collaborative support related to teaching the language in rural areas. If teacher learning and professional development are to be supported in rural schools, particularly in Boyacá, then in-school support should be built into structures that continuously and purposefully bring teachers together to enhance their professional development. To this regard, the secretariats of education supported by MEN should invest in rural public schools, train teachers regularly, provide rural families and students with academic and emotional support, and design improvement plans annually to reach the academic standards established by MEN.

The limitations of this study relate to the nature that observations, interviews, and surveys were applied online because of COVID 19 pandemic. On the other hand, although teachers were committed to participating, they always dealt with time, connection, and motivation issues. However, this study hopes to inform participants on a future suitable professional development program that will be implemented with them.

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