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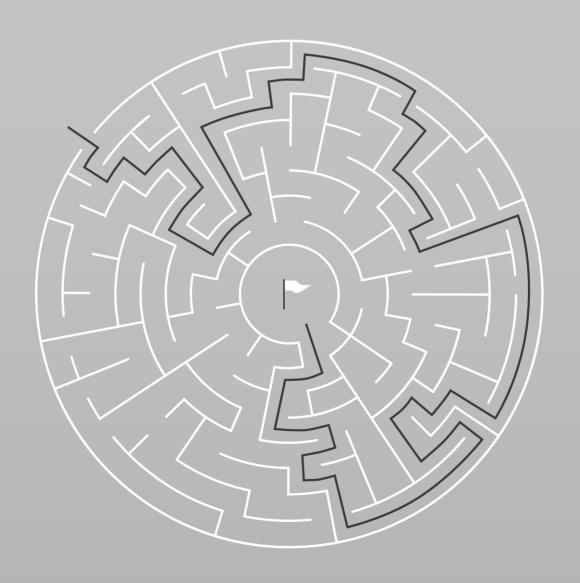
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General Structure

FOREWORD

Research in the English Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó: Retracing Past Trajectories, Projecting New Directions

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FOREWORD

Research in the English Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó: Retracing Past Trajectories, Projecting New Directions

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In 2010, teachers at the Bachelors' Degree in English Teaching at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó [Luis Amigó hereafter] formed CILEX[1] research group; since then, CILEX has been intricately tied to the development of research within the program. In 2013, due to administrative decisions, CILEX became part of EILEX[2], a nascent group attached to the School of Education and Humanities. Between 2013 and 2015, the work of the researchers who belonged to CILEX focused primarily on formative research through the creation of the first research incubators in the areas of language acquisition, language assessment, and technology integration into the language classroom. These areas also reflect the research agenda we then followed.

Research and teaching in the program have evolved hand in hand since the onset of CILEX. As of 2015, given the increasing number of teachers and students interested in doing research, and in response to the recommendations given by external evaluators so as to attain the *High-Quality Accreditation*[3], the number of research incubators in the program increased and the range of research interests diversified thereby. The program conceived an additional research incubator in cultural studies in 2015, and those in linguistic policies and language teacher education in 2016. In 2017, two new incubators in literacy processes and in teaching and learning of foreign languages in childhood came forth.

Formative and scientific research (Restrepo Gómez, 2007) within the program have grown in a synergistic manner. The creation of research incubators prefigured the development of research within the program; their development reflects the formative vocation of the program's researchers and condenses a great deal of the research we have done. Teacher researchers started these research incubators to communicate to student teachers the love for their respective fields of interest; nevertheless, it is clear that these groups also constitute a key strategy to promote the generational replacement required to ensure the continuity of research within the areas of knowledge we have favored thus far.

Today, CILEX is made up of a group of teacher researchers who, in conformity with the institutional mission, carry out scientific and formative research aimed at "generating, preserving, and disseminating scientific, technological, and cultural knowledge" (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2018) in the area of foreign languages with a primary focus on English teaching and learning. With their work, CILEX researchers seek to contribute to the positive transformation of society through the reflective investigation of and intervention in specific educational realities, subjects, and communities; and to the integral education of language teachers enrolled in the programs offered by the School of Education and Humanities at Luis Amigó.

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[1] CILEX stands for *Construcciones Investigativas en Lenguas Extranjeras* (Investigative Constructions in Foreign Languages)

[2] EILEX stands for *Educación, Infancia y Lenguas Extranjeras* (Education, Childhood, and Foreign Languages)

[3] The English Teaching program received the High-Quality Accreditation from the Ministry of National Education in 2016.

CILEX subscribes to qualitative research methods, but it remains open to other approaches, provided they meet the thematic interests, strategic objectives, and ethical principles held not only by the line but also by the English teaching program and the university, as declared in *Proyecto Educativo Institucional*[4] ([PEI], Luis Amigó, 2019) and *Estrategia de Investigación 2022*[5] (Luis Amigó, 2012). The group of researchers that make up the line favor collaborative work, academic rigor, and respect for intellectual production as a way to build knowledge; the recognition of multiple social realities and diverse academic perspectives towards the understanding and transformation of educational phenomena; and the strengthening of the teaching-research link for the promotion of language teachers' personal and professional development.

Rationale for the Book

In 2018, in order to contribute to the re-accreditation of the bachelor's degree and the creation of both a master's degree in foreign languages teaching and a research line for the PhD in Education, which was then in its preparatory stages, the members of CILEX decided to rearrange the research work we had done so far. With this purpose in mind, and as the leader of CILEX at the time, I prepared a manual that outlined the epistemological, axiological, and methodological bases for the research line and proposed a nodal structure to collect, organize, and guide its research production.

In 2019, responding to my call, a group of researchers from CILEX decided to compile the research most recently conducted on each of the nodes we had identified. This book is the product of that effort. Although in no way comprehensive of the research work done for nearly 10 years, it attests to our trajectory in scientific and formative research. It also condenses our latest research work and projects the direction in which we want to move forward.

In the following sections of this introduction, I lay out the epistemological foundations that support research in CILEX and in the English teaching program; explain the nodal system intended to organize our research activity and production; and sketch the structure of the book, whose chapters conform to the proposed nodes and gather the latest work done in each of them.

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[4] Institutional Educational Project

[5] Research Strategy 2022, an official document that sets the research agenda for the university.

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Epistemological Foundations

The organization of research activity in CILEX requires its epistemological base to be broad enough to allow for the emergence of future thematic nodes, yet defined enough to guide the work of researchers over time. As stated in its mission, CILEX focuses on language teaching and learning, specifically as concerns language teacher training. Hence, it aligns with the national guidelines that regulate teacher education, particularly as stated in the General Education Law[6] (MEN, 1994) and in recent reforms to undergraduate teaching programs.[7] In this sense, the line recognizes the need to strengthen teacher education within the framework of the specific curriculum components inventoried by the reform (Resolution 18583 of 2017), namely: (a) general knowledge; (b) specific content knowledge of the subject of study; (c) general pedagogical knowledge; and (c) didactic knowledge of the specific academic discipline, which in our case is the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Additionally, in line with the postulates of the *Program's Education Project*[8] (Licenciatura en Inglés, 2016), CILEX advocates for the education of critical, ethical, integral, complex, diverse, and sensitive teachers who are committed to their continuous education and to the transformation of society through both teaching and research. This broad vision of the language teacher, in combination with the specific competencies they are expected to develop, gives way to three epistemological axes that frame the territory on which the line of research is located.

Language Teachers as Intellectuals

The first axis recognizes language teachers as cultural, social, and political agents whose activity, although initially circumscribed to school settings, impacts other socio cultural spheres as it irrigates the life of the communities they serve. As stated by Giroux (2013), every form of education contains in itself an ideal vision of the human person and of society. Teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously, communicate the principles and values pertaining to that vision. From this perspective, teachers' pedagogical thinking, discourse, and action carry deep ideological and political content. With their actions, teachers perpetuate, configure, or subvert forms of social organization; they interpret, replicate, or transform culture and its meanings; and they help regulate and shape forms of identity and relationship.

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[6] Ley General de Educación, Law 115 of 1994.

[7] The most recent reforms to teacher education were articulated in Decree 2450 of 2015 and in Resolution 18583 of 2017, which were passed by the Ministry of National Education.

[8] Proyecto Educativo de Programa (PEP).

Therefore, conforming to the tenets of critical pedagogies(Freire, 1970, 1975, 1993, 1998; Kincheloe, 2007), CILEX researchers believe that teachers need to move from the exclusively technical reproduction of the curriculum to the exercise of reflexivity that turns into praxis and political agency. In other words, we believe in educating teachers to be not passive technicians of decontextualized and often imposed educational agendas but *public intellectuals* (Giroux, 2004, 2013) capable of critically intervening in the school realities to positively transform the world thereby.

This axis especially contributes to specialties such as linguistic policy (Correa & Usma, 2013; Correa, Usma, & Montoya, 2014; Davis, 2014; Peláez & Usma, 2017; Shohamy, 2009; Spolsky, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Sutton & Levinson, 2001; Usma, 2009, 2015) and cultural studies (Barker, 2011; Freeman & Freeman, 2001; Gamboa, 2011; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Vanegas Rojas et al., 2016).

Language Teachers as Academics

A second axis recognizes the language teacher as an academic; that is, as an expert in their area of study. Within the broad area of language education, this axis supports the study of the communicative competence, its different components (Bachman and Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980; Maturana, 2015), and the teaching and learning processes associated with its development. Hence, this axis grows from and contributes to specialties such as sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics (Kasper & Kellerman, 2014), teaching English as a second or foreign language (Gebhard, 2006; Hinkel, 2011; Oxford, 2011), and critical applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001).

Within the latter field, we have taken in recent years a special interest in the study of literacies (Cassany & Castellà, 2010; Comber, 2015; Giroux, 1990; Janks, 2010; Mora, 2014), which, from a broad point of view, concerns itself with the interpretation and production of different types of texts. The study of literacies, however, goes far beyond the traditional view of reading and writing as simply decoding and encoding written texts. For a number of researchers (See, for example, Gómez Jiménez & Gutiérrez, 2019; Horner, 2013; Lea & Street, 2006; Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005; Trigos-Carrillo, 2019), the study of literacies is based on the following premises: (1) the existence of multiple literacies; (2) their political and ideological character; (3) the analysis of social practices rather than solely of texts; (4) the recognition of different approaches to study literacies; and (5) the attention to the relations between power, authority, meaning, and identity that are generated in reading and writing practices within concrete cultural and institutional contexts.

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Language Teachers as Educators

A third axis recognizes the language teacher as a professional educator and, consequently, as a practicing pedagogue. As professionals in the area of education and in line with the requirements made by the Ministry of National Education, language teachers are expected to develop the three essential macro competencies to teach, to train, and to assess language learners. These competencies involve the ability of teachers for critical reflexivity, situated research, and effective praxis through the implementation of pedagogical, didactic, and assessment practices that effectively respond to the needs of their students within specific yet complex and diverse school contexts.

This axis highlights the interest in investigating aspects such as language assessment (Arias, Maturana, & Restrepo, 2012; Arias Toro & Maturana Patarroyo, 2005; Maturana, 2015; Maturana, Restrepo, & Ferreira; 2009) and language teacher education (Abad, 2013; Abad & Pineda, 2018; Abad, Jaramillo & Uribe, 2019; Maturana-Patarroyo, & Uribe-Hoyos, 2018).

Nodal System and Book Structure

The epistemological territory described above is built upon the notion of the language teacher as both researcher and subject of research. Within that broad landscape, I proposed the consolidation of a system of nodes to represent, sort, and guide the activity of the researchers from CILEX. On the one hand, the nodes are aimed to help us delimit "plots" of knowledge within which the work of the researchers takes place at both the formative level and the scientific level. In that sense, the nodes represent the research tradition of the line and seek to order and focus it to give it sustainability over time. This approach was employed in order that as a group of researchers we can be excellent in some specialties and not simply good in many of them while lacking a defined research identity.

On the other hand, the nodes also serve an administrative purpose. They operate as work units formed by teams of researchers, who, from the execution of projects to the elaboration of products, can give sustainability to scientific research in this line. Finally, we wanted these nodes to have sufficient theoretical and methodological breadth so that they could include the work not only of the teacher researchers who are currently engaged in doing research within the line, most of whom have authored the chapters in this book, but also of those who will most likely join us in the years to come.

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As delineated above, the nodes that currently comprise the research activity of CILEX are cultural studies, language policy, literacies, language teacher education, and language assessment. The chapters in the book present some of the most recent work done in each area. In some cases, the reader may readily perceive that a chapter belongs to a specific node. In others, one chapter may share features of two or three of them.

Each chapter reports on one or two research studies in which the authors participated as either leading researchers or co-researchers. In some cases, the authors acted as advisors for students in the Bachelor's Degree in English Teaching program who conducted outstanding research projects to comply with their graduation requirements. Whenever that was the case, authors obtained formal authorization from them to report the studies and gave them credit through proper citations and references. This situation, nevertheless, reflects the formative research tradition that I initially referred to and that characterizes most of our work. On this matter, I personally believe in the great potential of the work we do with our students: They rejuvenate our perspective and we give their work the academic character it requires to fully mature as scientific research.

On a different note, a few of the studies reported have been published in local or international scientific journals. Still, the chapters constitute independent texts, as authors were required to go beyond the single studies and articulate them under a completely new analytical standpoint so as to supply significant and novel reflections on the themes they address. In the following section of this introduction I briefly describe the focus and structure of each chapter.

Overview of Chapters

In chapter one, Professor Marlon Vanegas provides readers with the insights produced during his experience as a researcher in the field of cultural studies. He reports on two research projects—developed with his research incubator—that studied the cultural and socio-affective factors related to students' academic performance at college level. Putting aside the narrow view of academic performance traditionally applied in university contexts, he uses the results of the studies to critically explain and redefine the concept from a sociocultural perspective. At times of curricula transformation, his exploration provides enough evidence to invite teachers and curriculum developers to think over the idea of academic performance as a multifactorial concept.

In chapter two, Professor Oscar Peláez problematizes language policy in Colombia from a sociocultural perspective and explores the implications of critically revising it in teacher education. First, he explores recent language policies in Colombia, which, in response to the pressures of

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economic globalization, have been formulated under the premise that the teaching and learning of a language should focus solely on its instrumental value. Then he reports on two studies that explored the effects of incorporating the critical study of language policy in teacher education curricula, primarily through a course and a research incubator. He concludes that for pre-service teachers to move from passive implementation to critical appropriation, it is imperative that teaching programs commit to educating them in analyzing, contesting, and re-creating policies in light of the needs of their learning communities.

In chapter three, Professor Bairon Jaramillo focuses on the theme of literacy development in early childhood education. He reports on two studies conducted through inter institutional alliances in 2011 and 2012. Results suggest that a significant number of teachers in early childhood education not only lack conceptual and epistemological knowledge regarding reading and writing but also remain reluctant to embrace new literacy instruction models. Hence, he recommends that teacher education programs for both language and early childhood education include a subject about how to teach a foreign language to preschoolers. Further, he insists on the need to propitiate a stronger alliance between school, home, and society as a fundamental step towards the qualification of literacy education in early childhood.

In chapter four, Professor Claudia Uribe addresses the relation between reading instruction and assessment towards the promotion of critical thinking in the EFL classroom. After a necessary exploration of essential concepts, she reports on two studies that explored teachers' beliefs and practices concerning reading and critical thinking in relation to formative assessment, particularly through the use of alternative text forms such as memes. Ultimately, she makes a call to transcend mechanistic approaches to reading instruction that reduce it to the development of test-taking skills so as to promote alternative approaches that endorse students' aesthetical and critical interactions with diverse types of texts. For the latter to take place, notwithstanding, Uribe insists on the need that teachers plan a curricular route that articulates reading instruction with formative assessment.

In chapter five, within the node of language teacher education, I analyze the practicum identity crisis, a widespread and definitive issue in teachers' maturation that has nonetheless remained largely unexplored in the Colombian context. After exploring the theory of teacher identity and outlining the concepts of teachers' beliefs, practicum, and identity crises, I report on two qualitative studies about the practicum crisis conducted under my supervision. In the last section I make recommendations on how student teachers, teacher educators, and programs can approach this phenomenon and turn it into an opportunity to promote student teachers' professional growth. I conclude that student teachers may be better equipped to face the practicum crisis if their advisors anticipate its appearance and assist them in developing their practical pedagogical knowledge through a systematic process of reflexivity.

In chapter six, Professors Alejandro Betancur and Diana Marcela Jaramillo probe research training in language teacher education in Colombia. Inspired by the recent reform on teacher education programs brought forth by the Ministry of National Education, authors analyze the conditions for research training in the country by contrasting the notions of formative and scientific research. Then they move on to report on a case study that analyzed the role of formative research in the teacher training process of students from the bachelor's degree in English teaching at Luis Amigó. Along with other scholars in the field of research training, Betancur and Jaramillo highlight the importance of research skills development during pre-service education so that new cohorts of teachers can be better prepared to respond to the complex realities of Colombian classrooms by effectively articulating theory and practice. The study, conducted at a time of major curricular reform within the program,[9] confirmed the pivotal role that research educators play as role models for their students so that they can deliberately embrace research as a key component of their professional makeup.

Finally, in chapter seven, Professor Erika Restrepo attends to the issue of language teacher educators'—often deficient—language assessment literacy (LAL), which becomes apparent in their self-designed classroom tests. In the first part, she elucidates essential concepts related to language assessment, such as test reliability and test validity in its various forms, and describes fundamental steps toward effective test design, including the construction of test items and tasks. Afterwards, drawing on the results of an action research study conducted within the English teaching program, she makes a convincing case for the use of guided peer coaching as an alternative strategy to bolster teachers' test-design competence and their overall language assessment literacy. Finally, given the unquestionable impact of classroom assessment on teaching and learning in higher education, she contends that training in classroom-test design should become a key component in the professional development of language teacher educators.

Conclusion

This book is the result of the collaborative work of a group of teacher educators from the English teaching program at Luis Amigó, who believed in the importance of putting it together as a way to make our research visible to ourselves and to other members of the academic community. My deepest gratitude goes to each of the authors, reviewers, and proofreaders for their contributions to this project. Their indefatigable passion and unwavering commitment not only to teaching but also to conducting and disseminating research is crucial in ensuring the highest quality education to those aspiring and practicing teachers who continue to seek it under our guidance.

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[9] See Abad and Zapata (2019) for a detailed description of the program reform as regards practicum and research training.

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Writing, revising, and editing this book has come to represent for me an exercise of reconciliation with our personal and collective history as teacher researchers in the field of language teacher education. It is my hope that when readers, whether affiliated with the program or alien to it, go through its pages, they will be able to recognize not only the singular value of each individual researcher's work but also the richness of our collaboration, which constitutes the fabric of our collective achievements.

At a time when pressing yet volatile external demands often exacerbate confusion in teacher education, it is fundamental that, as teacher educators and researchers, we recognize the inherent qualities of the work we do and the purpose we pursue with it. I am convinced of the power of research to galvanize teaching and to inspire positive educational change. Therefore, it is my hope that, through this book, those who come to join the teaching program, as well as those who already make part of it will be able to acknowledge the trajectories in research we have had and to envision the new directions for the research work that lies ahead of us.

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CHAPTER 1

Rethinking University Academic Performance from a Sociocultural Perspective

(Repensando el Rendimiento Académico Universitario desde una Perspectiva Sociocultural)

Marlon Vanegas

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Abstract

This chapter is intended to provide readers with the insights produced during my experience as a qualitative researcher in the field of Cultural Studies. Framed in the interpretative tradition, I have had the opportunity with my research incubators to conduct two important projects to study the concept of academic performance at a university level. The chapter will be organized in three major sections, that is, a literature review to provide scientific support on the topic, a detailed report on the two projects developed with my research incubators, and finally some insights gleaned from previous studies. Putting aside the narrow view of academic performance traditionally applied in school and university contexts, I use the results of the studies herein reported to critically analyze and thereby redefine the concept from a sociocultural perspective. The evidence is thought-provoking and moves the discussion about academic performance to a controversial area. An exploration of this concept provides enough evidence to invite teachers and curriculum developers to think over the new multifactorial concept of academic performance shaped by these research studies and consider its implications.

Keywords:

Academic performance, low-proficiency students, migrant students, sociocultural perspective.

Resumen

El propósito de este capítulo es proporcionar a los lectores los conocimientos construidos durante mi experiencia como investigador cualitativo en el campo de los Estudios Culturales. Enmarcado en la tradición interpretativa, he tenido la oportunidad con mi grupo de estudiantes del semillero de investigación de llevar a cabo dos proyectos de gran envergadura para estudiar el concepto de rendimiento académico a nivel universitario. El capítulo se ha organizado en tres secciones principales, a saber; la revisión detallada de algunos antecedentes acompañado de la construcción de un marco conceptual de referencia elaborado con el propósito de brindar soporte científico al tema; luego, un informe detallado de los dos proyectos; y finalmente la presentación de las conclusiones y una breve discusión de las contribuciones de estos estudios en relación con los resultados presentados en los antecedentes. Los resultados de ambos proyectos se presentarán con el propósito de redefinir el concepto de rendimiento académico desde una perspectiva sociocultural, dejando de lado la perspectiva tradicional y limitada utilizada en los diferentes contextos escolares y universitarios para continuar con un análisis crítico del tema. Las evidencias son bastante controversiales y generan inquietud. La revisión y el planteamiento que se hace de este concepto ha proporcionado evidencia suficiente como para invitar a docentes y diseñadores de currículo a reflexionar sobre la propuesta de un nuevo concepto multifactorial de rendimiento académico que se desprende de estos estudios desde una perspectiva sociocultural y así considerar sus implicaciones en general.

Palabras clave:

Estudiantes migrantes, estudiantes con baja suficiencia, perspectiva sociocultural, rendimiento académico.

Introduction

The studies reported in this chapter have been examples drawn from educational issues we observed in university contexts, particularly in the realm of teaching English as a foreign language. My reflections are based upon the experiences of my students, my own inquiries, and the papers we have published together. I feel most indebted to my research incubators because they have taught me a lot about qualitative inquiry. With their permission, I address their efforts, discussions, and insights to make this exercise more comprehensible for readers.

My guiding principle in organizing this chapter consists of creating a reference text where two research projects are used as examples to describe our experience in conducting qualitative inquiry projects. The chapter therefore guides the reader through the characteristics and nature of our research process, with a separate section on theoretical foundations, research design, data collection techniques, data analysis, and writing. These sections pose quandaries with which my students and I struggled. My goal is to pose the question, then report the studies and share the method used in each of them, and finally readdress the issues related to the redefinition of the concept.

The chapter is organized in three major sections, that is, a literature review that serves as a pillar to provide scientific support for the exploration of the topic; then a report on the two projects developed with my research incubators in Cultural Studies; and finally, some insights or conclusions which emerged from the results of both studies. I use these studies with the purpose of reconsidering the concept of academic performance from a sociocultural perspective, putting aside the traditional and numerical view used at school contexts to move forward with a critical analysis of the concept. An exploration of this concept of academic performance is based on evidence derived from these projects, which were developed between 2016 and 2018, and have been published in local and international research journals.

Research into factors related to the academic performance of university students has become a topic of growing interest in higher educational circles (Shahzadi and Ahmad, 2011). However, university institutions still adopt traditional teaching and evaluation systems that ignore the new concepts developed and constructed from research around the world.

In regard to our Colombian context, we need to rethink and transform academic life in relation to social and cultural changes. The complete integration of technological advancements to follow up and support academic performance may be far off in the future. However, exploring the concept of academic performance from a sociocultural perspective may help teachers and curriculum developers to start examining their teaching practices and beliefs.

Literature Review

Research antecedents

An initial glance at some recent research done on related factors influencing academic performance at a university level revealed that there has been a growing interest in overcoming an instrumental and narrow perspective that reduces the concept of academic performance to numbers and grades. These studies have considered not only inner-related factors, but also some outer-related factors that influence students' learning processes and results. However, some other studies have intended to relate inner factors with outer factors to better understand students' academic failure and success.

Shahzadi and Ahmad (2011) found that academic performance depends on learning skills and learning skills depend on home environment. Academic performance depends on academic interaction and academic interaction depends on study habits and home environment. This means that academic performance can be estimated for any student by their home environment and learning skills and also by their academic interaction, study habits, and home environment. Therefore, Shahzadi and Ahmad (2011) affirm that university students' academic performance is contingent upon their home environment and learning skills.

On the other hand, a research study, developed with mature working class university students enrolled in a part-time and evening undergraduate program, revealed that the current employment status and former socioeconomic status of students had an effect on their academic performance. However, in comparison with full-time students, Rossi (2017) found that evening students' academic performance is neither negatively affected by working nor positively affected by family socioeconomic status. Results revealed that the relationship between academic performance and both employment and parental socio-economic status of evening undergraduate students is totally different from that of daytime students. For that reason and according to Rossi (2017), the academic performance of evening students does not depend on their parents while studying, they become more independent as they acquired working experience.

The results of another study, conducted with the purpose of relating learning styles with academic performance at a university level, revealed that university students do not develop a single and specific learning style. They are more likely to show a preference for using any of the available learning styles. Carrasco Cifuentes and González Méndez (2018) found no evidence to prove that the use of only one learning style could lead students to have a better academic performance. It is the spontaneous use of any of them that makes learning possible and, hence, influences academic performance. A relevant issue that emerged out of this research study is the

possibility to relate learning styles with teaching styles. Setting a relationship between them makes learning a satisfying experience through which students and teachers benefit from each other. Carrasco Cifuentes and González Méndez (2018) affirm that it is absolutely necessary that teachers find suitable teaching strategies that actually respond to their students' needs since successful results also require the mediation of progressive and proactive teachers.

Besides qualitative research studies, some quantitative studies have been carried out to characterize the academic performance of university students. Through a factorial analysis of multiple correspondences, it was possible to identify types of students and influential variables that differentiate the students according to their performance (Ruiz et al., 2018). The results of this study contributed to designing tools that allow a valid diagnosis to effectively guide the interventions made by the educational institution. Among the influencing variables identified, social, cultural, and economic aspects were strongly related to students' academic performance. Having a personal computer available at home, certain kinds of interactions with peers and classmates, as well as having a stipend for school expenses contribute to a better academic performance. These results are supposed to provide institutions with enough diagnostic tools to intervene and follow up with students in the achievement of their academic goals.

The aforementioned research studies serve as evidence that academic performance does not encompass a single factor. From a holistic perspective, academic performance involves a set of psychological and sociocultural factors. As a multifactorial concept it should be understood in terms not only of results but also of processes. Therefore, considering aspects that go beyond students' inherent characteristics, as well as those that result from social interactions, becomes a way of transforming the instrumental conception of academic performance usually used for technical purposes (Vanegas et al., 2018). Adopting a sociocultural perspective may lead us to better understand the complexity of such a concept.

Theoretical Framework

University Academic Performance

In the field of educational research, there has been a major drive to study academic performance in relation to academic failure and success. Every year, a great number of articles at an international level are published in regard to academic performance and related factors (Montero Rojas et al., 2007). However, framing the concept of academic performance has been a difficult issue, given the multidimensional and complex nature that embodies this variable in the educational field.

According to Page et al. (as cited in Montero Rojas et al., 2007), grades and test results have been the most common indicators used for academic performance. Traditionally, it has been expressed in terms of qualitative or quantitative reports, grades, or numbers that supposedly correspond to the acquisition of a specific learning, that is, the achievement of an objective previously established (Tournon as cited in Montero Rojas et al., 2007). For that reason, grades do not have a corresponding value as to measure academic performance since there is not a standardized criteria for school, courses, and teaching staff (Montero Rojas et al., 2007).

In the same sense, Lambating and Allen (as cited in Caso-Niebla & Hernández-Guzmán, 2007) assert that school grades represent the most common strategy to evaluate the level of objective accomplishment inside the classroom. The average point is usually obtained through the historical cumulative average provided by the school administration by the end of each academic period. For Razia and Jahan (2017), academic performance is also assessed through the implementation of exams; for them, academic performance refers to the action students come up with to complete multiple tasks set for them by their teachers, it refers to the level at which a student has achieved his or her learning goals.

On the other hand, Navarro (2003) proposed a mixed concept that combines ability and effort. He conceptualizes academic performance as a construct that encompasses quantitative and qualitative values. There approximate different aspects such as abilities, knowledge, attitudes, and values (p. 13); according to Navarro, in school contexts, teachers tend to value effort more than ability, while students are expected to be acknowledged by their abilities, they tend to be more recognized because of their effort.

Despite the amount of evidence presented above, the concept and the evaluation of academic performance at university contexts still leaves aside issues related to sociocultural and historical factors, which are very influential in shaping the way students respond to academic demands from a socio-affective and cultural perspective.

A Sociocultural Perspective of Learning

The thesis of my theoretical perspective, in words used by Phan (2012), entails the idea that knowledge is acquired in context, that is, that cultural and social issues shape individual's cognitive and motivational processes of learning. According to Scott and Palincsar (2010), this theoretical assumption emerged from the work of authors who stressed the relation of students' learning and thinking with their context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruner, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978). This premise suggests that our thinking processes, motivation, and development of abilities do not

happen in isolation, they happen as a result of the social interactions and individual experiences. The importance of the social context in relation with the learning process becomes relevant as it provides the socio-affective supplies required for human interactions. The proposition of this theoretical perspective includes the qualities found with the influence of social factors in the act of learning. These qualities refer to three distinctive aspects: the historical and cultural attributes of learning, individuals' families influence within a local community, and the relation between culture and cognitive development.

In regard to the historical and cultural qualities of learning, and according to Vygotsky's genetic law of development, "any function of the child´s cultural development appears on the stage twice, or on two layers, first the social, then the psychological, first between people as an intermental category, then within the child as an intramental category" (Vygotsky, as cited in Scott & Palincsar, 2010). For Vygotsky it was important not only what the more knowledgeable person contributes but also what the child himself or herself brings to the interaction. However, in regard to the historical attributes of learning, it refers to the process of change; that is, the dialogical relations of time and space within a specific cultural context. It can be better explained in terms of phases and changes all living beings go through in the process of development. Thus, the historical study of behavior is not an auxiliary aspect of theoretical study, but rather forms its very base (Vygotsky, as cited in Scott & Palincsar, 2010).

With respect to family influence within a local community, and considering Bronfrenbrener's bioecological perspective (1979), we find that in Western culture family plays an important role as it contributes to the shaping of individuals' learning and development. In this sense, according to the contextual theory, several social layers interact and interrelate among themselves as a consequence of human interaction; thus, a community may impact a family, which in turn draws values, rules, and expectations from society at large. Embedded in a larger social system of change (Bronfrenbrener, 1989), "the immediate family may transpire and inform individuals of their 'moral' duties and obligations" (Phan, 2010, p. 7). In this sense, the family is in charge of the gradual passing of values and customs, which belong to a collective as a whole. Parents and caregivers are usually in charge of transmitting relevant information and beliefs about the conditions of life in society. In other words, the family, immersed in a community, conveys the principles and beliefs upon which individuals learn and interact.

Concerning the relation between culture and cognitive development, it has long been understood that cultural differences produce different ways of thinking (Bruner, 1987, p. 35). Scholars have been interested in exploring the influences culture has on cognitive development. An anthropological perspective was used in the past to infer internal cognitive processes from cultural products such as the myth, the ritual, and the social life (Bruner, 1987, p. 36). In contrast to the Piagetian perspective, in the words of Bruner, it can be affirmed that primitive societies were oriented towards the collective

rather than the individual. Reality is made up of the social and the physical worlds. However, it seems that the knowledge of the social world goes first compared to that of the physical world. A social explanation is enough, unless a physical one is required (p. 47). This means that the cultural and social worlds in all societies shape the cognitive development of their inhabitants. According to Bruner (1987), there are societies with more technological advancements that promote the intellectual maturation of the human mind. Societies less demanding at an intellectual level, by contrast, do not produce enough symbols and do not favor the emergence of ways to think and to understand (p. 64).

Cultural Foundations of Cognitive Development

According to Rogoff and Chavajay (1995), the transcultural psychology research done during the 1960s and 1970s mainly focused on expanding and proving Piaget's theory in different contexts. Piaget's interest was driven to comprehend the child's change of ideas throughout time, excluding an interest for cultural variations. After some exhaustive research done to prove Piagetian tests in other cultures, it was found that many people in some cultures do not reach the operational stage even with extensive schooling. These observations made Piaget change his mind in 1972. He decided not to declare the idea of the stages as universal. The development of intelligence is dependent on cultural variables (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). However, we can find that many scholars interested in studying the relationship between cognition and culture were mainly influenced by Vygotsky and his colleagues. It was the opportunity to conceptualize the relation between individuals and societies, testing and commonsense knowledge, and learning inside and outside school. According to Vygotsky (1978), to understand individual thinking processes it is necessary to comprehend sociocultural contexts where learning takes place and social interactions happen.

Rogoff and Chavajay (1995) affirm that many research studies conducted during the 1980s, especially those performed in the field of transcultural psychology, focused on setting different kinds of relationships between individual thinking processes and sociocultural experiences. It is worth mentioning the studies done by Patricia Greenfield during the 1980s (as cited in Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995) when she came up with the term *symbolic culture* to refer to the different techniques people use to represent their reality. She was deeply concerned with verbal and nonverbal language. Greenfield studied cognitive processes in indigenous communities, such as the use of conceptual systems to classify, interpret, and infer meaning from the instructions on how to knit. She found that cultural background was key to integrating ancestral practices and values into new cultural perspectives. On the other hand, Rogoff and Chavajay (2004) affirm that it was Jim Stigler who,

during the 1990s, defined the idea of a new discipline, *cultural psychology*; this field would combine some foundations of anthropology, linguistics, history, and philosophy to better understand how cultures shape institutions and how institutions shape individuals' needs.

Later on, Rogoff and Chavajay (1995) informed that it was Geoffrey Saxe who became very interested in studying the concept of number throughout different cultural scenarios during the 1980s and 1990s. He wanted to examine how numerical concepts are closely linked to cultural systems and daily practices. Additionally, according to Rogoff and Chavajay (1995), it was Rogoff who initially became interested in exploring and studying the cultural influence in the development of memory. She believed that cognitive processes are integrated into sociocultural activities rather than being a product or result of them (p. 141). We can evidence here the close, reciprocal relationship between culture and thought, which is mediated by language.

The idea that language may shape different cognitive skills was an issue that goes back centuries. However, it was in the 1930s that linguists such as Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, who studied how languages vary, proposed that speakers of different languages may think differently (as cited in Boroditsky, 2011). Nonetheless, there was no evidence to prove that claim. According to Boroditsky (2011), some decades later, a solid body of empirical evidence showing how languages shape thinking eventually emerged; "The evidence overturns the long-standing dogma about universality and yields fascinating insights into the origins of knowledge and the construction of reality" (p. 63). A new set of theories have showed up addressing the close relationship between language and thought.

Boroditsky (2011) affirms that the representations we construct about time and space are culturally rooted. Further, "speakers of different languages also differ in how they describe events and, as a result, how well they can remember who did what" (p. 64). It seems that language plays an important role in many aspects of our mental lives. Language integrates human experience; this means that categories and distinctions that exist in particular languages have a broader effect on our mental lives. Boroditsky (2011) asserts that what researchers have been calling "thinking" this whole time actually appears to be a collection of both linguistic and nonlinguistic processes. As a result, there may not be a lot of adult human thinking where language does not play a role (p. 65).

One of the conditions of human intelligence has to do with its adaptability and flexibility in order to construct perceptions of the world and influence our environments. According to Boroditsky (2011), one consequence of this flexibility has been the great diversity of languages that have emerged around the globe. Each language provides its own cognitive toolbox that encloses knowledge and a perception of the world constructed over thousands of years within a culture. Each language contains a way of perceiving, categorizing, and making meaning in the world, like

a guidebook proposed and refined by our ancestors (p. 65). Understanding how the languages we speak shape the way we think is helping scientists to reveal how we create knowledge, construct reality, and become humans.

Cultural Foundations of Emotions

Going back in history, we can find that biological and physiological aspects were the first to be considered in the study of the origin of emotions. Therefore, evolutionistic, mechanistic, and organic theories were developed to explain and describe the foundations of emotions in human beings. According to Vigotsky (2004), Spinoza referred to affect as bodily states that increase or decrease the predisposition for action, refraining or favoring the consciousness of the emotional state of mind (p. 5). From mechanistic and evolutionistic perspectives, an emotion is a biologically based and evolutionarily adaptive response to environmental stimuli (Matsumoto et al., 2013), while the organic view of emotions splits up affect into motor and psychic phenomena. This means that behavioral as well as psychosomatic aspects involved in the expression of emotions were integrated. The relationship between body, mind, and emotions was first established with the development of all these theories. In other words, emotions were perceived as a psychic driving force that pushed people to action.

However, given our inner drive to belong to our social world, it is evident that it influences our emotional lives. According to Hofmann and Doan (2018), emotion theorists have ignored the importance of social factors in the research studies conducted so far on emotions, referring to them as primarily biological and private experiences. Such studies have shaped a simplistic and narrowing perspective of emotions. For Hofmann and Doan (2018), however, human emotions are experienced, expressed, and regulated through others and with others; human emotions happen within a social and cultural context (p. 5). This means that through the process of interaction and socialization, humans become capable of experiencing emotions whose basic elements are mainly socially and psychologically constructed rather than biologically mediated. Hofmann and Doan (2018) assert that "the emotional experience is fundamentally shaped and colored by cultural and social influences to the extent that in fully developed humans, emotion can be understood only in the social or cultural context in which it develops and is observed" (p. 5).

Based on the previous premises, we have come to believe that emotions are fixed and universal across all cultures. However, emotions not only differ from country to country but also from time to time; this means that emotions are historically and culturally determined. There were emotions experienced in the past that do not exist any longer and there are new emotions constantly

emerging. According to Chaney (2019), an expert from the Emotional History Center of the United Kingdom, the emotions people experienced in the past can help us understand how we feel today. For example, in the Middles Ages, it was common for monks living in monasteries to experience acedia, a medieval emotion that consisted of a spiritual crisis comparable to what we would today call depression. In the same sense, frenzy was another medieval emotion that is similar to what we know today as anger, but more specific, such as a violent fit of rage. These emotions may highlight our modern tendency to think of emotions as being essentially internal, something we can hide, if we try hard enough to do so. Nevertheless, we can see that the cultural and historical contexts would determine their development and expression. In the same vein, new research on epigenetics indicates that hereditary and environmental factors significantly influence the transgenerational transmission of trauma. Epigenetics can help us understand why people tend to inherit problems and traumas that former generations experienced and did not have the chance to elaborate.

From an anthropological perspective, emotions are considered an essential component in human societies. Castaingts (2017) asserts that signs are not just signifiers with plural significances; they also hold an emotional message that emerges from the sender and is attained by the receiver. Moreover, from a linguistics perspective, signs have a social significance that shape hierarchical and emotional values negotiated within cultural issues. On the other hand, neuroscience contributions also help us understand what changes happen in the human mind when emotions are triggered by specific cultural situations. With the support of technological advancements, brain sciences expand our scientific radar to embrace an interdisciplinary perspective and help us to better understand the relation between the natural and social dimensions of emotions within specific cultural contexts.

In regard to schooling, it has traditionally focused on the development of cognition. Socio-affective factors have been put aside at the expense of human rights. People become emotionally illiterate despite attending school for an entire life. According to Santos (2004), affective factors have been kept hidden in school life. The hegemony of the intellectual component has left aside the affective component of learning. Emotions have been silenced and relegated to the private sphere. Instead they are punished and controlled in the school environment: although feelings and emotions are supposed to be left behind once you enter school, new feelings and emotions are in fact cultivated inside the school environment itself.

Report on Research Projects

The research projects I am using here are the evidence of the inquiry process we have gone through in order to establish a relationship between two important and controversial research categories in the field of education: academic performance and sociocultural factors. The first study conducted was about the influence that linguistic discrimination had on the academic performance of a group of low proficiency English language students in an English Language Teaching Program. I developed this project with five enthusiastic and reflective student-teachers during 2014 and 2015. The second project was about the sociocultural factors that influence migrant students' academic performance in the same program. This study was conducted during 2016 and 2017. Three committed and critical student-teachers were involved and engaged in the development and edition of this project.

Study 1: How Linguistic Discrimination Influences Low-Proficient Students' Academic Performance

In regard to the first study (Vanegas et al., 2016), we followed a descriptive approach within a socio-critical paradigm. The methodology implemented consisted of an exploration of literature related to linguistic discrimination so as to become familiar with previous studies on the topic. Second, class observations were scheduled based on my students' availability. Third, low-proficiency students were selected at random to be interviewed during the observation period. Then, professors whose classes were observed were also interviewed.

Our inquiry process became very sensitive to the inequality observed in the kinds of interactions present in the English Language Teaching Program as a consequence of the linguistic diversity in mixed-proficiency level classes where exclusion was evident. The extra visibility given to high-proficiency students by professors reduced low-proficiency students' opportunities to get involved in class, thus affecting their class performance and participation. We posed questions in relation to the quality of the interactions taking place in the classroom and the way in which they influence students' academic performance, self-perceptions, and class participation.

The sample consisted of a group of 104 students who were not only enrolled in the English Teaching Program, but also were part of the students attending five different classes selected for observation from the 1st to the 9th semester. Participants were male and female learners in five multilevel linguistic classes with their corresponding professors. Out of the 104 students, 16 considered themselves to have a low proficiency in terms of language production and comprehension.

In the end, only 12 students who met the self-declared low proficiency criterion were interviewed. It is important to mention that selected participants, whether observed or interviewed, were given an informed consent form to ensure their permission for further use of the information. Implications, benefits, and consequences of the data collection process were also explained. Consent forms were read aloud to participants and research ethics were explained in Spanish to avoid any kind of misunderstanding before conducting interviews and observations.

Observations were carried out to keep track of the quality of interactions fostered inside the classroom. Observers were invited to keep record of emerging attitudes in regard to the use of language in class. They were also expected to focus their attention on student-professor, professor-student, and student-student interactions within the class. At the end of the observation period, five observers visited five different courses, and a total of 21 class sessions were observed. Each observation lasted around two hours. The protocols used to keep track of those observations were designed with a triple-entry format to describe, reflect, and categorize the information gathered. Observers wrote detailed descriptions of every action undertaken in class by students and professors. A total of five protocols were written, and a total of 20 entries were registered. These journal entries were made over a period of five weeks.

Interviews were designed with the purpose of identifying students' perceptions and reactions in regard to the discriminatory attitudes experienced in relation to their linguistic proficiency level. Using the insights produced during the observations, we decided to conduct the interviews at the end of the observation process in a quiet environment. Participants' answers were audio recorded and transcribed for further data analysis. At the end, 16 interviews were conducted, each lasting roughly 40 minutes. Twelve interviews were conducted with students and four with the professors. The interviews designed for students were conducted in Spanish to provide them with a more confident, safe, and comfortable environment.

The analysis was carried out considering the five steps proposed by Burns (1999) as a guide for data analysis: "assembling data, coding data, comparing data, building interpretations, and reporting outcomes" (pp. 157-160). As a research group, we met twice a week for two months to re-read the transcriptions of the observations and the interviews, focusing on linguistic discrimination concepts and assumptions. During that process, some excerpts were highlighted and categorized using a color-coding system proposed by Arhar et al. (2001). Then, we observed how a large number of categories emerged from the 20 class observations and 16 interviews. These first emerging categories were reduced to make categories more manageable. We merged them using a content-oriented criteria. Then, we decided to create a chart to filter more recurrent categories. Subsequently, we reduced them down to sixteen. Six from the students' interviews, five from the professors' interviews, and five from the observations. Lastly, six final categories arose as a result of the triangulation process.

Trustworthiness was ensured as we applied three processes of triangulation as follows: data, theory, and investigator triangulation. Data triangulation consisted of setting relations as we compared the information obtained from the three sources, that is, observations, student interviews, and professor interviews. Furthermore, we used the theoretical framework as reference to relate the information obtained with the theory constructed around our question. Finally, as co-researchers, we agreed upon the interpretation of the data obtained from the previous steps.

Considering that our main objective was to describe how linguistic discrimination influences students' academic performance in an English Language Teaching Program, the scope of this study was descriptive within a critical perspective. Critical theory researchers look at their work as the first step towards political actions that lead to change regarding the injustices detected in society (Kincheloe and McLaren, as cited in Gamboa, 2011, p. 8). This approach became especially important since it was an opportunity to take linguistic discrimination out of the classroom to be analyzed. The data gathered from this type of research come from thorough analysis of certain issues with the purpose of describing them; in this particular case, the aim was to give meaning to the discrimination phenomenon in the language classroom and to foresee its consequences. Regarding the ethical considerations required to conduct this study, a set of actions were taken to ensure principled research practices. We protected participants' identities and the information collected was kept in privacy to ensure participants' confidentiality.

Results evidenced that the factors influencing low-proficiency students' academic performance can be grouped into three major categories: (a) Students' and teachers' beliefs about language and language users; (b) Teachers' and students' attitudes towards discriminatory events and; (c) Low-proficiency students' affective factors influencing their academic performance.

In regard to the ideas developed around language, we found that there is a tendency to idealize the native speaker. Teachers and students were inclined to use them as a reference of inspiration as it was manifested by participant 2: "Since I was little I have always liked English; I have always dreamed of going to England or the United States, a country of English speakers, specifically those two which are the most known." (Student interview excerpt, May 8th, 2014). We found that these kinds of beliefs about language neglect the variety of regional expressions used across the countries where English is spoken, implying the existence of a single correct way of using the language.

In relation to students' and teachers' attitudes towards discriminatory situations, we found that the pressure professors put on students to make them participate in class highlighted his discomfort towards low proficiency students as it was stated in one of the journals: "The professor says to talk about the focal point of the topic; well, she [the professor] starts to get annoyed because she doesn't hear what she wants to hear. She always points at the person she wants to

hear the answer from." (Excerpt from class observation #19, March 10th, 2014). In consequence, low-proficiency students tend to self-segregate and isolate due to this pressure, an issue that negatively influenced their academic performance.

With respect to the socio-affective factors influencing low-proficiency students' academic performance, we found that fear of negative evaluation, communicative apprehension, and students' self-devaluation negatively influenced students' academic performance to the point of making them drop the courses in some cases. According to participant 3 "sometimes you feel fear in a particular class because they make fun of you or you always find the ones who are talking with each other that are making fun of you" (Student interview excerpt, May 22nd, 2014). This discriminatory attitude has a major impact on the academic performance of students since being judged and scrutinized by classmates leads to frustration and disgruntlement.

From this study we concluded that academic performance is affected by all types of discriminating attitudes coming from either professors or classmates. Discriminatory attitudes trigger responses such as fear, segregation, anxiety, and apprehension, among others, thereby restraining and limiting class participation, quality of interaction, knowledge appropriation, and motivation towards language and course contents.

These results suggest that professors in the program should carefully observe the way communication takes place in the classroom and provide opportunities for all the voices to be heard by promoting participation that is based on values such as respect, caring, and sharing. Likewise, we invite professors to reflect upon the way cultural knowledge enters the classroom to promote the expression and participation of students inside and outside the class. From a sociocultural perspective, these results contribute to better understand university cultural values in relation to students' academic performance.

Study 2: Socio-Cultural Factors that Influence Migrant Students' Academic Performance

As for the second project (Vanegas et al., 2018), and considering the relation we wanted to set between the two main categories, i.e., sociocultural factors and academic performance, we decided to develop a project with an explanatory scope within a socio-critic perspective. This study emerged from the need to explain the way social and cultural factors influenced the academic performance of a group of migrant students within the university context. It is important to mention

that some members of the research incubators were part of the population of migrant students in the Language Teaching Program. We also wanted to gain perspective to understand our reality and contribute to transform it from a critical perspective.

Our inquiry process began when we came to understand that university migration was also a social and individual response to the demands imposed by an increasingly globalized world. The quality of the adaptive responses migrant students give to adjust to new cultural scenarios usually influences their academic performance. They usually find themselves at a disadvantage in relation to local students, so they end up developing new strategies that enable them to respond to the demands encountered in the new academic scenarios.

Given that our general objective was to explain how sociocultural factors influence migrant students' academic performance, this study followed a socio-critical paradigm and a qualitative methodological approach with an explanatory scope. Participants were selected based on a non-probability sampling method (Hernández et al., 2014), which consisted of a representative sample of the student and teacher population in the teaching program. Thirteen participants were involved in the study, that is, seven female learners and six male learners. They originally came from different regions of the country and outside the metropolitan area of the city of Medellin. Regarding the ethical considerations required to conduct this study, a set of actions were taken to ensure principled research practices. We protected participants' identities and the information collected was kept in privacy to ensure participants' confidentiality. They signed a consent form where we explained the study's purpose, procedures, and risks. Furthermore, we made clear to the participants that they could withdraw from the research at any moment. As for the process of analysis, we decided to use an alphabetical code system to identify the information each participant provided during the research process. As researchers, we were the only people who had access to participants' information and who knew the code system. Finally, we used the same system to reveal data along the research paper and public presentations.

Three data collection techniques were implemented during the development of this research project. First, we conducted a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions for each of the thirteen participants. As researchers, we administered, recorded, and transcribed all the interviews. We used our personal cellphones to record the interviews; each lasted 20 minutes approximately. Moreover, it is important to highlight that, before the interview, we delivered a consent form and invited our participants to complete a bio-data format with questions for them as migrant students. Second, we invited six participants to write a narrative for one week. They were encouraged to write a daily entry by the end of each day to complete seven entries in a week. They had to describe their experiences in the target cultural scenario. They were invited to write

the narrative using a previously shared Google Form, with instructions on how to complete it. Third, we conducted a focus group with five participants selected out of the wider group and the support of three co-researchers.

The data analysis was conducted using the same process used for the first study reported above. While collecting all the information, we started the analysis process by examining the data as follows. The analysis was conducted by reducing information through the development of a categorization system, often referred to as coding scheme, which was used to group data that provided similar types of information. We accomplished this by searching for words or phrases that appeared several times throughout the scripts. We used different color markers to arrange the emerging categories. After developing the categories, we proceeded to make comments on the main features or characteristics resulting from the coding of data. In the next stage, we connected and related the information gathered from the different data collection techniques. Finally, we moved on to the interpretations in which we connected theory with major findings and patterns in order to provide relatable explanations on the studied phenomenon. During this stage, we examined all the information collected looking for relationships, contradictions, and similarities.

In order to ensure trustworthiness and validity, we followed the same steps implemented in the previous study. Results (Vanegas et al., 2018) indicate that students who perceive a higher level of family support are more likely to achieve their academic goals. Besides, migrant students who report fewer difficulties to adjust to the host culture have greater opportunities to succeed academically. In addition, migrant students' previous academic experiences have an important impact on their adjustment to the university context.

After the data analysis process, three final categories or sociocultural factors emerged to let us explain the influences they have on migrant students' academic performance: family support, intercultural adjustment, and academic adaptation. In regard to family support, we identified that factors such as family-related emotional support, income, health conditions, and educational background have a major influence on migrant students' academic performance. For example, participant D said: "Yes, my family provides me with all the economic support I need to live here in Medellin" (interview excerpt). Therefore, a steady family income reduced students' economic-related concerns, promoting an emotional and psychological well-being that helped them focus their attention and effort on academic achievements.

We also found that the intercultural adjustment processes were facilitated or hindered by a set of overlapping factors such as the acculturation process, the hosting culture, the acculturative stress and the sociocultural stressors, as well as some other factors that contributed to the

sociocultural adjustment. For example, students who found mismatches between their own and the foreign cultural scenario had fewer chances to acculturate and, therefore, to timely adjust to the target cultural context. As participant L mentioned "(…) we have different ways of thinking, living, different lifestyles, including the way we dress, what we eat, everything. Then it was a little difficult [at the beginning]" (interview excerpt). So the time spent in the process of adjustment is related to the cultural congruence students found at the moment of adjusting to the new culture.

We also found that migrants' previous academic experiences at certain specific school contexts had an important impact on their experience of adapting to the new university context. Academic adaptation became a significant result for this study since it allowed us to observe the evolution of migrants' academic performance. For example, we were able to identify that academic and educational background had a direct influence on migrants' academic performance. Participants who came from high schools where the English proficiency level was poor, experienced more difficulties to cope with academic demands. That was the case of participant I, who said "I finished high school with a very basic linguistic [English] level (…) That's why I cancelled the course, not because of the course itself, but because of my linguistic level" (focus group excerpt). The former means that, students with limited academic previous experiences had fewer opportunities to adapt successfully to the new university academic demands.

These results imply that teacher and student population should start implementing classroom strategies that promote the implementation of inclusive, equitable, and democratic pedagogical practices. In the same thread of reasoning, professors are invited to observe how students' cultural backgrounds enter the classroom in order to transform the quality of the interactions inside and outside the schoolroom. These results also imply that teachers need to provide students with opportunities for intercultural exchanges within the university context. From a sociocultural viewpoint, we believe that sociocultural differences should represent an opportunity for the English Language Teaching Program to integrate into the curriculum issues related to interculturality, otherness, and alterity. In sum, conducting a research study on this issue was an opportunity not only to deepen our understanding of university culture from a sociocritical perspective, but also to examine issues such as migration and academic adaptation in terms of social justice, equity, and social participation.

Discussion

Conclusions and Recommendations

Rethinking university academic performance from a sociocultural perspective implies examining our teaching and evaluation practices inside the classroom. It involves leaving behind those pedagogical practices that assess learning from a narrow and traditional perspective, still restricting assessment to the mechanical allocation of grades without considering the emotional, cognitive, and sociocultural components involved in learning.

From a theoretical perspective, the results of the projects reported above supply enough scientific evidence as to the sociocultural foundations of students' cognitive and emotional development. A sociocultural perspective on learning contributes to understanding why there are students who fail, academically speaking, despite the deployment of their cognitive and psychological repertoires, evinced in factors such as ability and effort. In consistency with the results presented by Shahzadi and Ahmad (2011), we have identified a reciprocal relationship between internal factors and external factors. That is, academic performance depends on learning skills and learning skills depend on home environment. In other words, family and community are factors that convey the principles and beliefs upon which individuals learn and interact. This means that academic performance is likely to be influenced by home environment and study habits.

In regard to the cultural qualities of learning and based on Vygotsky's genetic law of development (as cited in Scott and Palincsar, 2010), we can confirm that cultural development occurs in two layers: first, the social, and second, the psychological, conveying the relationship between the intermental and intramental dimensions of reality. A research study with working-class mature university students enrolled in a part-time and evening undergraduate program (Rossi, 2017) revealed that current employment status and socioeconomic status have an effect on academic performance. After relating these results with the results obtained from the reported projects, I confirmed that parental socioeconomic status influences the psychological behaviors that undergraduate students display in order to achieve their academic goals.

In the same thread of reasoning, we found that the mixed study conducted by Ruiz et al. (2018) to characterize the academic performance of university students contributed tools that allow a valid diagnosis which will allow us to effectively guide students in general. Among the influencing variables identified, social, cultural, and economic aspects were strongly related to students' academic performance. These results are supposed to provide institutions with enough diagnostic tools to intervene and follow up with students in the achievement of their academic goals.

The conclusions drawn from the studies mentioned above proved to be enough evidence to show that academic performance does not include a single factor. From a holistic perspective, academic performance involves a set of psychological and sociocultural factors that go beyond numbers. Academic performance is a multifactorial concept. Consequently, considering aspects that go beyond students' inherent characteristics, as well as those that result from social interactions, becomes a way of transforming the instrumental conception of academic performance usually used for technical purposes (Vanegas et al., 2018).

For those interested in developing projects related to this topic, we suggest not only using different methodological procedures to establish other relationships among the categories that may encompass the concept of academic performance, but also developing strategies that may contribute to comprehensively communicating the academic results obtained by students.

Based on the results of these projects, we recommend that curriculum designers, administrators, and educators in general use this evidence to propose and design new educational policies to evaluate students' academic performance from a more holistic and interdisciplinary perspective that encompasses both internal and external factors such as emotions and family dynamics.

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CHAPTER 2

Reflection and Analysis of Colombian Official Language Policies as a Key Feature in Teacher Education

(Reflexión y Análisis de la Política Lingüística Oficial Colombiana como un Aspecto Crucial en la Formación del Maestro)

Oscar A. Peláez

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Abstract

The Colombian national government has formulated various education reforms and language policies in recent decades to respond to the international demands of the globalized community that promote the instrumentalized use of English for economic competitiveness. This paper reports the findings of two qualitative studies that aimed at exploring how the analysis of these policies relate to the English teacher education program in Universidad Católica Luis Amigo. Participants of these projects were administrative staff, teachers, and students who were involved in an in-depth study of language policies throughout an academic course and the participation in a language policy research incubator. Findings show that analysis and reflection on language policies have enhanced the students' critical awareness regarding their role as policy makers. The conclusions support a call for further studies about the role of teachers as political subjects who go beyond the appropriation of policies in the classroom to become agents of change towards the construction of a more equitable and just society.

Keywords:

Critical awareness; language policy; teachers as policy makers; teachers as political subjects

Resumen

El gobierno nacional de Colombia ha formulado varias reformas educativas y políticas lingüísticas en las últimas décadas con el fin de dar respuesta a las demandas del mundo globalizado que instrumentaliza el aprendizaje del inglés para promover la competitividad económica. Este texto reporta los hallazgos de dos estudios de corte cualitativo que exploraron cómo la reflexión y análisis de la política lingüística oficial se convierten en un aspecto crucial en la formación del maestro de lenguas extranjeras de la Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. En estos proyectos participaron administrativos, profesores y practicantes que habían tomado un curso en políticas lingüísticas y eran miembros del semillero de investigación en este campo. Los hallazgos señalan que el análisis y estudio de estas reformas y políticas promueven el desarrollo del pensamiento crítico de los estudiantes, contribuyendo a que ellos se apropien de su rol activo como creadores de política en la práctica pedagógica. Las conclusiones apuntan a seguir profundizando en estos estudios para que de igual manera se descubra más el rol del maestro como sujeto político que transciende el mero ejercicio pedagógico en el aula de clase y se hace actor social en la transformación de un país más equitativo y ético.

Palabras clave:

Consciencia crítica; maestros creadores de política; maestros como sujetos políticos; políticas lingüísticas.

Introduction

This chapter reports on the language policy research conducted in the Foreign Languages Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó as a response to the various education reforms and language policies that the national government has formulated in recent decades in Colombia. It focuses on the epistemological basis, advances, and perspectives for the research. Additionally, this chapter analyzes how the Colombian reforms and policies are linked to the country's current political and economic events and how these economic, political, and social transformations are shaping the education system. Given such circumstances, it is crucial to examine how particular institutions are responding to the demands and challenges these reforms and policies pose to teacher development.

Recent negotiations of bi-national trade agreements with the United States and countries in Europe, Asia, and the rest of America, as well as Colombia's recent admittance to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), have involved the government's acceptance of particular economic and political reform packages. As is evident in recent policy documents and reform agendas in Colombia (OECD & The World Bank, 2012) current models of education and language policy in the country include the enforcement of new accountability tools and indicators, the adoption of international standards, the recognition of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) exams as a worldwide indicator of local and transnational education quality, and the promotion and enforcement of English as an international language across the entire educational system. From this perspective, education and language reforms not only respond to globalized agreements on what education means today but also to international pressures connected to economic and political agendas (Peláez & Usma, 2017).

At the same time, government officials have been adopting models of reform with an international scope by introducing an expansive set of education and foreign language policies. They include the National Program of Bilingualism 2004-2019 (PNB by its Spanish acronym), the National Program for the Strengthening of Foreign Languages 2010-2014 (PFDCLE by its Spanish acronym), the National Law of Bilingualism 1651 in 2013, the National English Program 2015-2025 (PNI: Colombia Very Well 2015-2025), and more recently, Bilingual Colombia 2014-2018 (CB by its Spanish acronym). Such programs and policies have made it clear that the central government has a special interest in promoting, improving, and regulating foreign language teaching, learning, and certification processes within the country to make it more attractive to foreign investment at times of economic globalization, transnational policymaking, and international competitiveness (Peláez & Usma 2017). Despite the government's efforts, recent studies (Peláez & Usma, 2017; Roldán & Peláez, 2017) have shown that these policies have either failed to accomplish the expected results or have accomplished them only with a small percentage of the population, excluding the vast

majority. In cases where the latter has occurred, the smaller portion that benefitted was usually economically advantaged, while the majority not reached by the new policies was classified in lower economic strata (Usma, 2015; Usma & Peláez, 2017).

The current context of Colombia demands more reflective and political stances from future teachers. In order to rise to this challenge, some higher education institutions with programs for aspiring language teachers have begun to offer courses and study groups to conduct a more in-depth examination of the implications these reforms and policies have for pre-service and in-service language teachers as they are, in the end, responsible for implementing these policies in the classroom (Menken & García, 2010; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). In this new scenario, English teachers and other educational actors take on complex political roles far beyond that of the conventional EFL instructor.

As Datnow et al. (2002) have argued, "teachers are considered by most policymakers and school change experts to be the centerpiece of educational change" (p. 71). From this perspective, teachers are expected to act as policy actors and policy-agenda creators who respond to the specific needs, lacks, and wants of their students and school communities. Therefore, they should understand the social, political, cultural, economic, and educational implications of teaching an international language such as English in a highly unequal society such as Colombia (Usma, 2015).

Language policies in Colombia have been formulated under the premise that the basic rationale for the teaching of a language should be focused on the instrumental value it may have, for example, promoting economic progress by favoring its dominance as a necessary vehicle for taking advantage of opportunities offered to citizens only in terms of business and international exchange (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, [MEN], 2005). As a consequence, the role of teachers is jeopardized, and they are relegated to a position in which they can only have a minimal impact in the construction of a more social, egalitarian, and humane society. According to the Institutional Education Project [PEI][1] of Universidad Católica Luis Amigo (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2017), the core purposes and values of any education system in society should seek comprehensive training and human development.

This text intends to show the results of two investigations carried out by members of Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. These studies, which were conducted at the national level, unveil how education actors have faced the challenges described above and highlight the crucial role teachers' play in the implementation and appropriation of language policy. I argue that analyzing and reflecting on official language policies is crucial in teachers' education to ensure they can develop a critical consciousness regarding the social responsibility they have in our country. If this

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[1] The Institutional Education Project (Proyecto Educativo Institucional or PEI for its acronym in Spanish) refers to a document where the principles, goals and aims of any educative institution in Colombia are specified. It articulates, among other things, the resources, the educative personnel, pedagogical strategies and principles, and regulations for teachers and students (MEN, n.d.).

is not accomplished, the illusory belief that English is essential to create competitive and successful professionals will curtail the impact teachers can have in the transformation of themselves and society.

This paper is divided into three main sections. First, I outline recent language policy initiatives in Colombia and the most glaring contradictions involved in them. I also present a theoretical framework that has been used to carry out studies in the field of language policy by students and teachers from the Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages Teaching in Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. Second, I present a report on two language policy studies that focused on how educational actors from the same university analyzed language policies and the conclusions they reached. Finally, I propose an alternative agenda based on the conclusions and findings of the studies.

Literature Review

Education Reforms and Language Policies in Colombia: A Brief Summary

National Bilingual Program 2004-2019[2] (PNB)

This has been the country's most ambitious plan since the late 1990s. According to the Colombian government at the time, it was necessary because a two-year diagnostic study had reported that students were not attaining high academic competence levels (MEN, 2005b). The PNB attempted to have 100% bilingual students by 2019. According to the government, it was essential that, in times of globalization, Colombia developed the capacity of its citizens to manage at least one foreign language. It stated that competence in a second language opened borders and played a decisive role in the development of the country. This program clearly favored English as the foreign language to the detriment of others, stating that being bilingual meant having more knowledge and opportunities, being more competent and competitive, thus improving the quality of life of all citizens (MEN, 2006). To achieve this goal, the government took actions like requiring English instruction in primary and secondary school, adopting the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001) as the national standard for determining English levels across the country, and introducing the regulatory guidance as to the English learning standards[3] (MEN, 2006).

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[2] Programa Nacional de Bilinguismo (PNB).

[3] Guía 22: Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés

In addition, this program established a set of strategies to accomplish its goal, explaining that, with three hours of instruction per week for a total of 720 hours starting in sixth grade, by the end of high school, students would be able to reach B1 level (MEN, 2006). Regarding teachers, the MEN classified them into two groups: English teachers who do not hold an English education degree and those who do. For the first group, the target English level was established at B2; for the second the level was set at C1 (MEN, 2006). In order to verify whether students and teachers were reaching the target levels, the MEN started to align the national test with the CEFR (Ayala & Álvarez, 2005). However, a contradiction was perceived by scholars in the MEN's handling of the situation because it demanded that English be taught at primary schools and that specific English levels be reached, but it did not offer the necessary support, such as resources, professional development, and appropriate working conditions for primary teachers to carry out the PNB's demands (Correa & González, 2016).

Program for Strengthening the Development of Competences in Foreign Languages (PFDCLE) 2010-2014

As is so often the case with changes in national administrations, in 2010 new programs replaced the old ones; however, according to the government, the PFDCLE was a continuation of the PNB. Its aim was to help Colombian citizens develop communicative competencies in foreign languages, emphasizing English, in order to favor the insertion of Colombian human capital into the global knowledge economy and the international job market. To accomplish this goal, the program focused on connecting four aspects of the education system, namely, teacher training and professional development, monitoring and evaluation, pedagogy, and institutional strengthening (MEN, 2014). The goal of this program was to have 40% of students finishing high school at the B1 level by 2014. Additionally, by 2014 all teachers who did not hold a government-approved certification in English had to reach the B1 level, and 80% of those with an English certification had to be at the C1 level (MEN, 2014).

Some of the actions taken to promote the achievement of these goals included congressional approval of Law 1651 of 2013, known as the National Law of Bilingualism[4], which represented a major influence on the Colombian educational system as it modified articles 13, 20, 21, 22, 30, and 38 of Law 115 of 1994, the country's general law of education, mandating the inclusion of objectives for elementary, middle, and high school, as well as higher education, to develop students' receptive and productive skills in a foreign language. Moreover, it stated in article 8 that English should be the foreign language favored in public schools (Ley 1651, 2013).

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[4] Ley Nacional de Bilingüismo

The Ministry of Education made some teaching resources available like *English, please!*, a textbook series for 9th and 11th grade, in addition to *My ABC English Kit* and *Aprendamos Inglés con las Aventuras de Bunny Bonita*, a set of resources offered to primary teachers (MEN, 2014).

National English Program: Colombia Very Well! (PNI) 2015-2025

This program, whose implementation was interrupted by the launching of another initiative a few months later, aimed at improving the English proficiency of Colombian students starting with those in 9th, 10th, and 11th grade and gradually expanding the program's scope to the lower grades. The program was launched with the goal that, by 2025, 50% of students finishing high school would reach the B1 level, and 85% of teachers would achieve the B2 level. The plan also aimed at impacting English education at the university level and in the productive sector (Gómez Sará, 2017).

This program brought about several important actions. The first one was to continue with the diagnosis and training of teachers in language and teaching skills through a system of incentives. The second was to increase English instruction time from one to three hours of classes per week and increase general school hours from 6 to 8 hours a day (MEN, 2014). To date, these proposals have not been completely implemented, and, in some places, they are still in the piloting stage (Correa & González, 2016). The third action was the creation of quality guidelines for bachelor's degrees in education. The initiative's goal was that all teacher-training programs resulted in 100% of students reaching the B1 level of English. According to Correa and González (2016) the purpose of this regulation was to overcome the lack of English-proficient teachers in primary schools.

Finally, another action taken was the creation of the *English Teaching Fellowship Program* (ETF), an initiative to help the country become bilingual by 2020. This program intended to bring qualified English teachers to Colombian public schools and institutions, arguing that with their assistance students' English competence would improve. However, as Gómez and Guerrero (2018) claim, many of these so called "foreign native teachers"[5] neither had the pedagogical background or certification nor did they come from the United States and the UK, as some people expected. Additionally, the very concept of "native speaker" is brought into question, as some of these teaching assistants were immigrants to countries whose official language was English or had acquired a C1 level of English in countries from different continents (Gómez & Guerrero, 2018).

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[5] "formadores nativos extranjeros", as they were called in Colombia.

Bilingual Colombia 2014-2018

This is the current language policy program. It attempts to improve students' communication skills so they can have increased access to better job opportunities (MEN, 2016a). The policy estimates that only 8% percent of students in grade 11 reach the B1 level, and 35% of students reach the A2 level. For teachers, the goal is that those at levels A1 and A2 move up one or two levels from where they began (MEN, 2016a).

To achieve these goals, the national education authorities have proposed three lines of strategy: teachers, resources, and support (MEN, 2016a). In regard to teachers, it involves the continuation of the fellowship program that includes short local or international immersion programs and professional development related to the use of *Way to Go* and *English Please Fast Track* textbooks. In terms of resources, the program published several booklets, such as *Diseñando una Propuesta de Currículo Sugerido de inglés para Colombia, Esquema Curricular Sugerido* and *Orientaciones y Principios Pedagógicos Currículo Sugerido de Inglés* (MEN, 2016a). Another goal related to resources is the creation of a national syllabus for the English language that includes Basic Learning Rights (MEN, 2016b) and English teaching textbooks. The support line encompasses not only support to schools but also assessment of program implementation in the schools. It is important to note that this national program is being implemented in 36 cities and 141 targeted schools across the country with no clear reason for their selection (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sanchez, 2016).

According to Peláez and Usma (2017) a number of publications continue to examine the multiple dimensions of these plans. Some researchers point out that the reforms mainly respond to the transnational political and economic agendas that Colombia has adopted in recent decades, generally importing monolithic and homogeneous discourses on reform (Guerrero, 2008) and excluding local knowledge (González, 2007). Also, some studies carried out at the national level (Sánchez, 2012, 2013), as well as at the municipal level in places such as Pasto (Bastidas & Muñoz, 2011), Antioquia (Correa et al., 2014), Medellín (Peláez & Usma, 2017; Roldán & Peláez, 2017; Usma, 2015), Bogotá (Dávila Pérez, 2013; Parra, 2009; Quintero & Guerrero, 2013), and Cali (Cárdenas & Chaves, 2013; Cárdenas & Hernández, 2012; Miranda & Echeverry, 2010, 2011), have demonstrated that the acquisition of a communicative competence in English continues to be the privilege of a few and a challenge not only for the National Ministry of Education but for all school stakeholders. These studies show that, on top of a wide range of academic and social factors that affect teachers and students, part of the failure in getting good results has to do with the lack of a connection between the policies and programs formulated and the reality experienced by educational communities in the different regions of the country (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sanchez, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This chapter seeks to present epistemological and conceptual underpinnings for the interpretation of language policies that serve as basis for the conception of teachers as policy makers and political agents. Both research projects addressed in this paper were conducted under the same theoretical perspective. Drawing on previous studies on *policy appropriation* (Peláez & Usma, 2017; Usma, 2015), these studies embraced a comparative, critical, and sociocultural perspective on the study of foreign language policy. This perspective recognizes that language education policy in Colombia responds to transnational policy agendas, which are appropriated (Levinson, 2004; Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009; Sutton & Levinson, 2001) and then reconfigured (Hart, 2002) across institutional levels according to the actual conditions, needs, and interests of the local communities and school actors (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

The critical, sociocultural perspective acknowledges the multiple layers of governance and agents inside and outside schools interplaying in policymaking processes, and it considers their active roles in final policy implementation (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). From this perspective, I embrace a concept of education policy that goes beyond the idea that policy is formulated to simply solve a problem. Whereas policies are initially written by government experts, the negotiation, interpretation, and resolution of struggles related to policy enactment involves many groups and actors. As Ball et al. (2012) explained, "in this sense, policymaking is a democratic, diverse and contested process, subject to different interpretations" (p. 2).

This is how the concept of policy appropriation gives relevance to the agency and importance of education actors, whether as teachers or administrators, because their practices represent the policies, as explained by Levinson and Sutton (2001) and elaborated upon by Peláez and Usma (2017). In line with the concept of appropriation and the democratic nature of the policy making process, education actors are policy makers rather than passive implementers (Menken & García, 2010); therefore, "language policies cannot be truly understood without studying actual practices" (Menken & García, 2010, p. 2).

Furthermore, this concept of appropriation, which highlights the role teachers play in the final implementation of language polices, bears a connection to Kumaravadivelu's (2012) post-method theory. He introduces this concept in opposition to the technicist model, where language teachers' "primary role in the classroom is to function like a conduit, channeling the flow of information from one end of the educational spectrum (i.e., the expert) to the other (i.e., the learner) without significantly altering the content of information" (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 8). This concept was

also presented long before by Freire (1974). For him, education is an emancipatory process that should help people to become transforming agents of their social reality. Thus, people become subjects instead of objects of their own history. He wrote:

> Routine action is guided primarily by an uncritical belief in tradition, and an unfailing obedience to authority, whereas reflective action is prompted by a conscious and cautious consideration of any belief or practice in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads. (Freire, 1974, p. 10)

Consequently, language policy appropriation connotes critical awareness as a dynamic process necessary in today's teacher preparation programs. Since policy language flourished in Colombia to promote and instill in citizens the importance of English to be competitive in a globalized world, it is imperative to educate teachers to respond critically to and re-create those language policies according to the needs of the country. As Zeichner (2008) stated,

> If a teacher never questions the goals and the values that guide his or her work, the context in which he or she teaches, or never examines his or her assumptions, then it is our belief that this individual is not engaged in reflective teaching. (p. 332)

In conclusion, Zeichner's study considers policy as a social practice and school actors as policy makers who exercise agency in their contexts. Ball et al.(2012) argued that context and social interaction are relevant, and it is precisely within these diverse and complex contexts that education polices are "made sense of, mediated and struggled over, and sometimes ignored" (p. 3). Policy involves innovative processes beyond their passive implementation. The interpretation and re-contextualization of regulations, initiatives, laws, and plans demand positionality and creativity from actors at every level of education, including the bottom of the school system.

Report on Research Studies

Recent studies carried out at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó have examined how language policies are perceived and appropriated by various education actors operating in school settings and the implications of language policy reflection within the context of the undergraduate degree in English teaching. In these studies, it was highlighted the need to incorporate the reflective and serious study of language policy into their curricula, treating it as a fundamental strategy in the humanistic and socio-critical education of English teachers. In this section, I present the findings from two of those studies.

Study 1: English-Only or Language Ecology

Problem and Type of Study

Competence in a foreign language is a key component in higher education nowadays. Thus, this first study done under a constructivist paradigm and a qualitative perspective, explored the perceptions and relations of administrators and program directors with language policies and the teaching and learning of English at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. The researchers used for this study a historical-hermeneutic approach (Gadamer, 2008) to understand how the participants perceived the education language policies and their implications in the education of students.

Context and Sample

This study was carried out at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, in Medellín, Colombia. In an attempt to incorporate multiple voices and perspectives as a means to guarantee trustworthiness in the study and reported findings, a group of seven deans and three academic directors were selected as participants. In addition, these participants belong to programs that traditionally have considered the use of English as a key component in their curricula, such as international business, business administration, media communication, among others.

Method

The data collected consisted in a documentary analysis of various institutional regulatory acts promoting the teaching of foreign languages issued by the university's language department and president's office. In addition, seven semi-structured interviews with deans and academic directors were conducted. These interviews were transcribed and translated from Spanish into English and then analyzed using QSR International's NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software. For this analysis, researchers adopted a grounded approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to data analysis, which included processes of open and thematic coding, memoing, interpreting, validating, and reporting.

The study was carried out under the strictest standards for data protection, respecting and protecting participants' identity, integrity, privacy, and confidentiality in the handling of information and always following the international standards of research ethics proposed by the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2011) and the Central Ethics Committee at the university. To protect participants' private information, their names were coded so that only the research team could identify them.

Main Findings

Findings in this study reveal how participants valued a broader understanding of languages in general beyond the instrumentalized vision of English for competitiveness. This concept of *language ecology* is taken from the approach to the study of languages proposed by the Norwegian-American linguist Einar Haugen, who defined language ecology as "the study of the interaction of any given language and its environment" (Haugen, 1972, as cited in Garner, 2005, p. 91). Haugen's extensive writings on linguistics and philology were primarily concerned with the ways in which different languages, in their spoken and written forms, coexist and interact in a multilingual community. Although, the term "language ecology" has only occasionally been used in literature devoted to the study of multilingual societies, I see it as pertinent here because it highlights communal and cultural interactions as constitutive components of any given language.

While some participants in the studies conducted defended English as a priority over all other languages and even recognized other purposes for this language apart from its instrumental value, other participants believed that society demands education in other foreign languages besides English. For some participants, learning other languages is important, though they were aware that the university promotes English as a way to respond to the government's demands. The focus on English as both a requirement and tool did not prevent participants from recognizing other aspects of learning foreign languages: "We are promoting English first because we have to respond to that social demand anyway. But the learning of languages includes all languages" (Participant 3).

The language ecology just described nurtures complex tensions among the perceptions participants expressed regarding the institutional language policy. To start with, they regarded the English language as something more than a useful tool they need to be competitive. Some of these participants recognized the opportunity for personal growth embedded in learning English and considered the learning process an enjoyable activity that motivates them. For instance, some participants have taken advantage of the English classes the university offers to faculty members and teachers because they simply want to learn it: "We had a good time in that class. We felt

comfortable because we were friends and we went to that class every week to have fun together, along with the teacher" (Participant 5). Others expressed their natural interest in the language because of music and films. In the words of Participant 4, "I like English because I love to listen to music and watch movies. I prefer to do that in English." Some even claimed that, despite English being an inescapable obligation, they found that they took on the enterprise of learning English conscientiously, and not only as mere compliance.

These perceptions show policy actors approaching the language from a more humanistic perspective in the sense that it becomes an integral part of the artistic and social development of the person beyond academic or job demands. One participant shared his view of the role of learning English as a component "for the development of any person, not only in the academic world but also in art, cinema, and music" (Participant 7).

In brief, the data show the additive value that English held for the participants because they also praised the language for its pertinence in comprehensive human growth. Moreover, some actors considered knowing English to be insufficient in today's multicultural world. Additional languages such as French, Russian, Italian, and Portuguese carried a lot of importance for some faculty members. Some studied French in high school when the national government required instruction in both languages. Others recognized that learning Russian also adds to the skills citizens need to be competitive, observing that a potential market is emerging for Colombia in the former territories of the Soviet Union. As one participant explained, "the importance of learning Russian lies on a potential market there. There are too many inhabitants that the Soviet Union had in general terms, because they are all divided right now, but they still speak Russian" (Interview 2).

Unlike Russian, Italian and German were seen more as tools for the fields of literature, architecture, and engineering. Learning these foreign languages allowed participants to study Italian architecture from an enhanced perspective, for instance. Meanwhile, learning German served as an opportunity to apply for scholarships and research fellowships in Germany, and learning Portuguese was valued even more highly by participants due to Brazil's position as the industrial hub of Latin America. Its economic development, cultural richness and dynamic tourism industry have made the country a great source of marketing opportunities and thus a high-stakes partner for Colombia. As one participant stated,

> We have a country close by—Brazil is one of the largest countries in America. It is one of the strongest economies in the world. It's a very rich culture, right? And from the point of view of marketing, it is important, right? I hope to visit Brazil someday, not as a tourist, right? That is the interest in Portuguese. (Participant 4)

The existing awareness among participants in defense of learning other languages besides English challenges its dominance in the field of language education. Their testimonials disclose a growing interest in other foreign languages. English still enjoys hegemony among other languages, but faculty members claimed to feel social pressure as well as a general open mindedness towards fostering the learning of other languages at the university. In conclusion, English is considered to be necessary but not sufficient. For participants, the richness of other cultures escapes those who only speak English, as this policy actor illustrates:

> I encourage my industrial engineering students to study German, or to study Italian, or to study Portuguese because, here in Latin America, we have Brazil, which is the industrial mecca. So, it would be worth having exchanges there. It would be worth learning from their productive ways as in Europe. Italy, for example, is shutting down some its companies because of the lack of employees skilled in the language. So, an industrial engineer who goes there has a lot to learn but cannot learn it speaking English because we know that many of these countries defend their roots. (Participant 6)

For this group of university faculty members, the value in knowing additional languages went beyond just instrumental use. To them, knowing languages meant taking advantage of what different cultures can teach us because, even though most academic publications come in English, a significant amount of knowledge can only be found in the heritage of societies that is not translated into English. This situation also applies to a latent but serious concern for Colombian multilingualism and the threat that the imposition of English in its classrooms poses to the heritage of the indigenous languages of Colombia.

> I cannot ignore that Colombia is already a bilingual and multilingual country in many ways. Then, if I oppress those people by imposing another additional language in school, trying to make them lose theirs, those generations will also be lost. (Participant 1)

Study 2: Reflection on Language Polices: Raising Critical Awareness

Problem and Type of Study

The previous study was done with administrative and program directors, exploring their perceptions of language policies with regard to the teaching of English in the curriculum. In a second study, the researchers wanted to explore the relationship between reflecting on language policy and critical thinking. The research question focused on how pre-service teachers completing their practicum

who were taking a language policy course or were participating in a research incubator perceived the relationship between the study of language policy and the development of their critical thinking skills.

Context and Sample

The study was carried out at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. This project was carried out with twelve pre-service teachers who had either taken the language policy course or were participants in the research incubator on language policies. The course on language policy was offered as the so-called *optative seminar*, a course that students from the teaching program have to take in order to graduate, but whose thematic orientation is changed periodically by the curriculum committee according to the needs of the students in relation to the demands posed by the educational context. This course is offered in the last semester of the academic program and it has been taught for the last three years. The research incubators on language policy, on the other hand, is a group of five students who, along with the coordinator, have had the opportunity to study, discuss, and analyze how these policies respond to the political, economic, and social problems of the country, contributing to a deeper reflection and complementing the topics students approach in class.

Method

A focus group and a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. The discussion group and the interviews were conducted in Spanish to favor the participants' involvement in the analysis and argumentative construction. Using narrative inquiry as a qualitative strategy to collect and analyze data, researchers incorporated multiple voices and perspectives to guarantee trustworthiness in the study.

After transcribing and translating the data, they were analyzed using NVivo 10. As in the former study, researchers adopted a grounded approach to data analysis. The ethical considerations intrinsic to qualitative research were also followed, especially because the study was done by researchers who were reflecting on their own experiences.

Main Findings

Participants valued the approaches, content, sequencing, and strategies proposed as part of the language policy course. They also appreciated the opportunity to get familiar with the challenges that teachers face throughout the educational system, including both public and private institutions, rural and urban schools, and language centers and universities. Participants recognized that including these topics in their training made them feel better prepared as professionals. Some of them stated that studying language polices helped them to have a better vision of how English was perceived in the country: "We had a better understanding of how these current language policies influence the perception of English held in our country" (Participant 1).

Participant 2 added the following:

> I would say that the course provided me not only with knowledge about the policies but also with criteria to analyze them and make proposals based on objective (instead of subjective) arguments, not on subjective criticism driven by opinion, because every time we had a discussion, a writing assignment, or even the final task, the teacher always insisted that our reflections be grounded in arguments and supported with examples drawn from the policies, books, and projects. It's through this process that a change can be proposed. How can we propose changes if we don't know enough about these policies?

For some pre-service teachers already working in elite private institutions, the readings, activities, and special guests who visited their classes made them aware of how most of the schools in Medellin and Colombia differ from the reality they are immersed in every day. They learned to identify differences among public and private schools and thus became aware of how, no matter where teachers work, they are part of a broader system. Participant 6 mentioned the following:

> I was able to see the existing breach between the public and private sector. For me, it made me more critical about this matter, so to speak, toward that ideal space where I work. So, eventually, that environment grows on you and then somehow you forget about the other context that is there in the country that is not as privileged or perfect.

Additionally, participants who were doing their practicum in private schools wondered who or what they were educating their students for, Colombian society or the international job market? According to some teachers working in elite private schools, instead of following the national agendas, they follow international education models. Then, many of their students leave the country to study and work abroad. Given the international focus of Colombia's recent education reforms,

these teachers' critical awareness of them and the school system in general has become essential. More than functional English instructors, they must become critical agents that reflect on the role of teachers, education, and English in Colombian society.

The language and education policy course also allowed future language teachers to have a broad overview of past and present language and education policies in the national context and how they have become increasingly connected to broader international agendas. One of the participants questioned this policy approach in Colombia:

> These policies are not taking into account the context in which our country is immersed. Policy makers are not taking into account that these policies were adopted, without any adaptation. They were adopted, simply taken from somewhere else. (FG_4)

Teachers also recognized the importance of this critical awareness in teacher education programs in Colombia. As some of them said, teachers in different education settings have not only to understand these education and language reforms but also initiate conversations with their students about their many dimensions in a country such as Colombia. One of the teachers argued:

> Students should also be aware of these policies. If we are educating students who have a critical standpoint and who are participants in their own process, it's good for them to know at least the generalities of the norms which they must follow for the teaching and learning of English. (FG_5)

This is how the course contributed to the participants' critical awareness and understanding of current language and education reforms in Colombia and how this knowledge and critical consciousness served as a basis for future action as critical agents who need to take a very active and proactive role in the construction of a more inclusive education system and society. One of the participants elaborated on the multilayered nature of this development process and confirmed its importance in the education setting:

> With the Language Policies course, I also see a slightly bigger but necessary challenge in which one must keep in mind what must be taken into account for one's own development. One should keep in mind that, from a social standpoint, we have, as members of a society, that political aspect that we cannot reject or put aside. We can't say, "I'm not into politics." It's not about getting into politics or supporting candidate X or Y; it's about having a critical viewpoint in regard to what's happening politically, not accepting everything happily, or saying "yes, I believe in the PBN. It's good and it will work for everyone." No! We must have the capacity to take a step back and see to what extent these policies that are being implemented are positive, to what extent they can affect what is going on in society, and from there, see how things can be improved. I have always looked at things more from the perspective of how they can be improved, instead

of saying "This policy is bad, this policy is good." We should first look at how it's failing and, from there, how things can begin to be constructed. This course provides us with a capacity to develop that type of thinking or that type of criticism, but from a constructive point of view, not from a destructive one.

In this sense, the development of a more sensitive, critical, and politically active teacher starts with an effort to raise their critical awareness on these crucial matters that affect teachers, students, and education communities in their daily life.

Discussion

Cerletti (2003) claimed that "education would have as one of its fundamental tasks to try to alleviate or mitigate the contradictions of class (or gender, race, religion, or others), that belong to our societies" (p. 300). Although this statement reflects the institution's philosophy, I believe we are still far from accomplishing this ideal. Through a systematic analysis of data gathered about the relationship between language and education policy and its contribution to the development of more critical minds in learners, I have described how the language policy course and the research incubator on language policies offered at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó at the undergraduate level enhanced both pre- and in-service teachers with broader and deeper insights regarding their conceptualization of teaching and the implications of this reflective coursework in teachers' praxis in the context of Colombia's current transformation.

Educating teachers as political subjects requires the student teacher to (a) rethink their own school education and reread their own history to deepen their awareness of their social role and (b) to reflect upon their future practice as teachers with the goal of constructing their own professional identity. I conclude that students increased their competency in self-reflective practices and gained experience in understanding, processing, reconstructing, and adapting language policies in the classroom. However, these programs and accompanying studies constitute only the first steps in this new effort to improve teacher education in Colombia by enabling them to dialectically understand reflection and action as they exert their agency as teachers in the quest for the humanization of Colombian society.

The studies conducted also gathered information on the teaching approaches participants used and how they related them to the analysis and reflection that took place in both the language policy course and the research incubator, including how they saw themselves politically as English teachers. If it is taken as a given, the desirability of an education whose foundation is the recognition

of a human being as an autonomous, perfectible, transcendent, historical, and social person, as it is established in the PEI of Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, then humanistic pedagogies should be paramount to that educational vision. Yet humanistic education in Colombia has been in severe decline due to the intensification of political and economic injustices, poverty, corruption, and violence, coupled with the prevalence of market-driven neoliberal education reforms and language policies that promote teaching for economic competitiveness. An education grounded in the principles of critical awareness, openness, and humanism may be among the best means for confronting the irrationalities, inequities, and injustices of our time. In the following paragraphs I conclude that it is necessary to reposition teachers as policy actors and political subjects to contribute not only to their own transformation but also to that of Colombian society.

Teachers as Political Subjects

Language policy in Colombia has responded throughout the years to a set of international, political, and economic interests that are not necessarily in line with the varying needs of local populations (Pelaez & Usma, 2017; Roldán & Pelaez, 2017). The policies treat English learning as a crucial tool for competitiveness and professional success, but due to the decontextualized way in which the country's language policies have been implemented, language teaching plays an increasingly important role in Colombian society because teachers are at a crossroads where they could either perpetuate the widening of societal inequalities or further help the construction a more equal and just society.

A strictly instrumentalized vision of language leads to an erroneous understanding of the teacher's role as one who knows no more than a foreign language and thus teaches without any connection to social context or understanding of community needs. Other members of the academic community also see the acquisition of language skills in English as a great achievement and its lack thereof, as a failure. There are still many who when given the opportunity to continue their academic training in masters and doctoral programs, do not do so because they fear having to learn English and see it as one of their most difficult challenges.

Hence, these research has contributed to conclude that when we perpetuate the idea that English is essential to academic and professional success and that communicative competence in English makes citizens competitive in the global market, the other essential and urgent condition in the comprehensive conception of the teacher—the political component—is lost. These and similar studies have shown that English teachers in training see their knowledge as the biggest bulwark against the subjugation of their status as social and political actors.

A Contextualized Practice: Teachers for Colombia

The studies in this report reveal the need to promote the political dimension of teachers within the university's language teaching program. It is evident that the course and the research incubator on language policies have impacted pre- and in-service teachers in many ways, such as raising their critical awareness about recent reforms and policies and the extent to which they have been disconnected from Colombia's general context and the needs of its citizens. Reflection on the country's language policies therefore contributed to the empowerment of teachers in terms of pedagogical development and methodological skills. Yet concrete political stances regarding individual and social responsibility in the transformation of our society remain absent.

This first step in the process of embracing teachers' political condition as transformative intellectuals was introduced to us in the concepts of *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* (Edge, 2011). The *reflection-in-action* refers to a rapid response when the expected flow of a class is interrupted for some reason and the teacher has to rethink, improvise, reprioritize, or reorient the direction of the lesson. By exploring such incidents, and by encouraging teachers to do so, I have discovered more about the ways in which knowledge, experience, and thought interact in decision-making and action. This important technique can improve teachers' pedagogical practices. In so doing, as an evaluative strategy, teachers become critical with regard to what they were thinking or feeling and what informed their decisions and actions.

The second concept mentioned above, reflection-on-action (Edge, 2010), refers to a more contemplative type of reflection that takes place beyond the immediate pressures of the teaching moment, when one can think back over what happened and consider what has been learned from it and how it might be used in future planning. This concept has contributed to explore another distinction—introduced by Argyris and Schön (1974)—between *espoused theory*, what we say we believe, and *theory-in-practice*, the beliefs that might reasonably be interpreted to be ours by anyone watching us at work. However, it is essential to understand that "the effects of reflection upon practice have yet to be fully realized, for the creation of reflective learning spaces in itself does not necessarily lead to change" (Clandinin, 2008, p. 389).

As it was presented in the theoretical framework and evidenced in the studies reported, teachers' agency goes beyond the simple fact of implementing policies to be more adequate and useful for students (Montoya-Lopez et al., 2020; Peláez & Usma, 2017; Peláez et al., 2020). Since education would have as one of its fundamental tasks to try to alleviate or mitigate the inequalities visible in our society, pre-service teachers need to be educated in critical pedagogies based on political intentions. Paulo Freire's (1993) contribution is essential when he speaks to us precisely of a pedagogy of the oppressed, not for the oppressed. In other words, a pedagogy that allows

us to overcome oppression; a pedagogy of hope that allows us to build the future; a pedagogy of indignation that allows us not to remain passive in the face of all injustices and inequalities; a pedagogy of autonomy that allows us to build ourselves as subjects; ultimately, a pedagogy of possible dreams. That is, in the construction of this new society, political pedagogies are essential. Freire also said that education itself will not generate social change, but there will not be social change without liberating education. Thus, we are called to act not simply as executors of policies but as actors able to influence the educational policies that exist in our country.

It is here, in this context, perhaps not so different from the reality of many regions in Latin America, where educating teachers to be autonomous educators and critical policymakers is crucial nowadays. In the country's transition out of decades of war and social exclusion, education plays a decisive role as it opens citizens' minds to embrace their reality and become active agents in its transformation. The road to peace-building demands an education that strengthens reflection and dialogue and that stimulates respectful coexistence so as to contribute to forming citizens able to resolve conflicts peacefully.

There are many good teachers, but they are not necessarily good social agents committed to the transformation of themselves and society. This is not in itself a critique of current reflective practice, yet the political component in teacher development is constitutive of teaching, so it should be incorporated as one of the most influential aspects for carrying critical pedagogical ideas forward into action.

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CHAPTER 3

About Reading and Writing: Contemporary Tasks from Diverse Academic Realities in Early Childhood Education

(Acerca de la Lectura y la Escritura: Quehaceres Contemporáneos de Diversas Realidades Académicas en Educación para la Primera Infancia)

Bairon Jaramillo Valencia

Table of Contents

Abstract

The following text presents a set of qualitative results from some studies developed under the node on literacies. These findings focus on teaching and learning procedures associated with literacy in early childhood teachers, as well as in their students. Subsequently, aspects related to pedagogy, didactics, and teachers' training will be presented in this chapter. Among the most used data collection techniques, the implementation of interviews, observations, questionnaires, thematic workshops, and focus groups can be observed; all of them were used with the intention of providing not only descriptive information but also solid data. These research studies were sponsored by Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. One of the most remarkable findings was the low epistemological appropriation of some teachers regarding reading-writing issues, as well as their lack of initiative to look for other ways to teach children how to read and write.

Keywords:

Early childhood, reading, writing, teaching.

Resumen

El texto que a continuación se presenta da a conocer una serie de resultados cualitativos de estudios desarrollados bajo el nodo en Alfabetización Estos hallazgos se enfocan en los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje de la lectura y la escritura de profesores en educación inicial y sus respectivos estudiantes; así pues, todo lo referente a la pedagogía, la didáctica y la formación docente podrá verse en este capítulo. Entre las técnicas de recolección de información se pueden identificar entrevistas, observaciones, cuestionarios, talleres temáticos y grupos focales; todos estos con la intención de proveer no solo información descriptiva, sino también datos sólidos. La entidad que lideró estas investigaciones fue la Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. Entre los hallazgos más significativos se encuentran la baja apropiación epistemológica de algunos profesores sobre el tema de la lectura y la escritura, así como la falta de iniciativa de algunos para buscar nuevas formas de enseñar a los niños y niñas cómo leer y escribir.

Palabras Clave:

Primera infancia, lectura, escritura, enseñanza.

Introduction

The following text is intended to present a set of studies that were a product of inquiries into the matter of teaching how to read and write in early childhood education. These studies, which were developed in the Colombian context, suggest several improvements for the way the child population is taught. Correspondingly, one of the aims of this text is to demonstrate some common conceptions that early childhood teachers have regarding reading and writing and how such conceptions might influence their teaching practice. Moreover, the concepts that readers need in order to comprehend this manuscript (reading, writing, and early childhood)—along with explanations of how reading and writing are conceived—are elaborated throughout in order to provide a better understanding; then, outcomes regarding the theme of the study will be demonstrated through a complete theoretical framework. Finally, the study results will be contrasted with the literature, so that a rigorous discussion will be developed as well; hence, this strict reflection will have the purpose of demonstrating the relevance of the main topic, reading and writing in early childhood education, within the educational field, which contributes to the research node on literacies.

In addition, this text will exhibit all the methodological strategies that supported every result obtained, as well as all data collection techniques and their instruments; likewise, the corresponding paradigms, approaches, types of research, and participants. It is appropriate to mention that all these investigations were mainly backed by a qualitative approach, since some characteristic elements were the flexibility and dynamism during the research process, the interaction with people, their behaviors (attitudes and educational competences) and subjectivities. Consequently, the paradigms—also known as the process of inquiry—varied according to the focus of every single study itself; therefore, some were supported by a hermeneutical approach and others with a critical one. To conclude, the methods employed included case studies, ethnography, historical research, and phenomenology.

It is imperative to mention that all research studies—which worked as a basis to write this chapter—were supported by *Universidad Católica Luis Amigó* and some other entities from public and private sectors; some from national and others from international stages, which will all be referenced afterwards.

The objective of this chapter is to show the most meaningful findings of two different research studies that were accomplished in 2011 and 2012:

- Characterization of practices, approaches and early childhood teachers' conceptions about the reading competence development in ten public schools from Medellín.

- Knowledge and experiences of early childhood teachers in relation with intervention processes: The case of *Fundación Fan*, Stage I.

Among these two studies, one common finding was the low epistemological appropriation of some teachers regarding all that implies the reading-writing issue; teachers that do not want to open their perspective to other ways of teaching children how to read and write, and the necessity of some universities and colleges to include a didactic subject about how preschool teachers must teach children a foreign language (English). Thus, it is evident that these aspects require exposure for the benefit of education itself, insomuch as sharing these experiences can serve as a reference for future teachers. Reading and writing are skills which need strong foundations that should be laid in earlier grades to allow further development in the upper grades, where students who exhibit difficulties to redact basic ideas with coherence and cohesion are likely to copy and paste information instead:

> In a world in which internet is omnipresent and copying and pasting information is an easy option, students who lack writing proficiency are likely to believe that anything they can find on the internet will be better than their own writing. (Carnero, 2017, p. 61)

All in all, teaching reading and writing must be a strong praxis that guarantees learning and enjoyment most of the time, not only for teenagers but also for children; accordingly, students are less likely to plagiarize if they are aware of their own skills, a product of a proper learning process connecting school and home.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Reading

The term 'reading' comes from the Old English *rǣdan*, which has a Germanic source (*raden* and *raten)* that meant 'to guess' or 'to advise'. Later in its evolution, the term was not only related to the act of advising but also to the act of interpreting; hence, it could be declared that reading is the capacity to select, interpret, or take meaning from a specific context because the action of reading is always facing graphemes, images, scenes, icons, gestures, and so on. "The goal of reading is to comprehend meaning. Comprehension depends on the ability to get individual word

meanings. Good readers have to learn to interpret word meanings according to the context" (Hamra & Syatriana, 2015, p. 30). The definition above does not emphasize visual perception as a unique mean to accomplish that fact, since people with visual limitations can also acquire meaning from a text through touch using Braille, the tactile system used to write and read; "Overtime the Braille system has been used by blind people for written communication. Different patterns of raised dots are inscribing characters on paper for writing. Blind people can read this by touching the dot instead of vision" (Chitte et al., 2015, p. 263).

The action of reading is commonly related to vision and written codes; nevertheless, it goes beyond a simple decoding behavior. Reading is a complex action that allows people to communicate, and that communication occurs while a person is inferring meaning from pictures, images, symbols, and their combinations (words, phrases, sentences, clauses, etc.). For Lorange, "reading is an activity informed by the apprehension of images, shapes, patterns and rhythms, which come to be recognized through repeated encounters and remembered forms" (2014, p. 30). Thus, the usual perspective that represents reading as a matter of skillful ways to decode symbols is far from its nature and reality, because in that decoding process the comprehension itself might not exactly be present. In accordance with Darnton (2014), "The differences seem endless, for reading is not simply a skill but a way of making meaning, which must vary from culture to culture" (p. 162). For instance, sometimes at school, children are told to pronounce orally—with a proper intonation and pauses along the text—all the readings the teacher assigns, and there are cases when kids are asked about what they have just read, but they may not answer, since they would usually pay more attention to pronouncing than to understanding meanings.

Reading is a demanding cognitive system that implies complex abilities and dexterities; as Sudrajat (2018) states, "Reading . . . is a complex process by which a reader reconstructs, to some degrees, a message encoded by a writer in graphic language. To comprehend the text, a reader needs two kinds of information: visual and non-visual" (p. 148). Within the non-visual input there is an element which is not very evident at first: pronunciation. Although pronunciation is not the main objective of reading and it is more related to the speaking skill, it helps, nonetheless, in the comprehension of a message; "pronunciation is considered to play an important role in not just supporting the learners' overall communicative power but increasing their self-esteem and confidence" (Hoon & Hong, 2016, p. 265).

On the other hand, reading provides people with some other benefits such as increasing vocabulary and practicing grammatical structures; these are meaningful components for the literary improvement of an individual. Additionally, Chew and Krashen (2017) suggest the following:

There is a growing evidence supporting the Reading Hypothesis, the hypothesis that we not only "learn to read by reading" but also that reading is the source of our reading ability, our "educated" vocabulary, our ability to handle complex grammatical constructions, our ability to write in an acceptable writing style. (p. 2)

To sum up, reading is a significant skill that all people should strive to develop, because it does not only let them be part of a dynamic and postmodern society but it also permits them to recognize more realities, so that understanding the world and its singularities becomes an easier task.

Writing

The second term to be explained is 'writing', which is connected to the previous language skill. Writing has been quite useful for mankind in many ways; one of them has been *conveying information*, since the act of exchanging information through language represents communication itself (Ondondo, 2015).

This kind of representation—which characterizes most languages throughout the world—is based on codes, which systematically allow people from different cultures to express their sets of beliefs and conceptions of the world.

Since its inception, writing has been mainly visual; that is, a variety of signs that could be perceived through sight. Similarly, new singularities and structures in the communication were later established due to the secularity and the polychromy of human life; for instance, the grammar competence, which includes the use of vocabulary, syntax, phonology, and morphology; "Grammar instruction included labeling lexical categories, introducing rules of syntax and morphology, drilling sentence grammar as well as semantics and phonologic exercises" (Al-Khatib, 2017, p. 9). When it comes to language as a system, writing becomes a unit of guidelines that offers the writer and the reader the significant assistance to establish consensus along the text; equally, Rutherford (2014) points out that "seeing grammar thus as a social device compels an interdependence of form and function; grammar is to be understood in relation to semantics and pragmatics, firmly set in the contexts of language use" (p. 20).

For some experts, writing is not a matter of joining consonants and vowels to generate words, phrases and/or sentences; instead, it must be a procedure that has an intrinsic intention of conveying a message or a set of messages. Therefore, cohesion and coherence appear to give

another connotation to this ability, "Writing has several stages and these stages can be performed from the initial to the final stages, and can proceed through again, until the final product is presented" (Widiati & Cahyono, 2016, p. 144).

Additionally, cohesion and coherence—which are subcategories in the textual competence—demonstrate whether a person writes or pretends to write a text, since both go deeper into the practice of redaction: "Textual competence is critical in cohesion, coherence and rhetorical organization" (Abbasian et al., 2016, p. 266). Moreover, in the words of Plakans and Gebril (2017), "coherence and cohesion are writing features that signal connection across a text explicitly or implicitly" (p. 101).

The process of writing generates a text, and that product tends to communicate information that is read by a person (the reader); this act has helped to keep a historical record of numerous cultures around the world and has also allowed the spread of knowledge by breaking borders of all kinds. "Writing is one of the most powerful tools we have for learning and for demonstrating what we know. It facilitates communication and connections with others, and promotes self-expression, self-reflection, and personal development" (Santangelo, 2014, p. 5).

Currently, the importance of writing may still be as relevant as technology, because this skill lets individuals share information through social media, and both are essential in contemporary communication; people need the ability to read to deal with daily life tasks, either for the most basic activities or the complex ones. Hence, the requirement of working on literacy skills must be an endless "duty" for children and adults, due to the dynamics of this postmodern world and the new changes implemented by its reality:

> Writing is not always about life and death, but in the end, writing is always about meaning. From the efficiently constructed grocery list, to the first-grader's tribute to his mother on Mother's Day, to the fourth-grade essay on how chickadees survive in the winter, to the eulogy composed for a dear friend, to the investigation of the effects of global warming on polar bears, a piece of writing has meaning for the writer—and for the reader. (Ginty et al., 2016, p. 34)

All in all, writing is a fundamental aspect of humankind, and thanks to it, knowledge has become more accessible for everybody almost everywhere.

Early Childhood

The third concept to be developed in this section is *early childhood*, a stage in human evolutionary biology. This level is characterized by a series of changes and particular needs that require special consideration by adults, like guaranteeing inherent rights and responsibilities to children. Then, throughout this physical and mental development—while the children's physiological make-up is changing as well as their internal psyche—the familiar environment as well as the educational and the social one must accompany them during the process of living experiences in different contexts:

> Research has revealed that early childhood is a time where developmental changes are happening that can have profound and lasting consequences for a child's future. This emerging science makes clear the importance and complexity of working with young children from infancy through the early elementary years. (National Research Council, 2015, p. 1)

Likewise, Masten and Gewirtz's (2006) study confirms that "early childhood is a crucial window of opportunity for families and societies to ensure that children have the resources and protections required to develop the adaptive tools and relationships they will need to engage the future well prepared" (p. 4).

It could be perceived that, from a global conception, childhood is understood as a condition of the individual in their life, which goes beyond a simple chronological stage marking a time of birth or certain age to also encompass the children's characteristic way of behaving and comprehending the world:

> Early childhood is more than a time of toilet training; it is also a time of learning to walk, run, hug parents, and hold on to toys and other objects. With each of these activities, young children are likely to display some stubborn tendencies. (Feist & Feist, 2008, pp. 252-253)

On the other hand, this period has some peculiarities that make it important and imperative to ensure the proper evolution of upcoming stages. During these years, children accomplish a set of actions that define them; specifically, skills like planning, joining, and classifying information:

> Early childhood is marked by substantial development in the self-regulatory skills supporting school readiness and socioemotional competence. Evidence from developmental social cognitive neuroscience suggests that these skills develop as a function of changes in a dynamic interaction between more top-down (controlled) regulatory processes and more bottom-up (automatic) influences on behavior. (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012, p. 154)

Related to what is mentioned previously, early childhood is a period that goes from birth to around 6 or 8 years of age. This stage of human development is considered the pillar in which all foundations of individuals regarding biology and psychology are set. Equally, Davis (2009) establishes that "As recent studies in fields as diverse such as brain science, economics and health promotion show, early childhood is a high-leverage area with investments in young children having the potential to reap big rewards into the future" (p. 237). It is imperative to clarify that—although there are different conceptions by scholars in this field about chronological aspects in early childhood—the care of children is an element of paramount importance during this stage.

In conclusion, early childhood is the time when individuals set all aspects necessary to have a proper human development; behaviors and attitudes that are supported by education and care.

Research Antecedents

This subsection deals with some recent investigations done in the field of reading and writing competences that are, therefore, relevant for the purposes of this chapter. To begin, one international research study developed in Amsterdam through a qualitative design—with a total of 21 teachers and 469 students participating—revealed in its results the meaningful experience of productive talking time by children in the classroom. According to the study, this task lets children develop reading comprehension as well as some other skills like self-regulation and social acceptance:

> Results from a large-scale study show that productive classroom talk has a positive effect on young children's oral language abilities. This is of great importance as good oral communicative competence is related to later reading comprehension skills and social acceptance and mediates learning, thinking, and self-regulation. (van der Veen et al., 2017, p. 689)

In accordance with what is previously described, when teachers speak in class, they use their voice as an instrument to convey information and their body language too; both are indeed points of reference for their students. Likewise, children are constantly gaining new vocabulary as the teacher is talking to them and they start using and connecting this lexicon with their world.

On the other hand, a longitudinal study developed by Snow and Matthews (2016) in Massachusetts with children from several US schools demonstrated that teachers' talking time has benefits in childhood education. However, the exposure of students to pictures and images from books, the development of collaborative-cooperative activities, and the implementation of expressive arts in class tasks seem to be of greater importance:

Simply focusing on practices in professional development for early childhood educators (talk more, ask more open-ended questions, select interesting words from read-aloud texts to talk about) is demonstrably less effective than providing sets of books related to a theme for reading aloud, identifying the words to be talked about and the questions to be asked, and providing guidance for center activities (act-outs, art, sandbox, or block corner) that echo and thus reinforce the theme of the books. (Snow & Matthews, 2016, pp. 70-71)

As previously established, childhood education demands more effort from teachers, who have to be dynamic and versatile when teaching reading and writing in these early years. Equally, teachers must combine numerous didactic strategies to cope with children's needs, which is why teaching children is considered one of the most challenging assignments for professionals in contemporary education: "Teaching children is a challenging undertaking, in addition to acquiring necessary skills and knowledge in pedagogy and methodology, today's teachers need to have an array of social and emotional-related qualities and behaviors" (Overton, 2017, p. 27).

Furthermore, another vital matter at schools and high schools seems to be the articulation among subjects; this is a complex task because that linking does not depend only on teachers who are in charge of school courses but also on educational institutions and their curricula design. According to this, one study that worked under a qualitative approach and took place in New York, found that "opportunities for children to engage in reading and writing activities should be provided throughout the day in all areas of the curriculum" (Giles & Tunks, 2015, p. 527). In this inquiry, 76 teachers from 11 different educational institutions participated, providing testimonies in several surveys.

The importance of the connection between different subjects to pursue common aims demonstrates the need of providing children with the opportunity to read and write in all of them, insomuch as reading and writing are not just elements to be developed on language courses but a traverse necessity of learning from all disciplines.

Referring to the support of parents/caretakers in helping children improve the skill of writing, the research by Bindman et al. (2014), which had 135 preschool children and their parents/caretakers participating in it, revealed the following results:

Parents may face challenges when supporting children's writing in English because it is a phonologically opaque language: letters are not always associated with the same sound (e.g., cat versus cease) and the same sound can be produced by different letters (e.g., key and cat). This may be a factor to consider when interpreting our finding that parents very rarely encouraged their preschoolers to make connections between sounds and letters. (Bindman et al., 2014, p. 628)

Parents/caretakers and society itself are fundamental to students' learning process, mostly as concerns reading and writing abilities, as these are practices that can be promoted with basic activities at home. The previous was a qualitative study with a descriptive focus. It was developed in a Midwestern city in the United States, and the participants were mainly exposed to observation techniques. Moreover, findings from another research carried out in New South Wales by Mackenzie and Hemmings (2014) were analogous to those coming from the aforementioned study. This inquiry ran under a mixed approach and 60 kindergarten children from six various state-run schools participated in it:

> These results point to the important functions that oral language and certain forms of cognitive processing play in the development of children's ability to hear and record sounds in the words they want to write and writing vocabulary development. These findings clearly have implications for those working with and caring for children. For example, parents/carers and teachers should be talking to their children, reading to them and strongly encouraging them to engage in writing and drawing activities. Such engagement seems to be linked to phonemic skill and writing vocabularies. (Mackenzie & Hemmings, 2014, p. 50)

Finally, having in mind that meaning is the aim of reading and writing, it is relevant to conclude this section by referring to a result from a study by Mackenzie (2014), developed in different metropolitan schools from Victoria, Australia, and in which 228 early years' teachers participated. Among its findings, it emerged that when it comes to reading and writing in early childhood education, the most significant achievement is receiving and giving meaning. Other aspects that surround those skills evolve at a time: "Most participants agree (in survey), that helping children make meaning . . . and express their own ideas . . . should be the highest priority of an early years' writing program" (Mackenzie, 2014, p. 186). Teaching how to read and write is defined by the way teachers do their job; what they consider is relevant for children to learn first is what is going to determine children's processes along their educational experience.

Report on Research Studies

This section will present findings from two different research studies conducted in the years 2011-2012, for they have a strong connection with the literacy node established for this chapter.

Study 1: Early Childhood Teachers' Conceptions about Reading Competence Development

Type of Study and Problem

The reflections about this study emerge after observing how the majority of the teachers who participated in this research study used mainly traditional reading and writing methods during their teaching labor; at the same time, they had only vague notions about analytic reading and writing dynamics. As a consequence, it is possible to observe an unconscious eclecticism that is mostly improvisation as the teachers combined several methods and approaches without knowing the epistemology behind them. Hence, these teaching practices were basically supported by the teachers' experience rather than by any theoretical knowledge about their discipline (Quintero & Valencia, 2018). Therefore, the teachers in this study mixed alphabetic, phonic, syllabic, global and ideo-visual methods but without being aware of their theory and the systematic way to plan and develop them properly.

While the researchers were working on this inquiry, they uncovered multiple truths about the teaching practice of first grade teachers. The study itself took into consideration several aspects of the daily teaching experience; nevertheless, it focused on teachers' conceptions and perceptions about reading skills and everything that concerns this topic.

Context and Sample

The context for this research was the city of Medellín and 10 public schools were selected from all the educational institutions in the city. These were located in three adjacent sectors: *Aranjuez*, *Castilla*, and *12 de Octubre*. The names of neither the schools nor the participants are mentioned in this chapter for ethical reasons. In addition, a distinctive element in common between these places was their social strata, mainly 1 and 2, i.e. the lowest social strata in the city.

Out of a population of 76 first-grade teachers, only 24 were selected to participate in the study. The suitability of the participants was established bearing in mind the following criteria: (1) to have a diploma as a professional in childhood education; (2) to have between 5 to 10 years of experience teaching children; and (3) to have a graduation certificate from Medellín.

Method

This study conformed to the qualitative paradigm, as it sought to go deeper in specific viewpoints and contextualize all the study results. The researchers and the participants developed a good rapport throughout the study; thus, subjectivity was an associated component during the comprehension process. This idea is supported by Padilla (2015), who emphasizes that:

> One of the precepts of all qualitative investigations lies on the perception held by the participants as protagonists of the studied phenomenon. It can therefore be argued that qualitative research is underlined by an element closely linked to perception (subjectivity to some) of the studied object. (p. 103)

On the other hand, the hermeneutic approach guided this inquiry as researchers aimed at interpreting the information (testimonies, attitudes, affirmations, and so on):

> A further invaluable feature of the hermeneutic approach is its sensitivity to the partial and perspectival character of human understanding, which in alerting participants to the fact that they are inevitably viewing the matter under investigation from a particular standpoint, simultaneously enables them to recognise that others who occupy different hermeneutic situations will have different viewpoints and perspectives to bring to bear. (Healy, 2014, p. 284)

This approach allowed the development of a behavioral understanding of findings and a possible explanation of them; a task that was cautiously developed, since the precision of the results depended on this analysis by keeping in mind the context (i.e., the time and space where interviews and observations took place):

> An interpretative hermeneutic approach is applied within the framework of a general qualitative research strategy. The use of the interpretative mode of understanding allows not only to describe the phenomenon, but also to identify the variants of its manifestation and the processes that induce it in the "vertical" of the unconscious. (Lashkova et al., 2018, p. 37)

Moreover, the type of research selected was the phenomenological one, because a meaningful point to analyze was the participants' representations as they answered the interview. According to Mensch (2010) "this, however, is precisely what phenomenology provides. It studies the cognitive acts through which we apprehend the world, observes the constitutive build-up of such acts, and attends to the temporal constitution at work in the genesis of every act" (p. 63). Hence, it was necessary to adjust this study to this perspective (phenomenology), since the teachers' answers and conceptions were relevant through all of the research process itself.

Data Collection. The data collection techniques used during the inquiry were a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and a non-participant observation. The interview allowed the research study to yield relevant results about the distance between theory and practice that was evinced in teachers' answers. Moreover, the use of this technique was relevant for the study because many topics from the inquiry could be explored only through dialogue.

Similarly, the non-participant observations allowed the researchers to appreciate—in a reliable way and without any intervention on their part—how the teaching practices focused on grapheme pronunciation, but without any regard towards textual comprehension. The researchers were also able to witness the students' participation in class while performing the activities proposed by the teachers.

Those were all main techniques used to gather information; in the following segment, the process of analysis will be elaborated in order to provide a wider perspective of this study.

Data Analysis. After designing the first version of the data collection instruments, these were tested for content validity and reliability in order to ascertain their accuracy; consequently, a panel of three experts evaluated every single item in both instruments (the semi-structured interview and the non-participant observation protocol). As a result, four elements from the first instrument were modified as well as two subdivisions in the second one:

> Since content validity is a prerequisite for other validity, it should receive the highest priority during instrument development. Validity is not the property of an instrument, but the property of the scores achieved by an instrument used for a specific purpose on a special group of respondents. (Zamanzadeh et al., 2015, p. 165)

Later, the instruments' criteria validity was verified against that of other instruments that were used as reference, and after comparing other instruments with the ones designed for this study, some characteristics were changed to improve their quality (e.g. socio-demographic data and lexical items). As soon as the researchers finished the aforementioned processes, the tools were ready to be applied.

After the research team applied the instruments, all the interview information was collected in transcription matrixes, and observation sessions were gathered in observation charts; then, a global-unique categorical matrix helped to organize and encode every single testimony and observation from the participants, in order to compare all data with different categories (first triangulation process). Later, all of these findings were contrasted with the literature written by scholars and experts in the discipline of literacy (second triangulation process).

Main Findings

Finally, some pertinent facts were uncovered; an initial finding can be seen in Table 1, which shows a fragment of the non-participant observation protocol.

Table 1. *File-Fragment of Non-Participant Observation*

Activities	The lack of this indicator was observed	It was observed only once	It was observed a few times	It was observed sometimes	It was observed frequently
The teachers teach according to the methods and approaches they mentioned during the interviews.			___		
Synthetic approaches were observed during the teachers' classes.					___
The teachers' practice is supported by the theory/epistemology of their discipline.		___			
The teachers' use technological tools in their sessions.		___			
The teachers link analytic and synthetic approaches.				___	

Source: Personal design. Meaningful selection about teachers' practices during their literacy classes.

Through this non-participant observation, the connections between the teachers' testimonies during the interviews and their actual teaching performance could be observed. This allowed the researchers to realize that many of their assertions were not consistent with their practice.

Regarding this observation, as the teachers were participating in the semi-structured interviews, they made pronouncements such as the following:

> I think there is no need for us to change if things are going well; I mean, I remember many things my teachers taught me when I was young and I admit I use them nowadays and they work for my students as well. (Interviewed teacher 21, February 23, 2012)

Preschool teachers from this study must worry even more about comprehending all that concerns the "new literacy methodologies for children", because it seems that they are teaching the way they were taught, by implementing synthetic tasks: "Although teaching is more complicated than cooking, we frequently hear this saying and often observe that teachers teach in a certain way because that is the way their teachers did it" (Lee & Zeppelin, 2017, p. 334).

Moreover, another teacher answered the following: "I am about to finish in this matter of teaching and the way I teach has shown me good results; parents tell me their children learn a lot… I consider that young teachers have the chance of facing new challenges" (Interviewed teacher 7, February 23, 2012). Teachers who have many years of experience in these schools are less likely to look for different ways of teaching, since they think they have no reason or necessity to do so. Yayli (2017) asserts that sometimes "the experienced teachers do not know much about contemporary methods and techniques of teaching. They just follow the Teacher's Book and do nothing different, which really bores the students in the classroom" (p. 194).

When it comes to parents' follow-up, the majority of participants agreed that "parents or guardians have to support their children throughout their early reading experiences outside the classroom" (Interviewed teacher 16, February 22, 2012). This is a constant request that teachers have made along their experience as educators, because there must be a correspondence between these three constitutional elements:

> School, family and society. Family is the important element close to the development of a good personality. Especially, school as an active progress element uses within the teaching process the most efficient ways to improve abilities to learn and apply knowledge in society. (Nguyen, 2018, p. 2)

All these three factors are necessary to develop not only literacy abilities but also other educational competences required to live in an academic and ethical society.

Regarding the teachers' conceptual and pedagogical knowledge, the interviews evidenced a lack thereof, due to either the teachers' lack of awareness of current education theories or their tendencies for improvisation when talking about these: "what we implement in this school are mostly constructivism philosophies. We make the students—as the word says—construct knowledge together so they work in groups all the time, but in a sense, we combine many methods" (Interviewed teacher 11, February 22, 2012). According to that, an unconscious eclecticism appears to solve the teachers' problems as they face an academic conversation about education, pedagogy, and didactics.

Study 2: Early Childhood Teachers and their Linguistic Registers

Type of Study and Problem

The purpose of this section is to describe some findings about the development of writing competence in early education. To that aim, some results from this qualitative research are taken as the basis. This inquiry was carried out in Medellín during the year 2013; its findings revealed that early childhood teachers write in their daily academic lives using both a formal and an informal linguistic register. Gaps in relation with this dexterity (writing process) are evidenced in the teaching practice; as a consequence, it is fundamental to check institutional, linguistic, and personal standpoints.

Context and Sample

A non-profit organization recognized for its work with socially and economically marginalized communities, *Fundación Fan,* is located near two areas: *El Poblado* and *La Candelaria*. The vision of the organization is primarily to provide holistic education to children under 6 years of age who live in vulnerable zones across the city of Medellín.

The research team used an intentional sampling to select the participants for this inquiry. Drawing from all the early childhood educators from *Fundación Fan*, 50 teachers were selected. They had to meet the following criteria to participate in the study: (1) to have between one and five years of experience teaching in early childhood; (2) to be working with at least one group of children ages 2 to 5 years old at the time the study was conducted; and (3) to have a graduation certificate from a Colombian higher-education institution, obtained in or after the year 2006.

Method

Given the nature of this study's object and purpose, the design of the study was qualitative. It sought to describe participants' practices in their actual scenarios and understand the way they interacted with their environment. Accordingly, the intention was not to generalize the results from this research, since they might not be obtained in other educational settings. In words of Sanders et al. (2017) "foremost among these, qualitative design offers in-depth perspectives that may not be

generalizable" (p. 1066). When understanding human behavior from the participants' perspectives, the reality could be assumed as dynamic; thus, interactions and many other aspects that can be perceived through observation are key for this study.

In addition, researchers took an ethnographic stance, inasmuch as the participants constituted a distinctive community with their own characteristics. Hence, the analysis allowed the researchers to comprehend the participants' behavior in an early childhood education context, and that is one of the elements that distinguish ethnographic studies: "Ethnographic research involves the direct observation of human behaviour within particular settings and seeks to understand a social reality from the perspectives of those involved" (Mahboob et al., 2016, p. 51). In ethnographic studies, participants' interactions and behaviors are the elements that matter the most; thus, researchers are obliged to previously review the participants' customs and attitudes to avoid disrupting them while conducting research procedures. Otherwise, there would be a clash of cultures between the people that integrate the unit of analysis and the researchers that could compromise the reliability of the study.

On the other hand, comprehending and going deeper into the knowledge and experiences of early childhood teachers in relation with intervention processes is a task that must be developed through a case study methodology, since the phenomenon needed to be investigated in real contexts, while the participants were performing their daily disciplinary activities. As McDonald et al., (2019) state: "The case study is always centered around some sphere of practice, some set of activities which are representative of those in which disciplinary professionals regularly engage" (p. 2509).

Data Collection. Data collection techniques are essential for any research. This inquiry used the following:

Thematic Workshop. This technique allows researchers to work with participants in a conversational atmosphere, in which different topics are discussed to elucidate specific facts or situations. In accordance with Ahlers et al., (2019), "the workshop is an integrated venue where location and spatio-social aspects can be discussed in depth with an interested community" (p. 146). This strategy was applied with all 50 early childhood professionals.

Semi-Structured Interview. As suggested in the description of the previous study, this kind of interview allows researchers to vary the way they ask questions according to the way in which the interaction between interviewer and interviewee develops. Similarly, based on the data obtained in the research workshops, the researchers implemented a set of semi-structured interviews with the participants. Hence, this technique facilitated the collection of specific information related to disciplinary knowledge, didactic knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes.

Participant Observation. In this study, the participant observation was understood as an interactive mechanism in which researchers participated periodically in all the activities performed in the environment where the inquiry took place; as a consequence, they were inside the scenario as another member, which allowed the emergence of relationships of trust and the exchange of meaningful information. To sum up, these three techniques let the researchers collect the necessary information to understand in depth what was needed to reach the study goals.

Data Analysis. Data collection instruments were tested for both criteria validity and construct validity. For the first, the research workshop template and the interview format were contrasted against two similar standardized tools. After the analysis, it was necessary to adjust elements in the interview's protocol as the correlation was average; in contrast, the thematic workshop got high criterion validity, so it was not necessary to apply any changes in it. It was important to formally conduct these tests because reliability during the research process largely depends on these forms of validity. In the words of Lodin (2018), "concurrent criteria validity refers to how well a comparison between the measure of interest and an outcome measured at the same time fits" (p. 25). Likewise, construct validity was assessed in order to verify whether the semi-structured interview and its items were measuring what they were supposed to; therefore, a reduced sample (26 early childhood professionals) took part of this preliminary formality and no changes were made after this procedure.

Main Findings

After applying the said validation techniques for this study, we arrived at some meaningful findings that are shown in this section; in order to connect them with the data, several testimonies from opened-ended questions in the semi-structured interview are presented.

First, some professionals asserted that their academic experiences at the university were not good enough for them to produce different kinds of texts. This deficiency was visible in job-related tasks such as planning classes, designing class projects, redacting field journals, or writing stories, poems, and songs for childhood classes. A teacher commented:

> I think that the big trouble I had when I started working as a teacher was the writing matter, mostly when I had to design class projects and students' anecdotes reports. Also, having in mind that I have had different jobs, I needed to follow different guidelines then. (Interviewed teacher 42, September 23, 2013)

Regarding the same issue, another teacher declared the following: "I guess I am not particularly good at writing because I did not use to write academic texts in high school. Afterwards, when studying at university, we did indeed write a lot but teachers' feedback forms were very general" (Interviewed teacher 2, September 23, 2013). Finally, one more participant stated that, "we naturally did not have the chance to work on things to improve our writing, because university courses did not necessarily focus on aspects of grammar; we needed to take extra classes for that instead" (Interviewed teacher 35, September 23, 2013).

Considering all the courses that universities offer in their respective syllabi, there is a high burden of responsibility on each university student, because of the many opportunities they are offered in terms of extracurricular activities and workshops related to reading comprehension as well as text redaction; "Extracurricular activities are not limited by teaching plan, teaching program and educational form, with relatively wide range of activities and rich contents" (Xu, 2019, p. 442).

Additionally, some participants perceived writing, and even reading in all its manifestations, as a sanctioning tool; this phenomenon and others are the consequences of some traditional practices that were applied decades ago in Colombia, such as the practice of assigning reading in the library as an academic punishment. Similarly, an inquiry developed by Reece (2017) demonstrated that: "a sense of loss or lack of direction, disinterest in reading, and reading as punishment were themes common across multiple cases by examining the reading attitudes and experiences of these participants" (p. 3).

Consequently, because most of the participating teaching staff came from this generation, it is possible that apathy towards reading and writing from childhood experiences had been transferred into adulthood. Regarding this, one of the participants stated the following while participating in the thematic workshops: "Although it sounds like an excuse, we were always struggling with reading because we perceived it like a punishment, then our teachers made us write more and more, or they made us go to the library for hours at a time" (Interviewed teacher 17, September 27, 2013). Likewise, another teacher who participated in the workshop tasks added the following:

> When I was a kid, it was common to hear our teachers telling us that if we misbehaved, then we had to go to the library for reading three or four hours non-stop: and not what we wanted to read, but what she made us read, such as boring books about very academic topics, things that children do not like at that age. (Interviewed teacher 10, September 27, 2013)
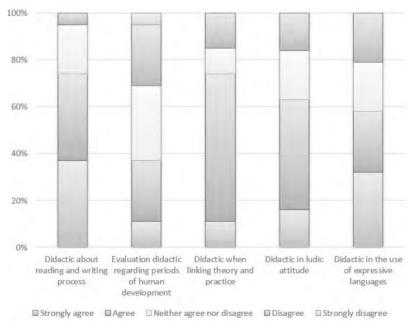
The previous testimonies are clear evidences that sometimes schools convey the wrong impression about reading and writing processes. It is unfortunate that so many teachers-to-be experienced reading as something to be endured in the past rather than as something to be enjoyed.

Discussion

This section presents a brief and critical analysis of the results shown in this chapter; thus, aspects like didactic, pedagogy, and language are going to be a matter of discussion and consideration.

As indicated by Figure 1, teachers consider that their university trained them very well in terms of the development of reading and writing. Nonetheless, their testimonies and observed performances demonstrated something completely different. In fact, they suggest that these teachers seemed to have neither a conceptual and pedagogical knowledge about educational theories, methods, and approaches nor an appropriate and coherent way of teaching children how to read and write.

Figure 1. *Categorical scale of answers about training teaching process that universities provided to childhood educators*

Source: Personal design. This questionnaire was applied to childhood education teachers from ten public schools in Medellín, Colombia, during March, 2012.

Constructivist-analytic perspectives of literacy learning go hand in hand with the natural acquisition of knowledge, inasmuch as they provide children with all the necessary tools to develop their mental capacities. These perspectives, nonetheless, should be adapted to students' needs and contextual realities. Childhood education teachers must be aware that children today belong to "the image generation"; therefore, reading and writing practices are definite examples of dexterities that require suitable training since early ages. Thus, it is imperative that teachers connect what they have learned in higher education with their literacy teaching practices, which should be supported by a solid theoretical foundation; otherwise, an unconscious eclecticism could continue to persist in Colombian classrooms.

Another aspect that deserves to be analyzed is the cooperation between school, family, and society, particularly when it comes to reading and writing processes, because all three have a connatural impact on children's learning. When this link is established, results are observable; therefore, in regular classes some children seem to be more advanced than others, insomuch as parents' follow-up has a strong influence in their learning process:

> Teachers who are working with young children before they commence formal schooling may want to encourage parents to read to their children often and to explain to parents the nature of the sharing-reading strategies that have been found to be most effective in facilitating early literacy. (Sim & Berthelsen, 2014, p. 54)

Furthermore, society may help in this matter by providing extracurricular activities that complement learning at school as well as at home. In fact, this threefold association must be a universal axiom, because it can make a substantial difference in the quality of childhood education. In sum, just as practice needs theory and *vice versa*, school needs the support from parents/caretakers and society as well, since learning has always been a matter of collaboration.

Conclusions

Childhood education teachers need to work on comprehending and researching what concerns the world of literacy education. Synthetic reading and writing methods are not wrong, but using them unconsciously without a clear purpose weakens the teaching labor and leaves it without a pedagogical basis. Teachers have the responsibility of overcoming their pedagogical and literacy deficits by taking advantage of different educational scenarios.

Nevertheless, if there is not any connection between school, family, and society, then education itself will always be regarded as the responsibility of schools. However, the factors ascribed to the failure of the school may be due to the parents' absence in a child's literacy education processes. When parents/caretakers are not a reading-writing reference for children, low levels of reading comprehension and writing-cohesion and coherence will probably be present in the future of today's children.

Finally, when reading becomes a form of punishment, its pleasure will appear neither short nor long term. This is the result of making children read by force instead of choice. As a result, when they are in high school or college, several activities that have to do with this skill are considered arduous or boring.

Recommendations

Colombian universities must include specific literacy courses in most of their degrees, and not only as an optional and elective element in their syllabi, inasmuch as students' academic texts barely reflect a professional discourse with cohesion and coherence in many cases. Any deficit regarding academic literacies may usually be present after students' graduation, when they are indeed working, as it could be perceived in some testimonies from these studies. Such deficit is particularly concerning in childhood education teachers, who are expected to teach children how to read and write; one more reason to implement such courses.

Childhood education teachers have a responsibility to look for a way to reinforce their educational and pedagogical knowledge about reading and writing teaching methods, because the "lack of training at university"— which some teachers referred to—cannot be an excuse for implementing an unconscious eclecticism during classes. Hence, taking advantage of refresher courses at universities is more than an option to have in mind.

In order to make school, family, and society have a constructive dialogue, entities must begin proposing strategies to make it possible. This means that schools, colleges, universities, and mayoralties should implement extracurricular programs that offer students the possibility to develop the four communicative skills and have fun through this process; reading and writing should not be seen as arduous, boring, or irrelevant practices during childhood, lest they become so later in life.

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CHAPTER 4

Reading Didactics for the Development of Critical Thinking in the EFL Classroom

(Didáctica de Lectura para el Desarrollo del Pensamiento Crítico en el Aula de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera)

Claudia M. Uribe

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Abstract

This chapter addresses the role of reading in the development of critical thinking in the EFL classroom by discussing the importance of having a planned route for reading that is directly connected to formative assessment (FA) rather than to the development of a simple skill for testing. Furthermore, it presents and discusses two exploratory research exercises carried out with teachers in Medellin, Colombia, who were interested in giving reading other significance in the process of learning in the EFL context. The studies explored (a) teachers' knowledge and beliefs about reading and critical thinking; (b) the connection between FA in reading and the development of critical thinking; and (c) teachers' perceptions about different resources, as memes, to promote reading and critical thinking in the classroom. The information was gathered by using instruments such as questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and some interactive techniques, all of which were tailored to meet each research-specific purpose. Results underscore the importance of planning a route for reading in the classroom that leads readers to develop critical thinking as a conscious and disciplined process aligned with the use of metacognitive skills.

Keywords:

Critical thinking, formative assessment, reading, reading practices

Resumen

Este capítulo aborda el papel de la lectura en el desarrollo del pensamiento crítico en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera al examinar la importancia de planearla como un proceso relacionado con la evaluación formativa (EF) y no simplemente con pruebas de suficiencia. Además, presenta dos ejercicios de investigación exploratoria realizados con maestros en Medellín, Colombia, interesados en dar relevancia a la lectura en el proceso de aprendizaje de inglés. Los ejercicios exploraron (a) el conocimiento y las creencias de los maestros sobre la lectura y el pensamiento crítico; (b) la conexión entre EF en la lectura y el desarrollo del pensamiento crítico; y (c) las percepciones de los maestros sobre diferentes recursos, como los memes, para promover la lectura y el pensamiento crítico. La información se recopiló mediante el uso de diversos instrumentos, como cuestionarios, entrevistas, grupos focales y algunas técnicas interactivas, estas últimas adaptadas para cumplir el objetivo específico de cada investigación. Los resultados subrayan la importancia de planificar una ruta de lectura que lleve a los lectores al desarrollo del pensamiento crítico como un proceso consciente, disciplinado y alineado con el uso de habilidades meta-cognitivas.

Palabras Clave:

Evaluación formativa, lectura, pensamiento crítico, prácticas de lectura

Introduction

Reading has had a key place in developing the proficiency of the students of English as a Foreign Language. Recent developments in the field of literacy instruction have shifted the comprehension of reading from a simple receptive skill to an interactive process that involves a close relationship between reader and text, regardless of script and physical mediation. Bearing the previous statement in mind, it is essential to explore teachers' perspectives regarding the practice of reading in the classroom.

Reading in the EFL classroom calls for a planned route that allows teachers to (a) use texts that facilitate the connection between course content and students' needs, (b) promote the development of critical reading skills, and (c) communicate experience-based preferences and beliefs about reading. This is a call to rethink reading in the classroom, so it entails more than a set of exercises planned around a specific topic or a linguistic descriptor and becomes a practice through which the reader constructs meaning (Tierney & Pearson, 1986, as cited in Aloqaili, 2012). When students interact with a text, they go beyond simply answering specific comprehension questions or looking for information; these readers get notions that allow them to construct stances in relation to the realities provided by the text. These aspects, which are fundamental to understanding reading in the EFL classroom, require a didactic progression aiming at strengthening the interaction between the reader, their mental processes, and the text (Shihab, 2011, p. 211).

Classroom reading needs to be seen as a continuous, progressive, well-planned activity that caters to the interests and needs of all class members. Reading instructors, therefore, should go from simply selecting material for students to read to setting the conditions so that students can critically explore diverse text types and modalities. This conception of the process of reading in the EFL classroom demands a professional teacher that moves from using traditional textbooks and reading comprehension exercises, to designing an experience through which a diverse selection of reading materials and exercises aims at developing reading abilities as well as critical thinking in the students.

A didactic progression for reading instruction in the EFL classroom is necessarily tied to formative assessment (FA). As indicated by Vaffee (2007), FA "is carried out in the classroom for the purpose of providing students with developmental feedback. Closely related to instruction, FA is done to analyze both learning goals and the instructional processes involved" (p. 63). This type of assessment becomes a strategy that improves the proper selection of material for the classroom and lets students use their cognitive abilities in order to gain text comprehension (López-Velásquez

& Giraldo, 2011, p. 49). FA also improves students' expression of ideas and invigorates their critical thinking, which Mullin (2012) defines as "acquiring, developing, and exercising the skill of being able to grasp inferential connections holding between statements" (pp. 464 – 465).

If reading is treated as a process that develops through a well-planned path for the class and its needs, all the evidence gathered during course assessment will become an indicator not only of the changes experienced by the students regarding the texts and their comprehension, but also of the improvement of skills and attitudes that contribute to the development of critical thinking.

Moreover, this process approach allows for the conscious planning of reading to hold context-specific and cross-disciplinary perspectives and for the inclusion of elements that enhance critical thinking as a process more than an outcome (Brookfield, 1987, as cited in Sanders & Moulenbelt, 2011, p. 43). Such elements encompass an array of affective dispositions and approaches to specific questions, issues, and problems (Facione, 1990, as cited in Sanders & Moulenbelt, 2011, p. 43) presented in the diversity of texts read in the class. Hence, it becomes obvious that FA should be aligned to the specific aspects included in the reading process (Shore et al., 2016).

The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to the discussion in the field of literacy instruction and to outline aspects for a more pedagogical use of reading in the EFL classroom by reporting and analyzing the results from two formative research exercises that explored FA procedures in the reading practices and the use of a multimodal text, the meme, in order to enhance critical thinking.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Freire (1983) stated that "reading always involves critical perception, interpretation and re-writing what is read [sic]" (p. 11). This statement has a strong value in the planned route that reading must have in the English Classroom. Reading is an active construction process based on the reader's world and words, permeated not only by life but also by the texts read as well. Thus, it is crucial to understand that the act of reading is not a situation that takes place only because of a teacher; nonetheless, teachers—as well as other adults—could reinforce the way people view reading and its thousands of possibilities.

Moving from this romantic and complex perspective, it is important to clarify that school-based reading calls for a process that must be stated by the teacher. It should consider students' needs, worlds, and life stories as for the topics to be addressed in the classroom. EFL teachers are compelled to consider their students' lack of linguistic elements in the target language, a fact that often leads them to reduce reading to a basic understanding of vocabulary and literal questions and to disregard the complex yet possible connections and constructions that texts afford; it is imperative to clarify, however, that the way readers are asked to approach the issues present in texts can either enhance or thwart the development of critical thinking in the process of reading in a foreign language (Facione, 1990, as cited in Sanders & Moulenbelt, 2011, p. 43).

Considering what the act of reading involves and how students need to think while reading, it is imperative for the class to become a space where prior knowledge supports new knowledge, an aspect that requires students "to evaluate, draw inferences and find the conclusions" (Shihab, 2011, p. 212) on the elements that are within the text. Teachers must understand what reading instruction entails, that is, the different kinds of texts to be approached in the classroom and all the planning required doing so. They need to see reading not as a skill or a segment in the EFL class but as a progressive, connected, and formally-planned practice.

Every time someone reads, there is "a gap between the writer and the reader" (Shihab, 2011, p. 210), a situation that demands the use of skills and strategies related to reason, rationalization, and inclination, as well as certain dispositions that let readers act according to what the text demands to fill such breach (Barnett, 1997, as cited in Davies, 2015, p. 72). The reader cannot achieve this without specific abilities that are acquired thanks to background knowledge that comes from their personal lives and from their learning process. Therefore, reading instruction in the EFL classroom needs to include strategies to help students solve the problems they face when reading (Lopera, 2014; 2015, p. 132). For Panel (2000) (as cited in Ness, 2016), "Comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies or to reason strategically when they encounter barriers to comprehension when reading" (p. 60). This idea goes to show the unquestionable need for planning the reading act in the EFL classroom.

Reading different types of texts in English is a highly expected ability from students around the world. Colombia is not the exception, as one of the main concerns of the National Bilingual Program is "to form citizens able to communicate in English who can immerse the country in processes of universal communication, global economy, and cultural openness through internationally comparable standards" (MEN, 2006, p. 6). As stated by Gómez Sará (2017), different teaching strategies are used to achieve that goal, particularly in alignment with the Saber Pro National Standardized Test, which aims to verify national undergraduate students' level of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and use of the language yet disregards the analysis of their abilities as efficient readers and users of the language (p. 143).

Concerning the development of these skills and the invigoration of reading as an interactive route through which the reader "actively produces meaning with a set of mental processes" (Shihab, 2011, p. 209), the teacher must instruct pupils on the use of strategies that take them "to reflect on their learning and to enhance their metacognitive processes and confidence to work independently" (López-Velásquez & Giraldo, 2011, p. 50), "Competent readers do not only interact with texts differently, but also monitor and evaluate the state of their comprehension" (Calkins, 1983, as cited in Shihab, 2011, p. 210). For a reader to attain these monitoring levels, the teacher needs to see reading as a way to promote "understanding and retention of content" (Ness, 2016, p .74).

Reading draws on readers' knowledge of the world; for reading to be effective, the reader needs to work in understanding the text and its elements to guess properly (Shihab, 2011, p. 211). The teacher, therefore, needs to plan a clear process of FA that reinforces reading as an act in which several skills and actions take place to aid in the construction of meaning where background is present (Shihab, 2011, p. 209).

Reading is usually assessed in the classroom with materials that target the development of certain skills and the fulfillment of specific descriptors, yet they often disregard the measurement and description of other aspects that affect the reading process, such as "student changes relating to motivation, perseverance, attributions made for reading success and failure, and identity as a reader" (Afflerbach, 2009, p. 3). The previous author also stated that if educators are looking for clear accountability, one of the focuses of assessment must be determining the effectiveness of reading. In connection with the previous ideas, FA should be a class practice that provides chances for meaningful reading that could be developed either individually or collaboratively.

Dunn (2002) (as cited in Sapungan et al., 2016) affirmed that students fail to read meaningfully not necessarily because of the curriculum, but because of the teachers' methodological approach to teaching reading, particularly in regard to the way they develop lessons and give commands (p. 53). There is a strong interdependence between FA and reading instruction. This connection is established by the way FA is used in the class aiming at "providing students with developmental feedback" (Vafee, 2011, p. 63).

Reading as an act and as a process that generates active and meaningful responses from students requires systematic assessment and deep understanding of learning (Poehner & Lantolf as cited in Vafee, 2011 p. 63). This type of reading training demands from teachers an interpretative view of the progression of students as well as of their own in the planning of reading tasks. Furthermore, it calls for (a) teaching reading in English in a more skillful way (Sapungan et al., 2016, p. 53) and (b) intervening in the class with a more integrated view that unifies instruction and assessment (Stenberg & Grigorenko as cited in Vafee, 2011).

Reading must be connected with FA in order to gather data to inform the teachers' instruction with the objective of improving learning outcomes. This goal requires the educator to be a constant inquirer that deepens the daily exercises with the responses gathered from students. Afflerbach (2009) recommended that FA should be conducted with a series of materials that lead to accountability from the basis of a process-oriented reading assessment in which students, as efficient readers, construct meaning while creating new scenarios in the process of interaction with the text. At the same time, teachers refine their classroom assessment practice when the materials they use are not solely designed by publishers or others (Johnston, 1987, as cited in Afflerbach, 2009, p. 5). Summing up, Wiener (2001) (as cited in Sapungan et al., 2016) emphasized that FA in reading should focus on students' success while using their abilities to understand and work with the content being read.

Critical thinking has been a matter of discussion: definitions range from the simple bearing of logical argumentation to thinking that transcends the intellectual use of reason. In the following lines, I outline some aspects of critical thinking and its importance when planning the route to reading in the EFL classroom.

When talking about critical thinking in education, the first perspective considers the use of higher- and lower-order thinking skills such as "interpreting, identifying logical fallacies, analyzing cause and effect, synthesizing claims, making inferences and predictions, evaluating and problem-solving" (Bloom, 1956, as cited in Davies, 2015, p. 258). This structural and pragmatic approach when working with reading in the EFL classroom is also the most commonly used because it offers teachers tools to test the reading process (Chamot & O'Malley, 1984; Oxford, 1990).

The second standpoint regarding critical thinking is the *criticality perspective* (Ennis as cited in Davies, 2015, p. 69), which requires that curriculum and teachers' instruction focus on having students develop not only knowledge and skills but also a *critical disposition*. Here dispositions, reason, and inclination are always connected to the way students act. In fact, Barnett (2015) (as cited in Wilson, 2016) further argued that criticality ¨is not just a way of thinking but a way of being and acting¨ (p. 258). All these elements embodied in the criticality perspective become important for teachers to look at their students as readers who have a deep conversation with diverse texts, genres, and resources in the process of constructing meaning and forming clear points of view.

The third perspective is that of *critical pedagogy*. From this approach, students are expected to be responsible and ethical enough to become actively engaged in the community. As readers, they are expected to understand misleading elements of texts (Davies & Barnett as cited in Wilson, 2016 p. 258); therefore, the reader ordinarily takes a position that reflects their perspectives.

In that vein, Davies (2015) claimed that critical thinking had "an individual and a socio-cultural dimension that should be seen as the axes in the model he suggested using in higher education" (p. 43). For Giroux (2010) (as cited in Davies, 2015) the practice of critical pedagogy helps students "develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power, and the ability to take constructive action" especially in relation to education and society at large (p. 69).

The concept of reading as a process and an act directly connected to thinking mandates having a planned route for reading in the EFL classroom wherein students have the opportunity to work and read from the three perspectives for critical thinking drawn above. In any case, "we cannot read without thinking" (Shihab, 2011, p. 209) and "critical thinking is necessarily an intellectually disciplined process" (Scriven & Paul, 1987, as cited in Davies, 2015, p. 46).

Research Antecedents

This section begins with a brief overview of three research studies carried out in Colombia and Venezuela regarding the strengthening of reading and critical thinking in the EFL classroom.

The first is a study by López-Velásquez and Giraldo (2011) carried out with two B.Ed. undergraduate students from a public university in Colombia. This study aimed at identifying the strategies used by the two participants in reading comprehension. The data was collected through think-aloud protocols; the analysis was based on the Glaser and Strauss (1999) constant-comparative method. The study concluded that the readers had three main differences in their reading processes related to number, frequency, and accuracy of the selected reading strategies; at the same time, the quality of the strategies used led the participants to correct or incorrect interpretations of the reading piece, a fact that took the researchers to consider, as an implication, the design of instructive material.

The second proposal by Gómez and Leal (2015) was an action research study conducted at a public high school in Usme, Bogotá, Colombia, with the purpose of developing critical thinking based on Rosenblatt's transactional reading approach (p. 230). Students were reading some selected urban legends that acted as the triggering elements to discuss social conflicts related to their background. The participants were 32 students from 11th grade ranging from 15 to 18 years old. The researchers used field notes and videos to record the critical comments made by the participants and semi-structured interviews to elicit information that did not appear in the previous instruments. The outcomes showed that it is important to select a reading method —the transactional approach in this case— that encourages learners to build critical thinking while interacting with the texts and their classmates. It was also observed that the participants developed a high level of critical

skills when facing conflicts, as portrayed in the urban legends, which fostered a situational analysis based on previous information. As a key element, it was determined that the different classroom practices used in the action research exercise triggered the students' speaking and critical-thinking abilities. In this exercise, researchers also stated the importance of focusing on the design of a reading instructional strategy.

The third study was carried out by Fernández de Morgado et al. (2016) with 94 contributors, from 18 to 20 years old, enrolled in the third level of the *Program of Reading Scientific English* at a university in Caracas, Venezuela. The study aimed at determining the relationship between critical-thinking abilities and reading comprehension of scientific texts in English. The approach was a transverse exploratory research framed in a quantitative approach with correlations. The Ennis-Weir Critical Thinking Essay Test was used to measure critical thinking, and the Departmental Reading Comprehension Achievement Test to measure linguistic competence. Among the findings, it is important to mention that reading comprehension and critical thinking are enhanced when students have the possibility of (a) assessing aspects like logical relations in the text, reliability of the information, and biased or superficial elements; and (b) talking about the text using their own words and ideas.

The most important outcomes from these three studies reinforce the imperative demand of developing pedagogical transformations in the way reading is approached in the EFL classroom, considering it beyond literal comprehension exercises. Reading, on the contrary, should be seen as "an active, fluent process which involves the reader and the reading material in building meaning" (Anderson, 2003, as cited in Albeckay, 2014, p. 176).

Report on Research Studies

The following two formative research exercises were carried out by two groups of students enrolled in the literacies node, from 2017-II to 2018-I[1]. The studies credited to this interest group aimed at finding connections between reading and critical thinking in EFL and the teaching implications that should be considered.

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[1] Academic calendar in Colombian Universities is divided in two semesters: Semestre I: from February to May, Semeste II from August to November.

Study 1: Formative Assessment in Reading Practices

Type of Study & Problem

Ortiz & Vargas (2018) developed a case study, which according to Creswell (2014) is "a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 13). This particular study focused on reading and critical thinking as key aspects of EFL teaching and learning and examined their relation to FA strategies that promote higher abilities in readers from a critical standpoint.

Being reading a common activity in the classroom aimed at helping the language learning progression, its didactic practice could enhance students' critical thinking so long as it is not reduced to simple comprehension exercises but integrated into diverse and carefully-selected FA procedures.

Context and Sample

This study took place in a Language Department of a Catholic University in Medellin. The main focus of this university is to form professionals from a humanistic perspective as well as a community for the practice of intellectual, moral, and social autonomy (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2018). Among others, having English as one of the mandatory courses of the University allows the institution to reach the goal of bringing social autonomy to its students. The Language Department offers English courses as part of the curriculum of all academic programs; therefore, they constitute a requirement for graduation.

Students take courses that are often designed to help them achieve specific English proficiency levels. The ten main English courses based their goals on Colombian regulations for tertiary education, as well as on the Common European Framework of Reference (2001), which is one of the bases for the national linguistics policy: The National Bilingual Program (Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo; MEN, 2009)

The participants selected for this exercise comprised four teachers and their English A1 and English A2 classes, the first two courses of the program where students were expected to: "express ideas about their daily, personal, and family life in a simple an accurate way using specific grammar structures, as well as particular vocabulary, being aware of suprasegmental elements

such as pronunciation and intonation" (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2018, p. 2). Besides, the syllabus established that reading intended to permit the learners to interact with different texts in order to refine opinions and positions regarding the themes studied in the class. Consequently, students were encouraged to use strategies to read critically and thereby perform better when taking standardized tests (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2018).

The participant selection was done through homogeneous sampling, "the purpose of which is to describe some particular subgroup in depth" (Patton, 2002, as cited in Suri, 2011, p. 68) because these students and their teachers belonged to a course in which both reading was proposed as a means for developing critical thinking and formative strategies were at the core of course assessment.

Method

Data Collection. Designing qualitative research is a responsible act for which researchers should meet different criteria to capture and give meaning to the construction of knowledge. Table 1 portrays the different instruments, aims, and data collection process for this first study.

Table 1. *Data Collection Study 1*

Instrument	Objective	Frequency	Source
Observations	To observe class constituents related to reading, critical thinking, and the use of FA.	10 observations per group.	English A1 and A2 classes
Questionnaire	To analyze students' responses when facing critical reading and critical thinking practices in the EFL classroom.	One.	English A1 and A2 Students
Focus group	To get information about aspects like actions, activities, and experiences related to critical thinking and FA in the EFL classroom.	One	English A1 and A2 Teachers
Interactive Technique	To analyze their responses when facing critical reading and critical thinking practices.	One	English A1 and A2 Students
Document Analysis	To identify information related to the pre-established categories such as FA, critical reading, and critical thinking.	Along the process	-English A1 and English A2 Syllabi. - Reading Plan material. - Institutional documents. - Class Planning.

Source: Ortiz and Vargas (2018). Devised by Uribe (2019).

Data Analysis. According to Merriam, "Qualitative research is not a linear, step-by-step process. Data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research" (2009, p. 165). The analysis of the process started by coding the information and understanding the emergent categories that were the onset for other questions to be asked and for new elements to be observed in the

classes. All the transcribed information was marked with codes that permitted its retrieval. In order to keep an ethical posture, information was color-coded to protect participants' identity and ensure anonymity.

Following Creswell's model (2014), categories and themes were part of the analysis in order to subsequently make interpretations. Once all the categories had been established, we corroborated them with the data sources through a careful reading of the applied instruments.

In order to analyze the observations and institutional documents, the researchers designed a series of checklists based on reading strategies (Kuta, 2008) and some language assessment descriptors that were expected to be observed. The surveys and notes taken by the observers were compared against the pre-established categories, which led to the finding of four main correlated categories: *Reading Strategies, Affective Filter, Reading Comprehension, and Instrumentalization.* Concerning the interactive technique, a patchwork quilt, the information it provided was categorized in light of Bloom's higher-order thinking skills (1956).

Creswell (2014) remarks that "the more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life settings" (p. 37). Bearing this in mind, the information recorded during the focus group as well as the notes taken by the team showed some preliminary findings that were connected to the pre-established categories and some new ones. All the analyzed, coded, and narrowed-down information led to the findings reported in the exercise.

Main Findings

Findings in this research study are framed in three main categories: the role of reading in the EFL classroom, students' higher thinking skills, and reinforcement of FA strategies.

Role of Reading in the EFL classroom. Motivation and well-planned class practices are essential elements in learning a language. Yang (2011) determined that "reading is not only one of the main English learning purposes but also an effective means of learning English for all the second language learners" (p. 903). Data showed that reading had an instrumental and limited role in the classroom directly tied to the accomplishment of academic assignments. This limitation restricted students' thinking skills because it reduced their opportunities to express opinions, make connections, and come up with new ideas. Some of the answers from the survey supported the aforementioned statement.

- "I believe [reading is] the most important [skill] because through reading we must accomplish workshops, assignments, and exams" (P2-ALE21).
- It is important, but it does not have much priority; we focus on other topics from a more grammatical perspective" (P3-ALE04).

As stated by some of the students, reading is important in their learning process in general, and it is also a means for accomplishing diverse assignments that reinforce cognitive processes. The information provided by the participants showed their monitoring level and a subtle request for teachers to give reading a more solid position with a clear sequence so as to enrich strategies for language learning and problem solving.

The development of higher thinking skills in undergraduate students' academic performance. The strategies used by the students who participated in this exercise remained in the first three stages of Bloom's Taxonomy (1956): remembering, understanding, and applying. Although most of the students reached the *understanding* stage, which allowed them a basic view of the situations, they were not displaying any higher-order skills required for critical thinking. The following were some of the students' productions that were classified according to Bloom's higher-order thinking skills (1956).

- "In the actual society if we see a woman breastfeeding, we see that as something bad, but, if we see a woman showing her titties, we see that as something good" (IMAGE05-JPG2).

- "This pic shows us the reality of society, a society that spends time in a bad way. Facebook everyday steals our time, valuable time, time that we waste in front of a screen" (IMAGE05-JPG2).

The data analysis revealed that students understood facts from the text and were able to apply the gathered knowledge to current situations, but it was not easy for them to recall the information in the text. These answers and their analysis confirm the importance of planning a reading practice where prior knowledge is the foundation that permits students to move progressively.

FA strategies in the EFL classroom need to be reinforced. Evidence showed that FA is neither stated in the teachers' planning nor observed in their classes even though the institutional policies promote assessment as an integral process for appreciating students' performance (Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, 2018, p. 54). Therefore, this process demands from the teachers the inclusion of formative and summative procedures.

Rea-Dickens (2007) (as cited in Vafaee, 2013) stated that "FA practices provide learners with ample opportunities for language practice through engaging them in collaborative learning activities and offering them self- and peer-assessment opportunities" (p .63). In this study, the teachers mostly focused their assessment on selecting tools, rather than on designing a process that provided students with an environment of constant feedback aiming at developing learning and critical thinking. Some of the following excerpts could exemplify the aforesaid:

- "I think that participation, forums, reading reports, debates, class discussions, role plays […]" (P-JPG).
- "The capacity of reporting what you read, like reported speech" (P-JP).
- "Games, videos, comparison, paraphrasing" (P-MO).

It is crucial to understand that the FA process needs to go beyond keeping track of students' progress or reporting grades:

- "I think that the rubric is the best way to frame the objective of the reading [task], as it provides a clear idea, a purpose to avoid getting lost when grading the process" (P-JPG).

- "Feedback could be categorized and it depends on the teacher, what is the intention. For example, if the teacher is making an emphasis on accuracy, linguistic competence, structure, or fluency, ideas, message. I think that it depends on us" (P-JP).

There is an evident need for revising the conceptualization and implementation of FA when reading in the EFL classroom, so it becomes a key component for providing accurate feedback that leads to the development of critical thinking. This implementation of FA involves a two-way process: it starts with clear planning based on course objectives and requirements, which are mediated by students' interactions with reading, yet it is settled within teaching practices that let students not only answer an evaluative exercise but also monitor their reading experience.

Study 2: The Development of Critical Thinking through Reading

Type of Study and Problem

The second study, carried out by Cifuentes et al. (2018), subscribed to the qualitative paradigm as an exploratory exercise. Robson (2002) explained that exploratory inquiries seek to determine "what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light" (as cited in Saunders et al., 2009, p. 59). Having reading and critical thinking as the key elements of inquiry, the research team explored the perceptions teachers had about the implementation of memes as reading units in the English classroom. For the purpose of this study, the researchers worked with Chesterman's (1997) definition of memes: "units of cultural transmission which contain fractions of realities described through hilarious images" (p. 219). Memes are part of reading, and it is important to consider that communication, especially Information and Communication Technology (ICT), has changed the way reading happens, turning it into a quest to be undertaken in the EFL classroom.

Context and Sample

This research was carried out in two private schools in Medellin, Colombia, where English is taught as a foreign language from six to eight hours weekly and serves as a possibility for the development of critical thinking and problem solving based on the General Law of Education, articles 5 and 92 [Ley General de Educación, 1994.] The participants were 8 English teachers with BA degrees in language teaching and B2-C1 linguistic proficiency based on the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). The sample was also selected because these teachers implemented diverse strategies to work with reading and critical thinking in their EFL classrooms.

Method

Data Collection. In order to explore the participants' perceptions on the topic, the research team designed a plan for data collection chosen according to the complexity and quality of the information needed. As Bell (2010) declared: "your aim is to obtain as representative a range of responses as possible to enable you to fulfill the objectives of your study and to provide answers to key questions" (p.122). The following table presents the different instruments and their specific consideration.

Table 2. *Data Collection Study 2*

Instrument	Objective	Frequency	Source
Documentary analysis	To identify how the fundamental concepts were evidenced in the documents from the schools.	Along the process.	English Area Plan and Lesson Plan
Questionnaire #2	To describe the teachers' perceptions of the research topic.	Once during the process.	Teachers
Semi-structured interview # 1	To explore their ideas about reading through different media and how they can contribute to the development of critical thinking in the process of teaching and learning in a second language	February-March 2018.	Teachers
Semi-structured Interview #2	To explore teachers' perceptions about the reading of memes and how they can be elements that contribute to the development of critical thinking in the process of teaching and learning in a second language	April-May 2018.	Teachers

Source: Cifuentes et al. (2018)

Data Analysis. The analysis of the data was an ongoing, organized, and systematic process through which the researchers started looking for patterns and themes in order to make interpretations, evaluate them, and find answers. All the information was carefully collected and transcribed. After transcribing and organizing the data, researchers started reading and coding. This process was done bearing in mind Saldaña's definition: "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (2009, p. 3). This first coding was related to the six initial categories: (1) reading, (2) critical thinking, (3) memes' didactics, (4) formats of reading, (5) reading of memes as a developer of critical thinking, and (6) online reading elements.

During this first analysis, data drew researchers to the understanding of emergent categories that helped to clarify the information differently and to come up with other findings.

For Bryman (n.d) (as cited in Heale & Forbes, 2013), "triangulation in research is the use of more than one approach to researching a question. The objective is to increase confidence in the findings through the confirmation of a proposition using two or more independent measures" (p. 98). The

data was triangulated in a process considering theory, the researchers and the discussion held. All these carefully-developed steps were key to determine similarities and differences between the data that led to the findings presented in this exercise.

Main Findings

Reading of memes as a way to develop critical thinking. Teachers use memes as readable elements in the EFL classroom because of their characteristics as texts, as they constitute a social strategy, enhance higher-order thinking skills, and include images connected to social issues. These visual literacy elements provide students with a "set of skills needed to be able to interpret the content of visual images, examine the social impact of those images, and to discuss the purpose, audience and ownership" (Bamford 2003, p. 1).

The following answers provided by the teachers during the interviews are some examples that clarify the previous statement:

- "Specifically, I think that I can develop major thinking skills at a high level because it (a meme) allows students to infer, to analyze (,) and to think about the different opinions or perceptions" (InsInt2-TMAV-CCt).

- "I think that [reading] memes could help in the development of critical thinking. [It could also help] to start a dialog about its meaning from different points and perspectives" (InsQT- TMAV- SCRMDCT).

It is essential to remember that one of the national mandates in Colombia is the promotion of higher-order skills to face 21st-century challenges, and memes could become a good representation of what is happening in society to be discussed and analyzed in the classroom. If reading follows a planned didactical route that includes the use of different types of texts portraying personal histories and social realities to enhance students' criticality, the English class becomes a space for the creation of informed opinions, respect, and tolerance; values that are not necessarily learned by only adopting pre-made sets of reading comprehension exercises.

Readable elements connect education to societal issues. If reading is understood as an act that goes beyond exercises related to comprehension, the use of elements like memes represents a tool to allow students to understand the messages expressed within the context in which they

are immersed. This way, reading becomes "a sociocultural component to the extent that the reader deploys his/her previous knowledge when facing a discourse within a symbolic plane and that results in a practice that takes place in a specific context, place, and time in discursive communities" (Muñoz et al., 2016, p. 54).

Using this kind of material, not originally designed for educational purposes, lets students come to a deeper interpretation of current situations within society. Some of the participants' statements clarify these ideas:

- "I think [a meme] connects the girls to jokes [and] to cultural elements, like to what it's really going on in life, and I think bringing [memes] into the language classroom in the school is really [useful] because they are able to develop skills to go out into society and understand how to interact in that way" (InsInt1- TMKH-ECS).

- "We can use them to connect to situations which are happening around the world" (InsQT- TMAP-ECS).

By using carefully selected material, teachers bring students the possibility of reading what the social context presents, and thus strengthen their critical thinking, a key aspect of any transformative education.

Memes could become an effective and purposeful teaching strategy when reading and promoting critical thinking. The participants showed how they diversified, contextualized, and innovated with the use of readable elements such as memes. This fact led the research team to corroborate the importance of adapting new features of communication to the EFL classroom dynamics. Memes bring current social situations to the class for discussion and provide examples of diversity. Sarmiento (2010) established that memes could be used in educational settings to empower students to interact and interpret critically, as well as to engage students in the discussion of ideas in the target language (p. 73). Some of the participants expressed ideas that reinforce this finding:

- "When teaching a FL, the multicultural elements are intrinsic, as well as the social ones [which leads] to understand a different culture and different points of view. As it is said, learning a new language is learning a new way of living and a new culture" (Insint2-TMAQ-ECS).

- "We can use [memes] to connect situations which are happening around the world" (InsQT-TMAP-ECS).

- "These elements will make students more engaged, motivated, and creative in order to increase the development of critical thinking skills" (InsQT- TMAP-ECSI).

All these teachers' perspectives regarding the possibilities brought about by using memes —or other readable elements— emphasize on the need for a context-specific, cross-disciplinary selection of reading material directly connected to the class concerns so as to promote students' deeper participation and active generation of knowledge.

Discussion

Conclusions

It is a demand for effective reading instruction in the EFL classroom that teachers plan an organized route that presents reading as a constant act and as an interactive exercise for the construction of meaning between the reader and the text. For this to happen, teachers need to create a positive learning environment (Chau et al., 2001, as cited in Tung & Chang, 2009) where the focus is not analyzing language structures or developing test-taking skills but rather consciously and coherently displaying "skills, judgments, disposition, actions and critical being" (Davies, 2015, p. 43). Such an environment where not only teachers but also students select different types of texts facilitates the making of meaning between the text's message and the interpretation constructed by the reader in relation to it. Reading should become a constant activity in the EFL classroom where students have opportunities to become assertive and dedicated in the way they address any kind of readable mediator. This transformation implies having reading as a constant part of the class, not solely as a set of activities to promote communication, but as a way for the readers to interact with different types of texts, the ideas they present, and the stories they tell.

For reading to become an active and efficient element in the process of learning and developing critical thinking, it should involve a clear, dialogic, and dynamic process of assessment that provides the classroom members with accountability. The subtle aspects of reading concerning the interaction between the reader and the text cannot be addressed through the use of test-taking strategies or the analysis of grammar and vocabulary in context, as the tasks in the State Examination (Saber Pro) require. Educators need to change their thinking about assessment considering it needs to be "aligned directly with the key areas teachers feel they need to focus on in instruction, or aligned well with concepts or skills specific to their curriculum" (Shore et al., 2016, p. 15). For classroom reading to effectively promote critical thinking, the class should develop well-planned, adequately-paced, context-specific, cross-disciplinary sequences of tasks leading teachers and students to engage in group and individual self-monitoring practices aimed at enriching the meaning making inherent to reading.

Reading must be directly related to the process lived in class with the students. This connection between reading and experience requires the selection and adaptation of materials that display societal elements for the knowledge of the context and the development of critical thinking and criticality in the students. These two elements are essential to educating independent readers that are aware of what strategies strengthen their abilities. Readers and teachers must understand that "critical thinking is necessarily an 'intellectually disciplined process' that goes beyond exercises out of the context and should involve *metacognitive awareness*" (Davies, 2015, p. 46). This redirection of the reading syllabus implies setting in place a didactic sequence consciously aligned during the development of the course program. Reading should not be a randomly planned exercise but a crucial part of the curriculum. The selection of readable texts and reading exercises, which must be part of the didactic sequence used by teachers and students, should also promote deep thinking, analysis, problem solving, and meta-cognition as well as understanding of self and others.

Recommendations

As a recommendation for further research in this node, it becomes important to observe in detail the connection between the act of reading in the EFL classroom and the development of critical thinking. It is essential to look for stronger pedagogical constructions to broaden the role of reading in the EFL classroom from the teacher's perspective so it becomes a conscious act that responds to the aims that are established from the beginning of the class and is not seen solely as a set of disconnected exercises; and for this to be possible, teachers, novice or experienced, need to have a clear formation route regarding the act of reading in the classroom as a personal and as community exercise. This involves the reinforcement of axiological, epistemological and methodological elements that constitute reading as a cornerstone for any EFL classroom. At the same time, it is strongly recommended to consider the value of the findings obtained from these research exercises in relation to the theories that have been essential to instruct teachers about what reading and critical thinking should signify. Reading should be seen not only as part of the linguistic skills to be developed by learners but also as a competence that is required for any task in any classroom or social context.

Having a research node on critical literacies in formative research requires the strengthening of methodological elements to ensure that the research problem is observed deeply. It must grant an accurate exploration of the problem qualities and requirements for the construction of well-supported evidence and theoretical views. To enrich the constructions in this node, researchers should engage in academic conversations with seasoned and novel EFL teachers to raise awareness about the

object of study. The aforementioned pointers should guide the teaching community members to become more active participants and policy makers as to the inclusion of reading into the EFL curriculum from a critical perspective.

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CHAPTER 5

The Practicum Identity Crisis: Threats and Opportunities for Pre-Service Teachers' Professional Growth

(La Crisis de Identidad en la Práctica: Amenazas y Oportunidades para el Desarrollo Profesional de los Maestros en Formación)

José Vicente Abad

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Abstract

The practicum is a key component in language teacher education; however, the identity crisis that student teachers face during this period has not been sufficiently explored in the Colombian context. This chapter sheds light on the nature of the practicum identity crisis and suggests strategies to overcome it. The chapter first examines the theory of teacher identity, focusing on the concepts of teachers' beliefs and identity crises. Then, the author reports on two qualitative studies about the practicum crisis conducted under his supervision by student researchers from Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. In the last section he makes recommendations for student teachers, teaching programs, and teacher educators so they can more effectively address this phenomenon and use it as an opportunity to promote student teachers' professional growth. He concludes that student teachers may be better equipped to face the practicum crisis if their advisors anticipate its appearance and assist them in developing their practical pedagogical knowledge through a systematic process of reflexivity.

Keywords:

Identity crises, pedagogical knowledge, practicum, student teachers, teacher educators, teacher identity

Resumen

La práctica es un componente clave en la formación del profesorado de idiomas; sin embargo, la crisis de identidad que enfrentan los docentes en formación durante este periodo no ha sido suficientemente explorada en el contexto colombiano. El capítulo explora la naturaleza de la crisis de identidad en la práctica y sugiere estrategias para superarla. El autor inicialmente examina la teoría de la identidad docente, centrándose en los conceptos de las creencias y las crisis de identidad de los maestros. Posteriormente reporta dos estudios cualitativos sobre la crisis de identidad en la práctica, llevados a cabo bajo su supervisión por estudiantes de la Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. En la última sección, hace recomendaciones para programas de formación de docentes, maestros en formación y maestros formadores para que puedan abordar este fenómeno de manera más efectiva, empleándolo como una oportunidad para promover el crecimiento profesional de los estudiantes-profesores. El autor concluye que éstos estarán mejor equipados para enfrentar la crisis de la práctica si sus asesores anticipan su aparición y les ayudan a desarrollar su conocimiento pedagógico a través de un proceso sistemático de reflexividad.

Palabras clave:

Conocimiento pedagógico, crisis de identidad, estudiante-profesor, formadores de profesores, identidad docente, práctica pedagógica.

Introduction

Teaching is a highly demanding profession. Teachers constantly face innumerable challenges that put to the test not only their competence but also their identity. In fact, going through critical periods of stress, frustration, anxiety, and self-doubt may be an inevitable component of becoming a successful teacher. Teacher identity crises come in several forms and originate in multiple causes. Although they may appear at any given time, crises are prevalent during pivotal periods in a teacher's life. That is the case of the practicum, when pre-service teachers' ideal selves are pitted against the actual selves they put forth in the context of a real classroom.

Notwithstanding the crisis it may induce, the practicum plays a key role towards ensuring quality in teacher education (Karras & Wolhuter, 2019). Aware of this reality, the Colombian Ministry of National Education recently passed a reform (Res. 02041 of 2016 and Res. 18583 of 2017)[1] requiring teacher education programs to raise the number of practicum credits from an average of ten to nearly 50. Intended to ensure that student teachers accumulate a significant amount of teaching experience before graduation, this measure, nonetheless, forces new generations of teachers to initiate their practicum earlier in their training than their predecessors did. The problem is that any substantial deficiency in student teachers' emotional maturity and pedagogical knowledge could make them even more prone to suffering an identity crisis during the practicum than they already are. In consequence, as younger and younger students enroll in language teaching, the need for programs to be adequately prepared to support them through those critical times becomes more pressing.

Given the importance of the practicum in language teacher education and yet the propensity of student teachers to experience an identity crisis during this period, it is preponderant to investigate this phenomenon in the Colombian context. Understanding teacher identity crises is necessary because the way in which teachers and their communities undertake them can make a difference between a teaching career that is propelled with renewed force and one that is stifled by unresolved feelings of ineffectiveness and inadequacy. With these ideas in mind, I wrote the chapter to shed some light on the causes and characteristics of the practicum teachers' identity crisis and to provide research-based strategies to make the practicum itself a more edifying experience for them.

The chapter, which subscribes to the field of teacher education, comprises three general sections. In the first section, the literature review, I examine the theory on teacher identity. After supplying a broad explanation of the concept, I zero in on teachers' beliefs and identity crises.

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[1] These policies equated the conditions required to obtain the High-Quality Accreditation (HQA) with those necessary to obtain the Register of Qualified Programmes (RQP). In other words, the reform not only heightened the conditions to certify programs' excellence but also made them mandatory for all programs to operate under the law.

Afterwards, I explore the notion of practicum and practicum identity crisis, and then segue into a summary of two research antecedents on the topic. In the second section I report on two qualitative studies about teacher identity crises during the practicum that student researchers from Universidad Católica Luis Amigó conducted between 2017 and 2018 under my guidance to comply with their graduation thesis requirement.

I start the last section by acknowledging both the limitations and the strengths of the studies. By drawing on the results derived from the two previous sections, I then discuss the nature of the practicum crisis and make recommendations for student teachers, teaching programs, and teacher educators so that they can better comprehend the nature of this phenomenon and its implications for teachers' identity construction, and develop strategies to address it so that it can enhance rather than thwart student teachers' personal and professional growth. Last, by focusing on the role of teacher educators, I thereupon delineate some possibilities for further research.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Teacher identity refers to the ever-evolving construction of meaning through which teachers interpret, explain, and construe their personal and professional selves. The identity of teachers is rooted in their beliefs about the world in which they teach and about themselves as teachers. This belief system, therefore, guides teaching practice because it underpins teachers' notions about what a teacher should be like and what teaching ought to involve. Nevertheless, when these beliefs conflict with teachers' reality, an identity crisis may ensue.

Identity crises might be an inevitable—albeit necessary—aspect of every teacher's life; when inadequately treated, nonetheless, they could potentially harm teachers' development. This condition holds true especially for pre-service teachers during their practicum, because it is in this period when they confront, often for the first time, their ideals about teaching and about themselves as teachers with the realities imposed upon them by their initial classroom experiences. In the following section I articulate the concepts of teacher identity, teacher beliefs, and teacher identity crises, particularly during the practicum, to lay down the theoretical foundations of this chapter.

Teacher Identity

As a broad construct, teacher identity could be explained as a teacher's self-concept (Kumazawa, 2013) portrayed through a continually (re)constructed narrative of who they are, who they want to be, and what their story has been in relation to others (Richards, 2015). As any other form of identity, teacher identity is constructed through discourse (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Varghese et al., 2005). Indeed, a teacher's history is a set of interconnected experiences logically organized into a personally significant narrative that ultimately shapes the identity of its teller. Hence, teacher identity could be largely understood as a dynamic and evolving representation of self that emerges from that particular teaching story and the way it is told.

Teacher identity, however, is more than the result of a teaching trajectory. For the story to make sense, it must be constructed within the referential framework of a social community. In that respect, identity is not only personally relevant but also socio-culturally situated. Some researchers (Lu & Curwood, 2015; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Salinas & Ayala, 2018; Varghese et al., 2005) sustain that the construction of teacher identity entails an ongoing negotiation between a person's subjectivity and the particular demands of social and historical contexts that emerge in interaction with others. In fact, teacher identity is wrought out of the tensions between how teachers imagine themselves and how others perceive them; and between what teachers want their teaching to be like and what others expect from it. Consequently, teacher identity refers to the way teachers see themselves over time within a given set of social, cultural, political, and historical circumstances.

For Varghese et al. (2005), teacher identity is not only "crucially related to social, cultural, and political context; and constructed, maintained, and negotiated primarily through discourse," but also "multiple, shifting, and in conflict" (p. 35). Besides being bound to context and shaped by language, teacher identity is multifaceted and fluid.

On the one hand, teachers have multiple identities that are not restricted to their teaching. Teachers' relationships expand beyond the confines of the school: they have family, religious, political, sexual, ethnic, national, and other significant affiliations and bonds that define them as individuals and that come to bear into their teaching. Hence, teachers' multiple identities, which come from relational contexts other than school, influence the way they teach and construct themselves as teachers. On this respect, Miller (2009) argues:

> The negotiation of teachers' professional identities is . . . powerfully influenced by contextual factors outside of the teachers themselves and their pre-service education . . . [Their teaching identity] may be tested against conditions that challenge and conflict with their backgrounds,

> skills, social memberships, use of language, beliefs, values, knowledge, attitudes, and so on. Negotiating those challenges forms part of the dynamic of professional identity development. (p. 175)

On the other hand, teachers' identity is fluid; it morphs depending on specific contexts and interactions. Teachers are ones within the classroom and in front of their students, and yet others outside of it. Their teaching persona takes on a different tinge when they come into contact with colleagues, parents, supervisors, and other school agents. Each school-related setting and interaction calls for a different response and, thereby, for a different set of skills and attitudes. Wang and Lin (2014) state that becoming and being a teacher involves a continuous process in which teachers integrate their personal and professional dimensions in light of how they perceive themselves, how others perceive them, and how they operate in context as a result of these perceptions. Thus, in regard to their identity, teachers continually strive not only to reconcile their personal and professional selves but also to integrate the multiple facets of their teaching into a flexible yet congruous self.

Teacher Beliefs

People's beliefs condense their ideas about themselves, the world, and the symbolic place they occupy within it. Some authors (Clark-Goff & Eslami, 2016; Debreli, 2016) define beliefs as social representations that result from the interaction with the attitudes, expectations, and assumptions of others. Puchta (2010) states that beliefs are "strong perceptual filters. They serve as explanations for what has happened and they give us a basis for future behaviour" (p. 5). In other words, beliefs originate in the way we remember our past; yet they mold the way in which we perceive our present and envision our future. As they substantiate personal and social narratives, beliefs constitute the very fabric of identity. Beliefs, therefore, help people interpret their experiences and ultimately dictate their behaviors.

Every teacher holds a system of beliefs about what it means to teach and to be a teacher. In line with the ideas presented above, teachers' beliefs support their teaching identity and guide their teaching practices. In other words, as suggested by Qiaoyan et al. (2011), the way in which teachers think and behave is guided by their own beliefs. Albeit deeply ingrained, beliefs are not static. They can be modified as a result of deeply moving experiences. Debreli (2016) claims that teachers' beliefs change throughout their careers depending on critical situations they face at specific moments of their lives. Hence, a fundamental shift in teachers' beliefs often comes as a result of an identity crisis.

Teachers' Identity Crises

There are various ideas about what a teacher identity crisis involves. Teachers undergo identity crises when (a) their personal and professional selves clash, (b) ideals about being a teacher run opposite to their actual teaching selves, and (c) their classroom and school reality conflicts with their expectations and beliefs about teaching. Teachers' identity crises often derive from fractures between fundamental dimensions of who they are and who they want to be. In words of Delamarter (2015), an identity crisis can take place "in cases in which the 'personal' and the 'professional' are too far removed from each other" (p. 3). That is, when teachers' non-school related beliefs, relations, and affiliations do not fit with their professional choice.

When teachers' beliefs about teaching are not in alignment with their teaching reality, an identity crisis may emerge. Such crises often reflect an unresolved divide between the ideal and the actual teacher; that is, "between what teachers are expected to be or perform and what they really are or can do" (Vaillant, 2007, p. 12). Varghese et al. (2005) refer to them as tensions between *assigned identity* and *claimed identity* (p. 36, [emphasis added]). Other authors (Richards, 2006; Zimmerman, 1998) refer to these opposing poles of the same socio-psychological phenomenon in different terms. Thus, teachers' *situated identity* (Zimmerman, 1998, p. 90) or *default identity* (Richards, 2006, p. 60) refers to a more traditional and institutionally sanctioned notion of the teacher, whose main functions involve purveying knowledge and exerting authority. A *transposable identity* (Zimmerman, 1998, p. 91) or a *new-teacher identity* (K. Richards, 2006), in contrast, is more commonly adopted by pre-service and novice teachers, as it is more informal and presumably more personal. In this case, teachers emphasize their relationship with students over other pedagogical or institutional considerations. Clearly, many teachers' desire to nurture a positive relationship with students often conflicts with the expectations of schools that require them to keep the order and cover the whole curriculum at any cost. Such conflicts, that tend to be more common during the earlier stages of a teacher's life, generate crises too.

In any case, identity crises are as personal as they are social. They occur in context and often signal discrepancies between individual teachers and the social-cultural settings in which their teaching takes place. Not surprisingly, Pennington and Richards (2016), upon reflecting about teachers' identity crises, distinguish between favoring and disfavoring teaching conditions. Within disfavoring teaching contexts, multiple factors can trigger teachers' identity crises. Mahmoudi and Özkan (2016) and Sadovnikovaa et al. (2016) have identified that major stressors often leading to language teachers' identity crises include (a) problems related to students' attitudes towards language learning, (b) teachers' deficiencies regarding classroom management, (c) teachers' lack of confidence or ability to teach complex linguistic concepts or skills, and (d) supervisors' observations and negative evaluations about teacher performance. For other authors (Delamarter,

2015; Pennington & Richards, 2016), new interactions and settings, abrupt and sharp situational changes, or excessive contextual demands may induce a crisis in which teachers are required to re-negotiate their identity.

The Practicum Identity Crisis

According to Gebhard (2009) "A variety of terms is used to refer to the practicum, including practice teaching, field experience, apprenticeship, practical experience, and internship" (p. 250). The practicum corresponds to the period in which student teachers engage in their first formal teaching experiences. As the practicum constitutes a requirement for graduation, pre-service teachers ordinarily do it under the guidance of both a practicum advisor and a coordinating teacher. The former is usually a teacher educator designated by the teaching program in which students are completing their training; the latter, a professional educator who works at the school agency where students must fulfill their practicum hours.

The practicum is a fundamental phase in teacher training worldwide (Karras & Wolhuter, 2019) primarily because it serves as an initial period of acclimatization to the school culture—to its norms and mores—and adjustment to the demands of teaching. The practicum, however, should not be limited to a merely "practical" experience. Castiblanco (2016) states that the practicum results from student teachers' reflection upon their specific discipline, its inherent pedagogy, and their relation with specific teaching practices, so the practicum should involve a continuous process of reflection that allows student teachers to articulate theory and practice. Furthermore, through the systematization of such reflections, teacher education programs can verify and attest to the integral development of students as professional teachers.

Even though teacher identity crises may arise at any given moment along a teacher's career, they are prevalent during defining moments such as the practicum (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Coldron & Smith, 1999). In fact, crises are foreseeable when student teachers are required to assume a teaching role for the first time, as the multiple elements leading to their emergence are set in place. Delamarter (2015) referred to the crisis experienced during the practicum as "practice shock". The practicum crisis occurs because it is often while completing this component of their training that student teachers' expectations and reality collide for the first time. Some recent studies have already explored this phenomenon under varying contexts.

Research Antecedents

Focusing on the use of student-teachers' self-reflection during the practicum, Ivanova and Skara-MincL·ne (2016) explored the emerging professional identity of 66 pre-service English teachers in Latvia. Through a case study that involved the use of questionnaires and reflective essays, researchers proved the crucial role of the practicum in student-teachers' identity construction. Further, they found that although formal self-reflection proved to be beneficial to this process, many student teachers saw it as a waste of time. Therefore, Ivanova and Skara-MincL·ne recommend that teacher educators clarify with pre-service teachers the procedures to systematically write up their reflections on their practicum experiences and generate discussions with and among students as to the benefits of this endeavor.

In a recent case study conducted in Chile, Salinas and Ayala (2018) explored the identity construction of two pre-service English teachers during their practicum. Data collection involved narratives, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. Participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences learning the foreign language, learning to teach during the undergraduate program, and becoming actual teachers during the practicum. Researchers concluded that pre-service teachers' self-concept is significantly swayed by both their students' and their mentors' response to their teaching.

In summary, teacher identity is as historical as it is contextual, and it is as personal as it is social. It is built through discourse. It is multiple, dynamic, and in constant tension. Even though a teacher's identity is directly expressed in the classroom with students, it is also influenced by the roles teachers perform and the relationships they build, both in school and out.

Identity is rooted on teachers' beliefs about themselves and about the world in which they teach. When teachers' beliefs about themselves and about teaching enter into conflict with their teaching reality, a teacher identity crisis arises. Identity crises may be an inevitable aspect of becoming a teacher, but when inadequately addressed, they can thwart teachers' self-concept and willingness to teach. The literature suggests that teacher identity crises often originate in conflicts between either ideal and actual, personal and professional, or claimed and assigned teaching selves. The following section reports on two studies that explored student teachers' identity crises during their practicum experience while completing their undergraduate degree on English teaching at a Colombian university.

Report on Research Studies

Study 1: Pre-service English Teachers' Professional Identity Crisis

Problem and Type of Study

For Cadavid Rincón et al. (2018), "one of the biggest challenges pre-service English teachers face occurs when they begin their teaching experience" (p. 6). They argue that the experiences that pre-service teachers have during the practicum invariably lead them to change their beliefs about teaching. In this regard, they declared: "As pre-service English teachers we have personally experienced a change in mind towards teaching [since] we began our practicum training and faced the school reality outside the university" (p. 7). For them as well as for other pre-service teachers in their situation, this change of mentality often derives from an identity crisis experienced during the practicum. Therefore, Cadavid Rincón et al. (2018) set out to conduct this project to help other pre-service teachers in their identity construction by providing them with strategies "to cope with possible emerging crises during the completion of the practicum" (p. 7).

Within the broad framework of the qualitative paradigm, Cadavid Rincón et al. (2018) conducted a case study, which Rose et al. (2014) define as a case based on real-life contexts. With a case study research, researchers seek to understand how the case and the specific context in which it takes place influence each other. The study conforms to the interpretive paradigm, which according to Taylor and Medina (2013), "enables researchers to build rich local understandings of the life-world experiences of teachers and students and of the cultures of classrooms, schools and the communities they serve" (p. 4).

Context and Sample

As indicated above, the study was conducted at the B.A. in English Teaching at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. The program, formally created in 1996, started operations in 1998. Over its 20 years of existence, it has had three denominations with their respective SNIES numbers.[2] The first formal curriculum reform led to the program's second denomination in 2010. Between 2010 and 2016, the

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[2] SNIES (Sistema Nacional de Información de la Educación Superior [National System of Information for Higher Education]) is a database managed by the Ministry of National Education wherein the information of all higher-education institutions and programs in Colombia is compiled and organized. The Ministry of National Education assigns a SNIES code number to every university program that has been legally authorized to operate through a Register of Qualified Programs (Registro Calificado).

student population rose from 289 to 905. The program received the High Quality Accreditation from the Ministry of National Education in 2016. This accreditation led to a second curriculum reform that resulted in the third and current denomination.

A major aspect of the reform involved raising the program's number of practicum credits from 12 to 50. However, only students registered under the program's third denomination were subject to this requirement. When the study was conducted, students under the program's second denomination only had to complete 12 practicum credits, corresponding to four courses. In each course, besides taking classes at the university, practicum students were expected to complete eight hours of practicum per week over a 16-week period at the designated school agencies.

Participants had to be completing their practicum for the English teaching program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. Using this basic criterion sampling (Patton, 2001), researchers selected 11 pre-service English teachers from four different practicum levels. At the time, participants lived in middle-class households (social strata 3 or 4) and were between 20 to 25 years old. Regarding their English proficiency level, two of them had a B1 and the other nine had a B2.[3] In addition, 60% of the participants worked whereas the other 40% only studied. The participants were doing their practicum in either public or private institutions with students at different levels of education: One was doing their practicum in pre-school; two, in elementary school; two, in middle school; four, in high school; and four, in college. Besides the 11 practicum students, one advisor from the third practicum level participated in the study.

Method

The study was carried out in two stages. First, researchers conducted semi structured interviews of approximately 30 minutes with each of the 11 participants; then, they held a focus group with only four student teachers to verify the hypotheses drawn from the initial data. Researchers followed an integrated approach to data analysis (Curry, 2015). Taking into account the theoretical constructs defined in the literature, they established some initial categories. Then they codified the interview transcripts, from which new categories emerged. During the coding process, researchers created memos to draw connections between the different categories. The research team got together several times to discuss individual codes and thus consolidate the category tree. Finally, researchers agreed upon the final interpretation, for which they considered the most relevant results shown by the data, the interpretive memos they had written, and the theoretical constructs they had identified.

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[3] According to the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001).

The validity and trustworthiness of the study were ensured through multiple strategies. Researchers piloted their instruments, whose validity was maximized through reviews coming from both external researchers and the study's advisor. Different forms of triangulation (Burns, 1999) were set in place. The participation of five researchers in both data collection and analysis guaranteed investigators triangulation. Moreover, triangulation of sources was achieved through semi-structured interviews conducted with 11 pre-service teachers and one practicum advisor. As data was collected at different times during the academic semester, time triangulation was present in the study as well. Finally, the focus group at the closing stage of the study served as a form of members' checking (Burns, 1999) to verify the initial interpretations with the participants.

Main Findings

Cadavid Rincón et al. (2018) found that "practice shock" was a recurrent experience among all participants, whose beliefs and expectations about teaching clashed with their initial classroom reality as teachers. They linked their identity crisis to a "confrontation between the theory learned at the university and the reality encountered at the practicum setting" (p. 14). On this regard, one participant declared:

> [The crisis comes] especially with the confrontation between theory and practice. That is where a lot of confrontation takes place. For example, in my evaluation course they spoke to us about many things, but sometimes an evaluation is not enough. Many factors cause the evaluation process not to work the way they teach you there. (Student 2, Interview 2)

Concerning the theory-reality divide, another participant commented:

> I didn't know how to connect practicum and theory. That was… my God! That was the most difficult thing for me in my 1st practicum… I did not see the reality as it was. You know, the theory seems really nice and all, but when you get to the… schools and you see the reality, it is a shock, a big shock because, wow! So what happened here? This is something different to what the academy showed me. (Student 8, Interview 8)

Results showed frustration as an unmistakable sign of the practicum-teachers' identity crisis. According to Sutton (2007), frustration involves the evaluation of a situation that is deemed relevant but whose outcomes are incongruent with one's goals. For Cadavid et al. (2018), practicum teachers feel frustrated because they want to do their best under their teaching circumstances, yet they have very little control over them. Researchers believe this feeling of impotence is heightened

because, prior to the practicum, "the university only provides examples of controlled environments that create in students a feeling of confidence, while in the classroom reality they do not have that control" (p. 16).

The strategies practicum students most commonly used to cope with their identity crises involved reflecting upon the issues causing the crisis, looking for someone to discuss those issues, and adapting to their teaching context. Alternated periods of reflection and discussion came about when teaching circumstances got tough. Discussions were especially useful when practicum teachers had someone with experience in education they could trust, such as a parent or teacher. In sum, the challenges of teaching sparked the reflections and discussions that eventually led participants to be confronted with their identity and to come up with alternative teaching behaviors.

Looking at their experience in rearview, participants concluded that the practicum provided them with valuable teaching knowledge that could only be acquired through experience and that could not be replaced by theory. In this regard, some of them commented during the focus group:

- "It's not enough to know a lot of theory; experience is also necessary."

- "There are things that need to be lived in the context. There is no theory that indicates you how to teach certain things [that are] learned only inside the classroom."

- "Theory does not teach how to do some things, but it is the experience what shapes you. You will learn it there, [but you have] to throw yourself in."

- "The real knowledge you get is inside the classroom."

Besides recognizing the value of practical pedagogical knowledge that is acquired through experience, practicum teachers' reflections helped them re-signify the role of crises in their professional identity construction. In fact, researchers concluded that going through a professional identity crisis is part of the pre-service teachers' construction of their teaching identity. Some of the participants' responses during the focus group were indicative of this enlightened understanding that the reflection and discussion process engendered. One of them said: "Crises help define our identity as English teachers." And yet another one declared, "Crises strengthen you. Crisis is part of life. It is necessary. That's the moment when you can say 'I continue' or 'I quit'".

The above mentioned responses evince two characteristics of the participants' perceptions with regard to the practicum. First, the student teachers' answers show that they recognize the teaching practice as a fundamental source of pedagogical knowledge, which cannot be derived exclusively from theory-based college courses. Second, after engaging in deep personal reflection and group

discussion, these students were able to see the practicum identity crisis not as a perilous threat to their teaching status but both as a natural occurrence during their learning-to-teach practice and as a crucial opportunity to strengthen their teaching identity.

Study 2: Student Teachers' Competence to Articulate Theory and Practice

Problem and Type of Study

Developing the competence to articulate didactical, disciplinary, and pedagogical content knowledge into teaching practice is key for language teachers to become effective practitioners (Pennington & Richards, 2016). For Geeregat Vera and Vásquez Palma (2008), "there should be a coherence and balance between the specialty dimension, which is the theory, and the teaching dimension, which is the practice" (p. 91). In that vein, teachers need to find a balance between the theoretical knowledge learned at school and the practical knowledge of teaching acquired in the classroom (Freire & Macedo, 1995). On this regard, Pennington and Richards (2016) sustain that "an identity as a language teacher is in the best case underpinned by specific knowledge of the content of the field gained not only through experience teaching but also through formal education" (p. 14).

Praxis (Freire & Macedo, 1995; Torres Novoa, 1977; Vaillant & Marcelo, 2000) refers to professionally and socially relevant teaching practice that is supported on theory and that emerges from systematic reflection and inquiry. The articulation between theory and practice is pivotal to the emergence of praxis, which gives way to teachers' practical pedagogical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Golombek, 2009). A key feature of teacher identity, this personal pedagogical knowledge lets teachers reconcile both elements in an evolving dialectics; it develops over time notwithstanding, so teachers grapple with it during the initial stages of their teaching career.

Arroyave Estrada et al. (2018) argue that the "practice shock" experienced by student teachers during the practicum is largely due to their inability to articulate theory and practice. In fact, as suggested by the previous study and by other researchers (Vaillant, 2007; Vaillant & Marcelo, 2000), the identity crisis often experienced by pre-service teachers during the practicum is often tied to the feeling that the theory learned during their initial training is "useless" as it does not supply them with the practical skills they need to deal with the demands of teaching in real classrooms.

Furthermore, the perceived mismatch between the theoretical knowledge received in their classes and the practical knowledge required in schools often leads student teachers to challenge the guidance offered by their practicum advisors. In a few instances some student teachers go as far as to question the suitability of their trainers, whom they presume to be in ideal teaching conditions alien to the challenges they have to face as student teachers in primary or secondary schools. Despite the criticism they sometimes receive, teacher educators play a key role in helping student teachers overcome the difficulties experienced during their practicum and develop their practical pedagogical knowledge. Hence, Arroyave Estrada et al. (2018) focused on exploring teacher educators' influence on the development of student teacher's competence to articulate theory and practice during their practicum.

Within the qualitative paradigm, Arroyave Estrada et al. (2018) decided to conduct an exploratory case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Moore et al., 2012; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013). For Yin (2003, as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008) this type of case study "is used to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes" (p. 548). In addition, Jupp (2006) sustains that researchers who take up an exploratory approach become explorers who engage in discovering and generating theory.

Context and Sample

The project was also conducted in the English teaching program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, during the second semester of 2018. Researchers also chose the participants through criterion sampling (Patton, 2001). To participate in the study, student teachers had to be completing either their third or fourth practicum course. The 12 students who accepted to participate in the study were in the 20-to-23 age range, and their language proficiency level was B2. Instructors, on the other hand, should be actively performing as practicum advisors or tutors; the four practicum tutors who took part in the study were in the 35-to-46 age range, their language proficiency was C1, and all of them had an educational background at the masters' degree level.

Method

For this exploratory case study, the twelve student teachers and four teacher educators completed a questionnaire that asked them to assess four factors: (a) importance of theory and practice in teacher education, (b) importance of articulating theory and practice in teaching, (c) satisfaction with practicum courses offered in the program, and (d) contribution of the practicum courses (and advisors) to the student teachers' practical teaching experience.

In addition, researchers collected narratives from four student teachers in which they reflected upon their teaching identity, their practicum experience, and the contribution of their courses to their ability to articulate theory and practice into their teaching. Besides, two teacher educators were interviewed about their role as practicum advisors. Researchers specifically enquired them as to their contribution to help student teachers articulate theory and practice.

A basic descriptive analysis of numerical data was employed for the questionnaire results. In contrast, narratives and interview transcripts were analyzed through content analysis. Researchers first coded texts using a deductive-inductive approach. After the initial coding, researchers scanned the data again in order to identify patterns, relations, similarities, and differences. Then, they built a categorization matrix in which they assembled the data under larger categories and wrote interpretive memos. At this point, researchers worked in separate teams that later got together to discuss interpretations. Researchers did some members checking (Burns, 1999) by giving back the results to the participants so they could verify that the researchers' interpretations were accurate. As indicated above, researchers applied triangulation of investigators, methods, and data sources to limit the influence of individual bias and maximize the study's validity and trustworthiness.

Main Findings

Results showed that practicum student teachers made clear attempts to implement the theory learned in college into their teaching practice. When some of the methods, approaches, or strategies they were trying out did not work well with their students, they reflected on their pedagogical practices and started to use new strategies. One of the teachers stated:

> I have tried plenty of theories, methods, [and] strategies. Some of them have worked for me, some of them did not, but the truth is that there is no theory, method, or strategy that can work in all classrooms worldwide. When I first started teaching, I used to be a grammar-focused

teacher, but after seeing that when you plan that way students do not really find English useful or interesting, I decided to move on to UbD.[4] (Student 1, Narrative 1, Personal Communication, 2018)

The data analysis led to the conclusion that teacher educators were positively influencing the student teachers' competence to articulate theory and practice. More specifically, data showed that teacher educators were aware of the need to train student teachers in the multiple types of knowledge embedded in effective teaching. On this respect, one of the teacher educators commented:

> None of the subjects in the curriculum can be disarticulated from the final purpose of training competent teachers in the pedagogical, didactical, and professional (dimensions of teaching) (...) all the courses have to aim for us to be competent, creative, and humanistic teachers. (Teacher Educator 1, Interview 1)

Reflecting on the type of competences they try to promote, one advisor said:

> There are competencies which are intentional, and as teachers we try to support the students on the development of those intentional competences, but there are also (unintended) experiences and learning which help us to build knowledge together. (Teacher Educator 2, Interview 2)

Ultimately, data showed that teacher educators intentionally promoted student teachers' competence to articulate theory and practice, and that having them reflect upon their practice is a crucial step towards that goal, as can be noted in the comments made by one advisor:

> The teacher educator's role has several dimensions. First, he is a generator of scenarios for reflection and analysis . . . so that the student can reflect upon them, analyze courses of action, and make informed decisions. On the other hand, [the teacher educator] should be the one who helps make an articulation between the theoretical knowledge and the contextual reality. He must be a guide in solving problems from a strategic, a methodological, and even an attitudinal stance . . . Finally, more than giving them recipes or asking whether they are applying theories or not, I pose questions regarding the way they act in class and the situations that may come out of that acting. (Teacher Educator 1, Interview 1)

Finally, despite the critical positions held by some (16%), most student teachers (84%) evidenced appreciation for the contribution that their advisors made to the development of their teaching competence, as shown in Figure 1. The questionnaires showed that student-teachers were aware of their learning process and recognized that the program provided them with enough tools to

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[4] Understanding by Design. Curriculum design method proposed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005).

successfully carry out the pedagogical practicum. Furthermore, these questionnaires indicated that student-teachers consider that the practicum courses were of high quality and beneficial for them to achieve their teaching competences, particularly as regards the ability to articulate theory and practice. Figure 2 shows student teachers' assessment of their practicum courses in relation to their professional development.

Figure 1. *Student teachers' assessment of their advisors' contribution to the development of their teaching competence*
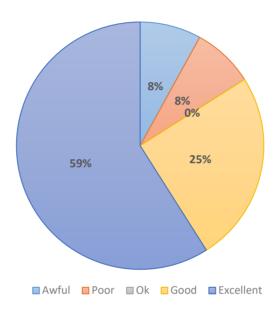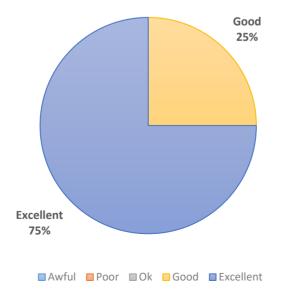

Figure 2. *Student teachers' assessment of contribution of practicum courses to their professional development*

Discussion

Conclusions

The authors of the studies herein reported (Arroyave Estrada et al., 2018; Cadavid Rincón et al., 2018) had little research experience and limited time to conduct their projects. However, the fact that they were finishing their practicum at the time afforded them the insider's vantage point. This advantageous perspective allowed them to have a candid dialogue with their peers, to relate to their experiences, and to confirm their perceptions regarding the practicum crisis. As a result, the analysis of these studies in combination with the revision of the theory led to some conclusions as to the causes of the practicum identity crises. Furthermore, it shed light on both the ways in which student teachers cope with such crises and the ways in which teaching programs in general and teacher educators in particular can assist them in this process.

Pre-service English teachers' major source of identity crises occurs during their practicum. The practice shock (Delamarter, 2015) or practicum identity crisis originates in a perceived conflict between the idealized teaching they envisioned in light of the theory learned in college and the actual—often survival—teaching they manage to put forth in the first stages of their practice in response to the contextual pressures they experience. This initial divide between theory and practice may trigger a deeper conflict that places in opposition student teachers' actual, ideal, and ought-to selves (Kumazawa, 2013).

Recommendations

Recommendations for Student Teachers

Although experiencing a practicum identity crisis may be an inherent phase of student teachers' training and identity construction characterized by high levels of stress and frustration, they can overcome this crisis if they are adequately guided into using the right coping strategies. Furthermore, when properly handled with the assistance of mentors, the practicum identity crisis may lead student teachers to reinforce their professional identity and to reaffirm their choice for a teaching career.

In fact, student teachers are more likely to overcome the practicum crisis and enhance their teaching self-concept (Kumazawa, 2013) when they are able to build up their teaching competence by consciously walking a two-way street. On the one hand, they need to be able to methodically appraise their classroom reality and modify their teaching practices accordingly in order to improve student learning. On the other hand, they also need to deconstruct and re-articulate theory by adjusting it to the needs and requirements posed by their teaching context.

As Ávalos (2004) says, a competent teacher is one who can mix the cognitive resources (theories, concepts) learned in the teaching program with an operating scheme (practices, strategies, techniques) to act in determined situations that happen inside the classroom and that call for teaching modifications. Both teaching programs and teacher educators can positively help students overcome the practicum crisis and use it as a growth point to advance in their professional lives.

Recommendations for Teaching Programs

Researchers from both studies (Arroyave Estrada et al., 2018; Cadavid Rincón et al., 2018) believe that in order to support student teachers in dealing with the practicum crisis, teacher-training institutions should effectively scaffold a process of inquiry by engaging student teachers in critical self-reflection that involves self-analysis and discussion and that is supported by peer and teacher examination and by school-based supervision. They point out that although these strategies may be already set in place, they often are delayed until the later stages of the training period; as a result, at the beginning of the practicum, student teachers "do not have clarity about what they are doing in the classroom and they can get confused" (Arroyave Estrada et al., 2018, p. 13). Consequently, researchers suggest that the practice of critical, personal, and collective reflection on teaching practices be promoted from the early stages of the student teachers' training, particularly at the onset of their practicum experience. On this point, they advocate for an early observation practicum (Cadavid Rincón et al., 2018) in which teaching conditions could be more controlled as a way to reduce the negative effects that "practice shock" may have on student teachers' professional development.

Recommendations for Teacher Educators

Teacher educators, particularly practicum advisors, play a key role in helping student teachers deal with the practicum crisis. They can more effectively do so if they focus on anticipating the practicum crisis to prevent its devastating effects and helping students develop their pedagogical competence through systematic reflection.

As profiled by Vaillant and Marcelo (2000), teacher educators are the professionals in charge of designing and implementing the teacher-training curriculum, which must include the necessary components in order to propitiate a legitimate learning of how to teach. In addition, some researchers (Pennington & Richards, 2016) now advocate for an identity-based curriculum in teacher education so that basic elements of what it entails to be and become a teacher are openly addressed. In light of such propositions, the teacher identity crises should be more openly discussed in teacher education courses, particularly in anticipation to the teaching conflicts that invariably emerge during the practicum. From an emotional standpoint, the practicum crisis is less likely to wreak havoc on student teachers' self-concept if they learn to see it as a natural occurrence that could nevertheless be turned into an empowering experience, provided they get the necessary support and guidance from their advisors.

A fundamental measure in reducing the negative effects of the practicum crisis and in enhancing its potential benefits involves supporting student teachers in the development of their competence to integrate theory and practice. This ability is usually tied to the conscious and systematic construction of practical pedagogical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Golombek, 2009; Pennington & Richards, 2016) in which all effective practitioners must engage. Although developing this knowledge takes considerable time, initial teaching experiences play a key part in its construction and, thereby, in the shaping of teacher identity.

Teacher educators, especially practicum advisors, can significantly help in the development of the teaching competence by promoting among practicum students a continuous and systematic process of reflection upon their initial teaching experiences. Such reflection should allow them to draw on theoretical knowledge acquired in their classes to illuminate the active reconstruction of their practices with regard to the requirements of their school and classroom realities.

For reflection to become not stagnant but transformative, teacher educators must help student teachers to turn it into reflexivity (Kumazawa, 2013; Mora, 2018) that leads them to actively elaborate their own personal practical theories and thereby substantiate the construction of a personally-

meaningful yet pedagogically-relevant praxis. In this regard, Vaillant and Marcelo (2000) state that practicum experiences present student teachers with unparalleled opportunities to inquire into the personal, didactical, curricular, organizational, and social dimensions of teaching.

In conclusion, the practicum crisis is a persistent phenomenon experienced by student teachers as they pit idealized notions of teaching derived from the theory against their initial teaching practices within the context of real classrooms. Student teachers will be better prepared to face the practicum crisis if their advisors anticipate its appearance and assist them in developing their personal practical knowledge through a systematic process of reflexivity upon their practices and identities. Nonetheless, as the practicum crisis only recently has become a matter of pedagogical discussion and analysis, the latter practices on the part of teacher educators have been only incidentally implemented. Therefore, further studies in the field of the practicum crisis should look more attentively into the way teacher educators help student teachers turn a potentially devastating yet foreseeable crisis into an opportunity for inestimable personal and professional growth.

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CHAPTER 6

Formative Research in the Training Process of an English Teaching Program

(La Investigación Formativa en el Proceso de Formación de una Licenciatura en Inglés)

Jair Alejandro Betancur & Diana Marcela Jaramillo

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Abstract

As part of the responsibility of teacher education programs in the country to strengthen the investigative skills of pre-service teachers, research training has become transcendental, since it provides tools for training teacher researchers who can transform classroom realities and meet students' learning needs. Thus, the objective of the descriptive exploratory case study reported in this chapter was to analyze the role of formative research in the teacher training process of the students from the B.A. in English Teaching at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. Results revealed that teacher researchers assertively transform classroom realities; furthermore, the study showed that there is a relationship between teacher educators' investigative practices and their influence on their students. However, data also showed that although there are a few strategies that aim at training student teachers in research, these efforts are not enough to provide the research training that students ask for.

Keywords:

Formative Research, Pedagogical Practices, Teacher researcher, Formative Process, Transformative Teacher.

Resumen

Como parte de la responsabilidad que tienen los programas de formación de maestros en el país para fortalecer las competencias investigativas, la formación en investigación se ha vuelto trascendental en las licenciaturas, pues proporciona las herramientas para formar maestros investigadores que puedan transformar las realidades del aula y dar respuesta a las necesidades de aprendizaje de sus estudiantes. El objetivo del estudio que reportamos en este capítulo fue analizar el rol de la investigación formativa en la formación de los estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Inglés de la Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. Por medio de una metodología cualitativa de corte exploratorio descriptivo se encontró que, aunque existen algunas estrategias que apuntan a la formación en investigación, estos esfuerzos no son suficientes. Los resultados del estudio indican que los maestros investigadores transforman de manera asertiva las realidades del aula; además, señalan una relación entre las prácticas investigativas de los maestros formadores y la influencia que estos ejercen en sus estudiantes.

Palabras clave:

Investigación Formativa, Prácticas Pedagógicas, Maestro Investigador, Proceso de Formación, Maestro Transformador.

Introduction

Nowadays, universities face the challenge of educating teachers to have a more critical and reflective outlook on their practices in order to answer the requirements of a demanding educational system. In accordance with this perspective, these characteristics have become some of the central axes of teacher education programs, as they involve educating teachers who can be part of todays' specific sociocultural and historical moment. In fact, the work of teachers has to transform the educational context.

Under these circumstances it is necessary to redefine the profile of the teacher, moving from a professional with knowledge in a specific field to one with different skills. From this perspective, educating student teachers in research allows them to become proactive and reflective in transforming their practices. For Kumaravadivelu (2003), reflective practitioners are problem-solvers with "the ability to look back critically and imaginatively, to do cause-effect thinking, to derive explanatory principles, to do task analysis, also to look forward, and to do anticipatory planning" (p. 10). Therefore, teachers must develop a series of capacities related to several roles within their practices.

Another challenge that teacher education needs to address is responding to the current needs of society, specifically within the educational context as it requires a transformative perspective. This has become a matter of great concern for education programs and therefore a topic of interest for researchers, who have focused on teacher development programs in order to bring about new changes. However, according to Jurado (2016), the prioritization of research education in universities has not yet been fulfilled; that is, it has not yet become a transcendental part of the tradition in teacher education programs (p. 13). This situation poses a major challenge, since there is a need to focus on specific skills development in teacher education, yet some schools might still need to work on developing such skills within their staff.

As a result of current tendencies and recent legislation, nonetheless, teacher education programs in Colombia must now focus their instructional processes on research as much as on teaching in order to have critical, reflective, and proactive teachers who can effectively adjust their practices to favor student learning. This chapter is concerned with the possibilities of language teacher education to address both language education and research training in light of the current national teacher education policies.

To that aim, this chapter describes a teacher education program that develops research skills. In other words, it refers to research-skills development in pre-service teachers that brings them from a specific knowledge-based education to a research-based teacher professional identity.

Within that context, a teacher educator who is also an active researcher promotes these newly required skills among student teachers. Once pre-service teachers are initiated in research, it becomes part of their professional identity, and they will always reflect and renew their practices thereby. Further, this chapter sheds light on the reality of teacher education programs that lack an appropriate research-skills development plan for pre-service teachers, a situation that leads to the fragmentation of teacher education curricula.

In contrast, teacher education programs in our country are required to focus on developing research skills to favor the integration between research and teaching practice. In this context, schools of education promote the development of research competences in student teachers through strategies that stimulate students' participation in research such as taking part in research incubators, carrying out research internships, attending conferences on research experiences, and participating in studies as research assistants or monitors.

Indeed, it is fundamental that teacher education programs help develop research skills in pre-service teachers under the perspective of transforming education, thus narrowing the gap between what society requires and what the educational system actually offers. Teachers have one of the most important roles in current educational processes: they need to engage in research practices that, fully supported by a theoretical-practical construction, facilitate the teaching and learning relationship in the classroom.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Teacher education programs must be strongly committed to developing teaching as well as research skills adequate to their field. In fact, today the association between both elements must be inherent to the work of teachers. According to Freire (2004), this union is part of the nature of the teaching practice itself. What is needed is for the teacher to be engaged in permanent professional development, in order to be perceived and assumed not only as a teacher but also as a researcher (p. 14).

Restrepo (2003) defined *formative research* as research that has the objective of developing research skills in students, who begin doing research-related activities in order to become part of the scientific research community. Moreover, the way in which the concept of formative research

is defined in comparison with scientific research has been acknowledged for some time. Bolivar (2013) found that some of the dissimilarities between both concepts have come to be accepted by the academic and scientific community. Thus, the terms **novices** and **experts** allude to those members of the academic community who are undergoing research training and skill development, and those who have already had a broad experience in the field of research, respectively (p. 440).

Likewise, for Bolivar (2013) research training is different from research at a professional level. Formative research is considered a step in the career of a researcher —the basis for research in a professional context—, so research training follows the same path as research carried out in professional communities and contexts (pp. 435-438). The CNA[1] (The National Accreditation Council) has a different interpretation of the concepts. Thus, formative research is assumed to be the way in which pre-service teachers develop research-focused skills; that is, they engage in the generation of new knowledge, not with less rigor, but rather focusing on learning everything that research methodology involves. It is worth noting that, in this context, there is creation of knowledge. This new knowledge nonetheless is not considered scientific.

The prior conceptualization indicates that there is a generalized problem within schools of education regarding research training. Jurado (2016) established that the fundamental problem is the lack of research and research-skills development at these schools. In this context, their research groups are very few, and those that exist are classified in lower levels; in addition, budget for research in education is restricted or almost nonexistent. In fact, to strengthen the role of universities and teaching programs in the research training of future teachers it is necessary to make an economic investment so that research educators can effectively encourage student teachers to do research.

Thus, there is a need to transform the education processes of new teachers, which calls for an in-depth restructuring of teaching programs as well as schools of education in Colombia. Including research-skills development in teacher education programs will allow teachers to be proactive about the ever-changing realities of the classroom. New teachers ought to be able to reflect upon their work and transform their practices in the face of the constant challenges they encounter as part of the teaching and learning processes. This reflection should then allow both pre-service and in-service teachers to establish an unbreakable relation between research and teaching practices.

Research in the classroom empowers a teacher to develop creative ways of thinking and apply different strategies for conflict resolution in an assertive manner. According to Rios (2014), research education enhances the professional development of student teachers, since it provides different

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[1] CNA (Consejo Nacional de Acreditación) is an academic organization that has the function of coordinating, planning, recommending, and giving advice on the accreditation of programs and institutions of higher education in Colombia.

ways to understand problems in order to propose timely and appropriate solutions (p. 195). When a teacher develops these abilities, they become indispensable elements to face a wide variety of everyday situations that take place in the classroom.

The Ministry of National Education [MEN]), in Resolution 18583 (2017), stated that the curriculum should also guarantee components and academic areas dedicated to research and educational practice (p. 5). The previous statement suggests that teacher education policies and legislation support this perspective of research-skills development. There is a great need in our educational context to empower future teachers in research studies; and although schools of education have made efforts to develop research in the teaching field, it has not been enough. Cordoba (2016) stated that the different regulations have not been enough to achieve the adequate development of research in higher education, because its research-promotion actions are modest. It is not enough to legislate and demand, it is also necessary to invest and accompany. Similarly, Rojas Betancur and Méndez-Villamizar claim that extracurricular spaces are not enough due to "the saturation of subjects in the curricula that do not leave enough space for the formative processes of investigation" (2013, p. 100).

In this way, teacher education programs must design and develop a whole compendium of strategies within their curricula to develop formative research. Thus, the courses that focus on *formative research* are a fundamental axis in the education of pre-service teachers and their initiation in this field. It is about fostering inquiry over vertical instruction, because faculty that carries out research is able to help students to do research and to become inquirers (Jurado, 2016, p. 15).

Likewise, Bolivar (2013) concluded that research incubators have contributed to developing new generations of researchers who are part of research groups and produce new knowledge on a regular basis within the canons of academic communities. It is clear that the work carried out within these academic groups is transformative, enriching, and innovative. Furthermore, it allows new generations of professionals to be agents of change supported by scientific rigor.

Research Antecedents

In a study on the pedagogical reasoning and the dynamics of pedagogical interaction of pre-service teachers in a teaching program, Salazar (2015) stated that the undergraduate students who participated agreed that formative research condenses the theoretical foundations for the elaboration of the research project required for graduation at the same time that it contributes to research in the classroom.

It should be noted that in the case of pre-service teachers, Salazar (2015) found that teacher educators contribute their knowledge and experience to the development of the research courses and also condition the CPC (Pedagogical Content Knowledge) shown by the student teachers. In the case of new teachers, the most significant aspect comes about in their participation and contribution to teacher education processes for their professional future. In the case of the teachers in charge of the courses, this conditioning is an invitation to reflect upon their research practice and their work in the classroom.

Additionally, one of the great contributions of research education is that it redefines thinking structures by empowering pre-service teachers to explore the world from their own realities. In that regard, Pirella et al. (2015) stated that formative research is determined by the possibility of deploying a set of actions and processes to encourage new cognitive structures in students, allowing them to approach reality with an attitude of multiple readings and interpretations (p. 53).

The education process in formative research has opened the way for the creation of new beliefs in future professionals that allow them to see the process of their professional development in a positive light. In this way, the generation of knowledge is approached through different strategies involving problematization and solution seeking. On this regard, Padilla et al. (2015) found that the interest in knowledge of experienced researchers is associated with the production of results, which for young researchers and research incubators translates into experiences of socialization, interaction, and learning according to specific topics.

The work done by research incubators has had a constructive effect over time, since the basic theoretical-practical elements that support the initiation in formative research are forged there. However, their challenges are endless. This means that a great deal of work is permanently required to train new researchers. Therefore, Saavedra et al. (2015) concluded that it is necessary to define a university policy for research incubators that conceives the articulation of these groups with the curriculum, thus ensuring their permanence and development. As a result, all future professionals would have access to this type of training, which should not be reserved only for a few students but, on the contrary, should be articulated in an interdisciplinary manner.

On the other hand, Fajardo et al. (2015) concluded that from the students' perspective, the implementation of pedagogical, didactic, and innovative strategies used for the teaching of research (a) stimulates autonomous learning; (b) fosters the configuration of an orderly mental structure; (c) develops holistic, discursive, and critical thinking; (d) strengthens competences for the tracking, classification, analysis, and interpretation of information; and (e) familiarizes students with formulating proposals for solving complex problems (p. 562).

A strong criterion that higher education institutions ought to have is the hiring and training of research educators, because the university is the natural context for scientific production. Hence, if teacher educators neither carry out research nor promote others to do so, education will be limited to the same traditional systems wherein knowledge is not built, but merely reproduced.

A recent study by Vilá et al. (2014) cites different ways in which formative research is important for both pre-service and in-service teachers regarding research and professional experience. Researchers found that research training contributes to transforming the teacher into a reflective professional capable of critical thinking to problematize and improve their practices.

From another perspective, in a research study in higher education, Rojas and Aguirre (2015) found that professors play a fundamental role in strengthening research-skills development in the university, a necessity that calls for an alternative analysis on the practice of teaching research that enhances the role of teachers as researchers as they involve their students in their research processes. These researchers argue that teachers are a pillar in the teaching of research because, as they become recognized practicing researchers and active members of research groups, they motivate students with their example and serve as a model for the promotion of scientific development.

In conclusion, it is essential to create awareness on how teacher education should take a look at research in all its dimensions, especially in the university context. The need arises for a theoretical reconfiguration of the curriculum that allows all teachers to do research and in turn train their students through formative research. Thus, the new generation of teachers will be the architects of academic renewal and, therefore, the leaders in new pedagogies that will change today's society for the better.

Report on Research Study: Formative Research in an English teaching Program

Type of Study and Problem

This case study research was carried out from an exploratory-descriptive perspective, within the qualitative paradigm. According to Hernández Sampieri et al. (2006), an exploratory study is carried out to respond to an objective, to examine a topic, or to investigate a problem that has been studied little and about which there are issues that have not been addressed before. Similarly, Hernández Sampieri et al. (2006) defined descriptive research as one that seeks to specify properties, characteristics, and important features of any phenomenon that is analyzed as well as describe trends of a group or population.

Context and Population

The case study was carried out in a language teaching program in a private institution. Participants were 10 teacher educators and 12 students from the program. The 10 teacher educators teach research courses like *Research Project* I and II. All of them had experience both in teaching and research in the field of education, as well as masters' degrees in education, applied linguistics, or language teaching. These teacher educators had had experience teaching these courses previously and all of them were proficient in the language. The 12 students were part of the different undergraduate courses between the seventh and ninth semester. In addition, some were part of the different research incubators of the language teaching program.

Method

Stake (2007) defined a case study research as one that focuses on the particularity and complexity of a particular case, to get to understand its activity in important circumstances. In this study the data was collected and then analyzed in different stages, as follows: a documentary analysis was made specifically of the Program Educational Project (PEP) and the Master Document of

the teaching program for the renewal of the Register of Qualified Programs (RQP); then, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the 10 professors. Likewise, a focus group was held with the 12 students.

The data collection was carried out under ethical standards by protecting the names of participants and making use of all the information for academic purposes. All participants were previously informed of the objectives of the study. They authorized the use of the information provided through the different instruments. The data was analyzed using color coding (Saldaña, 2009) in order to identify recurrent patterns and topics. The instruments were analyzed individually and then contrasted. The themes addressed the importance of research in both teacher education curricula and teacher educators' practices.

The data provided the possibility to triangulate and analyze the information about the general objective and the specific objectives designed in the methodological proposal. The general objective was to analyze the role of formative research during the teacher education process of the students in the B.A. in English Teaching at Luis Amigó University. On the other hand, the specific objectives were (a) to identify the training in formative research proposed in the curriculum of the B.A. in English Teaching: (b) to establish the beliefs regarding formative research of teacher-trainers and students of the English program; and (c) to describe the relationship between teaching and research practices as elements for teacher education.

Findings

Important elements emerged regarding the initial research question concerning the contribution of formative research in pre-service teacher education programs. The study presented the following findings:

First, the efforts made by the undergraduate education program to provide research skills development to pre-service teachers are not enough. Students feel that this effort is not sufficient and they expressed it during the focus group through the following comments:

> **Student 1**: It is not enough because it is precisely the fact that research skills development is not included in other areas [of the curriculum], which creates these myths regarding research and leads us to believe that only certain things, certain areas can be studied.

Student 2: For a final product such as the Final Paper, which is obviously required in the university and in the program, the research part is not very clear within the curriculum . . . throughout the whole program.

Student 3: (...) If there were more contact with formative research during the first stage of the undergraduate courses, these myths could be broken, and the importance of research in teaching could be understood.

The previous statements are a constant in the pre-service teacher education program. For the student teachers, it is clear that there was not a lot of research education as such, but it was rather limited to a few courses, which they considered were not enough to fully prepare them in doing research. Under these circumstances and as a result of several studies (See for example OCDE, 2016; Compartir, 2014), the Ministry of Education proposed a mandatory reform in 2015 though Decree 2450, which was to be carried out between 2015 and 2016 throughout the country. One of the most important aspects in this reform was the emphasis in bringing research and teaching education into the pre-service practicum that must be carried out throughout the process, that is, between the second and tenth semester.

Under these circumstances, it is important to establish that this particular teaching program, following the guidelines of Decree 2450, carried out a curricular reform in which research education went from offering traditional courses to incorporating research into the practicum. In order to achieve such purpose, the program proposed a set of courses concerning teachers as researchers named *Teacher Researcher*. This set of courses, designed to provide initial research skills development, gives pre-service teachers the opportunity not only to prepare for their final paper but also to build a teacher and researcher identity developed during the initial education process based on theory and on the practice of investigative work.

In this way, it is clear that the efforts and the guidelines of the program regarding research at the pre-service level have been renewed. On the other hand, the faculty also contributes to these efforts through the application of different strategies implemented in other courses to foster research skills. In addition, there are research incubators that focus on different topics selected in response to tendencies in the field and that thus provide a wide range of choices for students.

Second, there is a direct relationship between the faculty research practices and their influence on pre-service teachers. In the process of teacher education, teacher educators hold different roles and characteristics; that is, they must be patient teachers, companions, motivators, and passionate role models, but, above all, they need to have a human component which makes them more sensitive in reading the different difficulties of their students. In this context, the pre-service teachers expressed in the focus group:

Student 1: I would say that they hold an especially positive influence . . . In that specific professor, one sees the figure of the teacher educator as a researcher [and] after all, as members of research incubators, [becoming researchers] is the plan that we have in the future, so one can see in that teacher the embodiment of who we want to become as teachers and researchers.

Student 2: For me, the research faculties we have in the program have a significant influence in my process because they are a reference . . . Then, I take them as references because they are really committed to their class. Then, it is very, very important.

Student 3: The teacher educator or coordinator of our research incubators is supremely important because, as my classmate already said, he is a model, he is a determinant. Where do you want to go? Where is my teacher? What example do I want to follow? To do the things my teacher does. Suddenly, it is a determinant or it is a limitation too, so I think that the role that the teacher plays is very important.

Concerning the influence of the teacher researchers in their students, the faculty members affirmed the following:

Teacher 1: Yes, of course we influence them because the research process generates critical thinking, a capacity for constant evaluation. When I am constantly evaluating myself and I am going beyond the facts from the classroom, I am constantly improving my processes and that necessarily results in the quality of the education process. (Interview # 1)

Teacher 2: I think that in any case everything that we collect as teachers in our experience and in the exercise of the profession, both in what is teaching and what is research, will give us elements that we are going to be able to replicate in this program. Obviously I will have much more elements (...). (Interview # 2)

Teacher 3: I always tell them that when you do research, you do it to improve your teaching practice, that doing research out of context does not make sense . . . If research is not going to favor my teaching practice, it does not make sense for us to spend so much effort and time on it. Then, from there, I think they see me as a model, because besides being in research incubators with me, they have been able to be in other courses and can see that what I tell them, I do apply, so they see good teaching practices from my side in the other courses. I tell them where that comes from: problematizing, reflecting, collecting data, systematizing, and to that extent, I can change my practices and make adjustments. I think that convinces them. (Interview # 3)

The relation between teaching and research must be intimately established because the teacher faces multiple realities which demand a conscious, critical and proactive attitude in order to respond to the needs that permanently come about in the classroom. This process then makes the teacher transform and respond to these realities in terms of teaching and learning processes, which must be constantly changing. In this way, the teacher who carries out research is not a traditional one but, on the contrary, becomes a catalyst for educational processes. This response is based on the principles of Decree 2450 of 2015 which stipulated that research is conceived as a strategy that enables the development of a critical attitude and creative capacity in teachers and students, with the mission of contributing to scientific knowledge, innovation and social and cultural development.

The teacher researcher holds different qualities which contribute to shape a particular identity conformed by characteristics such as rigor, creativity, commitment, and competence. Furthermore, teacher researchers often have a wide teaching and investigative experience, which helps them keep up to date in matters of scientific production. Another important aspect is that the teacher researcher intervenes the realities of the classroom and transforms them. From the voices of the teachers and students, the following was stated:

> **Teacher 1**: I believe that all teachers have to be asking what happens in our classroom . . . It is a systematic, structured, organized process. As I reflect, I observe the evidence, I apply strategies, I evaluate those strategies, and that is part of the work of the teacher . . . I conceive a teacher who is constantly wondering how to improve their classroom and improve the processes with their students, and that will necessarily lead us to research processes. (Interview # 1)

> **Teacher 2**: Then we have to teach our students that educational practices and research have to go hand in hand because it is through research that we are going to improve . . . From a reflective and critical point of view is that we will generate knowledge so that other people can also apply it. (Interview # 2)

> **Teacher 3**: I think that the researcher who embarks on teacher education and research processes, in what we now call formative research, is called to make a reflexive and conscious articulation of this pedagogical exercise even in training with research. Then, on the one hand, those teachers in charge of research training at least must make a careful reflection on how they are training and how they can do it better . . . And in general the teacher is called to ask questions, not simply repeat or replicate but to ask about their practices and classroom scenarios, and their dynamics of interaction with students. And that is going to indicate an incipient degree to start investigating. (Interview # 3)

Similarly, during the focus group students expressed the following ideas:

Student 1: We need research in teaching because we do not simply have a way of educating. There are various ways of educating and we have to have some strategies . . . on how to evaluate students to continue educating and learning . . . In this way, the teacher begins to be reflective from their practices and can generate a change in the pedagogical act.

Student 2: If you do research in something educational, this is looking for the solution of a problem. This problem is not always a problem, but you are always looking for a solution to something. You are always looking for the improvement of something.

Student 3: Research in this field is important in order to respond to the needs that the educational context is demanding.

In accordance with this, Marcelo (2001) proposes that it is important to pay specific attention to teachers, their initial education process, their period of professional insertion, and their lifelong education (p. 550). Teachers must be prepared to teach the new generations, and that great responsibility must be molded from the moment of their initial training as teachers. It is there where strong foundations that allow them to acquire the knowledge, discourse, and strategies necessary to do their work are established and thus effect the changes that society needs.

Undeniably, there must be a relationship between research and practice, because today's teacher researchers must question their teaching realities to improve in the classroom. It is through the intervention of their practices that they can discover how the classroom works with sustenance in research. Teachers must be articulators of research and practice so as to build pedagogical and didactic knowledge that will let them intervene assertively into the realities and needs of students and transform them.

Along this line, Ríos León (2014) established that teachers consider that research training is relevant in their teacher career. Therefore, in the contents of the courses are considered training actions for research, and each teacher generates their own methods and incentives for students to approach research during their career. Rios (2014) sustained that research training is important for both teacher educators and student teachers because it allows them to (a) stay updated and competitive; (b) identify research problems and proposed solutions; (c) articulate theory and practice; and (d) appropriate scientific discourse.

Discussion

Conclusions

Some conclusions can be established from the study and the findings that give an account of the existence of a research culture in some of the levels of this language teaching program. There is an effort to work on formative research as a transforming and dynamic axis of the practices of pre-service teachers so they can propose a response to different educational realities. In addition, with the provisions of the policies and legislation for the renewal of the RQP, programs in the area of foreign language teaching have more spaces for and place greater emphasis on formative research. It is a sign of improvement. Data suggests that research education should be initiated at an earlier phase, nonetheless. In relation to this situation, Jurado (2016) highlights that an alternative model has started, in which student teachers make incursions into the analysis of problems in education in different elective courses and assistantships. These incursions allow them to enter the research field as assistants, so they are being educated in both the discipline and research.

On the other hand, to promote research skills development in future teachers, teacher educators are expected to engage in research to enrich scientific knowledge. In addition, they can promote different educational possibilities through the academic exchange of research at the local, national, and international level. Furthermore, there is a tendency to emphasize research in teacher education not only by offering specific research courses but also by mainstreaming formative research into the whole curriculum. In addition, in practicum courses pre-service teachers are able to observe, analyze, question, and reflect upon classroom realities, which constitutes an initial phase to research. Similar to this, Vilá et al. (2015) mentioned that learning through discovery fosters collaborative work between both the student and the teacher, by using problem-based or project-based learning methods. There is also a reference to the role of the teaching staff that focuses on tutoring students during the development of projects, offering them resources and guidance throughout their research and helping them to advance from process to result. Ultimately, teachers should guide students to move towards autonomous learning by motivating them to work independently, especially in the phases of implementation and evaluation.

It is also necessary that coordinators of research incubators be faculty members with strong teaching backgrounds and research experience, because training teachers who do research can bring their students to critically analyze their pedagogical practices and thereby transform their teaching and learning contexts. In a relevant manner, the fact that pre-service teachers are

aware of the experiences of their professors can be a motivating factor, and it is a reference that contributes to their education. In general, pre-service teachers are likely to follow the role model of the university professors who conduct research.

For teachers who are trained in doing research, reflection becomes an inherent part of their practice. Hence, they develop a heightened awareness of their educational context and display academic abilities that allow them to be more proactive in solving classroom situations and improving school conditions. In order to educate integral teachers, it is necessary to strengthen the relation with their context, an indispensable requirement for them to become conscious and critical practitioners and to improve their methodological skills and their pedagogical knowledge. Ultimately, it is clear that language teachers who engage in research become reflective and transformative educators in favor of language teaching.

Recommendations

To carry out effective transformations that allow the improvement of the training process of future teacher researchers, effective and profound work must be done. To begin with, teacher education programs must promote a wider participation of future teachers in research incubators as alternative and voluntary spaces that provide additional research tools to students.

On the other hand, it is important that during the process of research education, theoretical clarities are established in relation to the concepts of formative research and scientific research, since the concept of formative research was not clear among the participants. Only 3 of them gave an answer to the question that sought the definition of the concept of formative research. Also, for the promotion of scientific knowledge, basic research courses should not only provide pre-service teachers with a theoretical background to develop research but also foster critical thinking so that pre-service teachers can develop new cognitive structures.

It is essential that the research training of new teachers be addressed from a perspective of transforming education so as to narrow the gap between what society expects from education processes and what actually takes place in the classroom. In conclusion, to make teachers the

leading actors in the transformation of education, they must develop the necessary competences to conduct research and thus effectively transform their teaching realities from a solid theoretical and practical foundation.

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CHAPTER 7

Teacher Educators' Competence in Language Test Design
(Competencias de los Formadores de Maestros para el Diseño de Pruebas en la Evaluación de Lenguas)

Erika Restrepo Bolivar

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Abstract

This chapter addresses the topic of language classroom test construction as an essential constituent of *Language Assessment Literacy* (LAL). It presents and discusses outcomes from action research conducted with a group of English language teacher educators at a private university in Medellin, Colombia. The study was motivated by regular inconsistencies between course objectives and tests made and administered by teacher educators for summative purposes in the English class. It explored participants' knowledge on language testing, examined their competence for language test design, and determined the contributions of peer coaching to their ability to design classroom tests for language assessment. Data collection techniques involved a questionnaire, a focus-group interview, and teacher-made written exams. Results allow to conclude that (1) teacher educators' competence for designing classroom language tests need to be developed; (2) peer coaching becomes an appropriate strategy to foster teacher educators' professional development in classroom language testing; and (3) the development of teacher educators' competence for language test design allows them to direct teaching towards the achievement of course goals. Consequently, this chapter advocates for the inclusion of test-construction training in language teaching programs to contribute to teacher educators' language assessment literacy development.

Keywords:

Language assessment literacy, language testing, peer coaching, teacher educators, teacher-made tests.

Resumen

Este capítulo aborda el tema de la competencia de los formadores de docentes para el diseño de pruebas como parte de su literacidad en la evaluación de lenguas. Presenta y discute los resultados de un estudio de investigación acción desarrollado con un grupo de formadores de docentes en un programa de licenciatura en lenguas extranjeras de una universidad privada en Medellín, Colombia. Inconsistencias entre los objetivos de aprendizaje y las pruebas sumativas escritas diseñadas por los educadores en la clase de inglés motivó la exploración del conocimiento de los formadores sobre exámenes, su competencia para construir pruebas escritas y las contribuciones del trabajo con pares al desarrollo de ésta. Las técnicas de recolección de información incluyeron un cuestionario, un grupo focal y exámenes diseñados por los participantes. Los hallazgos permiten concluir que (1) la competencia de los formadores de docentes para el diseño de pruebas necesita desarrollarse; (2) el trabajo con pares representa una estrategia apropiada para fomentar el desarrollo de ésta; y (3) el desarrollo de la competencia para el diseño de pruebas permite dirigir la enseñanza hacia el alcance de los objetivos de aprendizaje propuestos en el curso. En consecuencia, es pertinente que los programas de formación de maestros ofrezcan a los formadores de docentes oportunidades de desarrollo profesional en el diseño de pruebas que contribuyan a su literacidad en evaluación de lenguas.

Palabras clave:

Literacidad en evaluación de lenguas, evaluación sumativa, prueba escrita, formador de docentes, aprendizaje entre pares.

Introduction

Interpretations and decisions based on assessment outcomes inevitably impact teaching and learning processes; therefore, developing teachers' assessment literacy is crucial to remove involuntary yet unfavorable consequences caused by erroneous judgments on learners' achievements. Language teachers' assessment literacy encompasses not only knowledge of testing, measurement, and evaluation, but also a profound understanding of the construct to be assessed: language. Therefore, the concept of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) has received special attention worldwide. Interest on the extent to which language teachers develop language assessment literacy has been increasing. Authors' contributions in the field involve theoretical constructions on what LAL entails and models for guiding both the creation of assessment courses and the evaluation of teachers' knowledge, skills, and principles in the design, implementation, and use of language assessments. Moreover, literature available in the discipline includes descriptions of processes for developing LAL.

One of the constituents of LAL is the ability to develop classroom tests to monitor learners' progress towards the achievement of course goals. Most important is the fact that, from a critical perspective, quality teacher-made tests are essential to guarantee fairness in student assessment. Creating or selecting input to assess learners' knowledge or skills, considering the points to test, generating the questions to ask, and establishing their facility are crucial decisions that language teachers make during the production of classroom test items. Consequently, teacher-made tests that appropriately assess what is to be measured in language learning provide reliable evidence to make fair judgments on the extent to which learners meet course goals.

Nonetheless, Mede and Atay (2017) allude to classroom-test preparation as an area in which the lack of training of language teachers is evident. For Farhady and Tavassoli (2018), "Teachers' insufficient command of assessment knowledge is often attributed to the fact that they do not receive effective training on assessment during their pre-service or in-service teacher education programs" (p. 80). As a case in point, López and Bernal (2009) found that, in Colombia, only two public universities offer courses on language assessment for trainee teachers. Furthermore, Büyükkarci's (2016) study evidenced that "not only teachers are deprived of sufficient training in assessment during pre-service education, but they also do not get adequate number of courses and training during their post-graduate studies" (p. 339).

After regular and systematic supervision of classroom language tests designed by teacher educators to assess trainee teachers' achievements in EFL courses, in a private university in Medellin, issues related to quality test construction emerged. This is problematic because traditional

pencil-and-paper tests for summative purposes are often assigned a high-percentage score of the final grade obtained by future teachers in these courses. Moreover, inferences and judgments teacher educators make are most of the time based on interpretations of test results.

> Scores are used for educational decisions with consequences for students: deciding what content needs to be reviewed, assigning grades, counseling students about what courses to take in the future, deciding how a course might be taught differently. It is therefore imperative that the scores mean what the instructor thinks they mean; otherwise, unwise or unfounded decisions might be made. (Brookhart, 1999, p. 24)

Regarding the reasons for which classroom language tests are frequently mistrusted, Hughes (1989) asserts that "a great deal of language testing is of very poor quality. Too often language tests have a harmful effect on teaching and learning; and too often they fail to measure accurately whatever it is they are intended to measure" (p. 1). He continues to affirm that test scores obtained by learners do not always reflect their actual skills. According to the author, "language abilities are not easy to measure; we cannot expect a level of accuracy comparable to those of measurements in the physical sciences. But we can expect greater accuracy than is frequently achieved" (p. 2).

Teacher educators' development of their competence to design classroom tests in student assessment is essential to guaranteeing high-quality ones. However, "despite this awareness, little attention has been given to ensure that teachers can collect 'good' data (data that provide accurate and sufficient evidence to make decisions) and interpret it in light of their professional needs (e.g., to guide instruction and assign grades)" (DiDonato-Barnes et al., 2014, p. 90).

In order to compensate for teacher educators' lack of competence in language-test design, faculties and programs are called to implement strategies to promote professional development in this area. Nonetheless, due to multiple responsibilities, teachers in higher- education contexts often complain about having insufficient time to attend seminars, lectures, or other professional development modalities. Moreover, most of these techniques disregard teacher educators' particular concerns or interests since they are conducted during very short periods of time, for a large number of attendants, and by outsiders who might not possess a complete understanding of the context in which teachers are immersed.

From this perspective, peer coaching might prove useful to allow teacher educators to gain and develop knowledge, skills, and principles regarding language testing. Robbins (1991) defines peer coaching as "a confidential process through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas; teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace" (p. 1). According to Richards and Farrell (2005), the following can represent types of peer coaching:

- A series of informal conversations between a teacher and a colleague about teaching, focusing on what is happening in the teacher's classroom, what problems occur, and how these can be addressed.

- Collaboration between two teachers on the preparation of teaching materials.

- A teacher and a coach can observe each other's lessons.

- Two teachers can co-teach lessons and observe each other's approach and teaching style.

- A teacher can videotape some of his or her lessons and later watch them together with the coach. (p. 143)

In peer coaching, "participating teachers see themselves as equals. Together they select an area of teaching or a classroom-related problem they would like to focus on" (Murray, 2010, p. 7). It might be inferred that addressing teacher educators' shared necessities through peer coaching would lead to the generation of meaningful and pertinent insight. Moreover, since peer coaching usually occurs within working hours, it could be really advantageous for both teachers and administrators.

The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to discussions in the field of language testing and to inform proposals for the development of teacher educators' competence for classroom-test construction. Furthermore, it discusses the results from an action research study aimed at enhancing teacher educators' competence for language test design through peer coaching, which was introduced as part of their professional development in an English teaching program. The overall structure of the chapter involves four sections, including these introductory paragraphs. Section two begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the topic and looks at how it has been researched. The third section is concerned with findings from an action research conducted with a group of teacher educators at an English teaching program. Finally, it presents conclusions and implications for future research in the area of classroom test construction.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Recent local and international research on teachers' language assessment literacy allows to conclude that in-service language teachers' practical knowledge, skills, and principles required for the design, implementation, and interpretation of language assessments are underdeveloped. Ölmezer-Öztürk and Aydin (2018) state that studies on EFL teachers' LAL have focused on

needs regarding language assessment "proving the inefficiency of pre-service education and lack of professional development, and revealing the self-reports of the participants related to their assessment knowledge or practices" (p. 604). Consequently, there is a call for teachers' qualification in language assessment both through programs for initial teacher education and by means of continuous professional development (Ashraf & Zolfaghari, 2018; Büyükkarci, 2016; Giraldo, 2018; Hakim, 2015; Herrera & Macías, 2015; Koh et al., 2017; Lam, 2015; Mede & Atay, 2017; Mohammadi et al., 2015; Scarino, 2017; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017; Viengsang, 2016).

In the context of the study presented in this chapter, teacher educators often collect evidence of learners' progress regarding language learning goals by means of tests they have partially or completely designed on their own—called teacher-made or classroom tests—. According to Alias (2005), "a classroom test is defined as any set of questions that is specifically designed by teachers to measure an identified learned capability (or set of learned capabilities) and administered by teachers to their students in classroom setting" (p. 235). Another conception of classroom tests available in the field reads:

> A teacher-made or classroom test is a test instrument constructed by the classroom teacher to measure the extent of students' achievement of a certain class based on some specific objectives. There are issues of quality, scoring, grading and comparability of standards of this evaluation technique which could vary from one teacher to another. Such variation may result from lack of competence in the development, validation, administration, scoring and grading of this testing instrument. (Omoruan, 2018, p. 66)

In regard to teacher-constructed tests, Alderson et al. (1995) observe that the design of a learning exercise and a test item is similar in that both present learners with input to be processed; however, in the second case, learners are expected to "produce behaviour or language which will give evidence of ability" (p. 41). A test item, on the other hand, is defined as a "a unit of measurement with a prompt and a prescriptive form for responding, which is intended to yield a response from an examinee from which performance in some language construct may be inferred in order to make some decision" (Brown & Hudson, 2002, p. 57).

According to the authors, expected responses can be selected, constructed, or personal. Selected-response items present the examinee with options or alternatives from which he must select the correct answer; this type of response includes multiple-choice, true/false, and matching items. Constructed-response items, open-ended questions, fill-in activities and other performance tasks are proposed for test takers to provide the expected answer by using short stretches of language. Conversely, personal-response items elicit answers that are shaped by test takers' particular interests; examples include portfolios, conferences, and self-assessments.

According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), achievement tests are summative in nature since they are administered after covering a limited part of the syllabus related to particular objectives within a specific period of time. They suggest teachers to consider five essential questions when starting the process of creating this type of tests or evaluating available ones. In the first place, since other kind of tests exist (e.g., placement, diagnostic tests), teachers should ask themselves what the purpose of the test is. The next question is about language objectives; that is to say, knowledge or skills to be assessed. Moreover, teachers must foresee how both the purpose and the objectives will be observed through test specifications. Similarly, questioning on the appropriate selection and distribution of tasks and test items is crucial in classroom test design. Finally, scoring procedures and feedback provision deserve teachers' careful consideration.

Furthermore, Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) call test designers' attention towards the importance of (a) assessing unambivalent objectives; (b) stating test specifications; (c) appropriately designing tasks and multiple-choice test items; and (d) clearly determining scoring, grading, and feedback provision techniques. In order to assess clear unambiguous objectives, the authors suggest teachers to think of the knowledge or abilities learners are expected to develop after a lesson, unit, or course has been completed. Appropriate test objectives are determined in terms of performance and not merely as linguistic forms to be managed. According to Hughes (1989), "If achievement tests are based on objectives, rather than on detailed teaching and textbook content, they will provide a true picture of what has actually been achieved" (p. 46).

In respect to specifications, Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) expect teachers to include a general sketch of the test, as well as a description of the skills being tested, and the type of items used. These specifications will display information about "the topics (objectives) you will cover, the implied elicitation and response formats for items, the number of items in each section, [and] the time to be allocated for each" (p. 52). Additionally, Maturana (2015) remarks the importance of developing explicit instructions that allow test takers to attain tasks, clear scoring criteria to determine levels of performance, and determining constructs of language ability. Other factors teachers should consider when devising test tasks are:

> How students will perceive them (face validity), the extent to which authentic language and contexts are present, potential difficulty caused by cultural schemata, the length of the listening stimuli, how well a story line comes across, how things like the cloze testing format will work, and other practicalities. (Brown, 2004, p. 53)

Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) suggest four rules to avoid writing poor multiple-choice test items. According to the authors, each item must be designed to assess a concrete objective; all distractors should clearly focus on the same objective. The second rule addresses the length and clarity of both the stem and the options; it is imperative to eliminate unnecessary or irrelevant

information that is likely to confound the test taker. Excluding ambiguous answers stands as the third principle to keep when designing multiple-choice test items. Finally, the authors advise teachers to revise classroom language tests by applying item facility, item discrimination, and distractor analysis indices.

The last step suggested by the authors in classroom test construction requires teachers to establish comprehensible scoring, grading, and feedback provision mechanisms; "As you design a classroom test, you must consider how the test will be scored and graded. Your scoring plan reflects the relative weight that you place on each section and items in each section" (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 61). Moreover, teachers must make decisions about the way in which classroom tests will be returned, options include letter grades, total scores, indications of correct/ incorrect responses, oral comments, checklists, marginal notes, self-assessment, individual conferences, among other possibilities.

Disregarding the guidelines described above might inevitably lead language teachers to the creation of invalid and unreliable classroom tests aimed at determining learners' achievements in the EFL class. According to Setiyana (2016):

> A teacher has to consider the quality of a test while creating an effective test. In this case, a test must possess two important characteristics, namely validity and reliability. This means that a test has to be well constructed by considering the validity and reliability of the test in order to provide an accurate measure of the test-taker's ability within a particular domain and to ensure the test is appropriate to what was taught in the class. (Setiyana, 2016, p. 434)

Regarding validity in language testing, Brown and Hudson (2002) explain that if a test "is designed to measure the objectives of a specific course, the validity of the test could be defended by showing that the test is indeed measuring those objectives" (p. 212). However, in the last decade, this notion of validity has been expanded to include usefulness and relevance issues. That is, a test might prove to be appropriate and useful to collect sound evidence of performance. Moreover, inferences about test takers' knowledge, skills, and abilities that can be made from test scores should be justified on a clearly defined construct and be relevant to test purposes (Douglas, 2010; Fulcher, 2010).

Some basic types of validity are content, construct, and face validity. Content validity refers to the "degree to which the items on a test, and the resulting scores, are representative and relevant samples of whatever content abilities the test has been designed to measure" (Brown & Hudson, 2002, p. 213). According to the authors, the content of the test must reflect the specific content of a course or domain. On the other hand, a test has construct validity if "it can be demonstrated that it measures just the ability which it is supposed to measure. The word construct refers to any

underlying ability (or trait) which is hypothesized in a theory of language ability" (Hughes, 1989, p. 26). Regarding face validity, Alderson et al. (1995), state that it "involves an intuitive judgment about the test's content by people whose judgment is not necessarily 'expert'" (p. 172). Moreover, the authors assert that this judgment "is usually holistic, referring to the test as a whole, although attention may also be focused upon particular poor items, unclear instructions, or unrealistic time limits" (p. 172).

According to Hughes (1989), "to be valid a test must provide consistently accurate measurements. It must therefore be reliable" (p. 42). Reliability is associated to credibility of results. Alderson et al. (1995) explain that variations in test scores can be caused by systematic or unsystematic differences. An example of a systematic change can be the actual development of the skill being tested; on the other hand, unsystematic variations can occur due to students' physical or psychological conditions or to environmental causes like noise; "The aim in testing is to produce tests which measures systematic rather than unsystematic changes, and the higher the proportion of systematic variation in the test score, the more reliable the test is" (Alderson et al., 1995, p. 87).

According to Weller (2001), "reducing random test error increases the reliability of the test. Error affecting reliability comes from a variety of elements but is usually attributed to the test itself, human conditions, or the surroundings in the testing site" (p. 35). Since it is not possible to produce100% reliable tests, Alderson et al. (1995) assert that teachers "should ensure, for example, that the test is administered and marked consistently, that the test instructions are clear, and that there are no ambiguous items" (p. 87).

Expanding on the idea of constructing reliable classroom tests, Hughes (1989) proposes taking sufficient samples of behavior representative of test takers' ability. Furthermore, he suggests restricting candidates' freedom by limiting the variation of possible answers and providing detailed tasks. Writing unambiguous items, displaying clear and explicit instructions, ensuring perfectly legible tests, as well as test takers' familiarity with format and testing techniques, are among the strategies suggested to enhance reliability during test construction. A final observation, regarding validity and reliability of language tests designed by teachers, relates to Weller's (2001) conclusion,

> Teacher-made tests often lack validity and reliability, two essential qualities for any assessment instrument. Valid tests are accurate assessments of what is taught or what they purport to measure. Reliable tests yield consistent, non-contradictory results. When teachers take steps to make their tests valid and reliable, they will make better instructional decisions and evaluative judgments. (Weller, 2001, p. 33)

Research Antecedents

Background studies on teachers' test construction competence are rather limited; furthermore, most studies have been conducted in primary and high school contexts and few in English language teaching settings. Regarding teacher-produced tests, Coniam (2014) concludes that they frequently are "a waste of time, and unfair to students in terms of the results generated" (p. 247). According to the author, limited time and resources for test development can be the cause. Moreover, he concludes that "it is clear that a great deal of continuing support and professional development is still required in the area of assessment and test design for the majority of teachers of English in Hong Kong and elsewhere" (p. 248).

Quansah et al. (2019) analyzed teachers' test construction skills in senior high schools in Ghana. The authors report that despite teachers' ability to keep other principles, they fail to ensure reliability and validity in classroom test design. Their study remarks teachers' reluctance to adhere to principles and lack of knowledge in testing practices as the main factors associated to the analysis results. Consequently, the researchers argue that "it is highly recommended that head teachers take up the challenge of inviting resource persons from recognised academic institutions to organise workshops for teachers on a regular basis to sharpen their skills on effective test construction practices" (Quansah et al., 2019, p. 7).

On the other hand, Hartell and Strimel (2018) examined content validity and item design of teacher-made tests in elementary technology education in Sweden. Their research suggests that there is a need for improvement since "items were unclear and often relied on questions that were easy to mark rather than items that best measured the prescribed abilities and core content stipulated in the Swedish technology curricula" (p. 18). They concluded by stating that "different constructs and purposes demand different ways of assessment; therefore, the importance of assessment literate teachers is key" (p. 20).

Similarly, in a study aimed at determining the quality of Indonesian language teacher-made tests at junior school level, Badara (2016) reported that tests produced by teachers proved to be invalid and unreliable for measuring learners' language learning outcomes. According to the researcher, teachers "required more in-depth training related to test preparation techniques, quality analysis test, as well as assessment techniques in schools" (p. 113).

In the same vein, Ing et al. (2015) investigated the content validity of teacher-made assessments and their understanding of a *table of specification* (TOS) in three Chinese elementary schools[1]. Findings reveal average validity of teacher-made assessments associated to a low level of knowledge and awareness of the importance of TOS. Researchers' recommendations include "creating and promoting awareness of the importance of the TOS, training on designing a TOS and the usage of multiple assessment methods" (p. 198).

Conversely, an experimental study conducted by DiDonato-Barnes et al., in 2014, to measure the influence of the use of TOS on classroom test construction, allows to conclude that, when exposed to instruction, teachers can improve the quality of classroom tests. However, the researchers conclude that "in addition to any instruction on item interpretation, future and current teachers also need to develop a sound set of beliefs about the goals and purposes of educational assessment" (p. 105).

Despite the growing interest in the field of teacher-made tests, concrete research on university language teacher-constructed tests is scarce. However, available studies conducted in the last five years suggest that one of the main issues with classroom-based tests designed by teachers in higher education contexts is their lack of validity. Regarding the assessment competence of university foreign-language teachers, Kvasova and Kavytska's (2014) study revealed that although 70% of participants were somehow trained in Language Testing and Assessment (LTA), 83% acknowledged the need to move into an advanced level in which validity and reliability concepts were the focus. According to the authors, "these findings imply that the LTA training provided for FL teachers in Ukraine should be more consistent at the pre-service level in all institutions of higher education and more regular and varied at the in-service level" (p. 168).

Research conducted in the school of education of a university in Nigeria investigated teachers' knowledge about validity of classroom tests. According to Ugodulunwa and Wakjissa (2016), teachers are not expected to master the evaluation of measurement instruments but "they need some basic knowledge on how to develop and validate their classroom tests to enable them use [*sic*] results of their classroom assessment for taking relevant decisions about the students" (p. 15). The study revealed that although teachers in this context have developed knowledge regarding "content-related evidence of validity, procedure for ensuring coverage and adequate sampling of content and objectives, as well as correlating students' scores in two measures for predictive validation content-related evidence", areas of validity regarding "criterion-related evidence, concept of face validity and sources of invalidity of test scores" (p. 19) remain unknown by university teachers. Researchers conclude that it is necessary to train and retrain teachers in order to develop and update their knowledge of validity for classroom test design.

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[1] "A TOS, sometimes called a test blueprint, is a table that helps teachers align objectives, instruction, and assessment. This strategy can be used for a variety of assessment methods but is most commonly associated with constructing traditional summative tests." (Fives & DiDonato-Barnes, 2013, p. 1).

On the other hand, strategies to promote classroom-test quality have been the focus of some research in university settings. Banerjee et al. (2014) proposed the *Analysis, Design, Development, Implement and Evaluate* (ADDIE) framework for course design to produce more reliable and valid summative assessment instruments in formal higher education programs. According to the authors, "well defined competencies, well-structured assessment pattern, item bank, assessment instrument and well-defined syllabus" are essential for defining quality in test construction (p. 78).

As the studies above suggest, in order to cope with the lack of sufficient and accurate training offered by language teaching programs, it is necessary to provide in-service teachers with tools that help them enhance the validity of the language tests they design. Furthermore, guidance and support from more knowledgeable and skillful peers would motivate a more effective use of these tools in higher education contexts. From this perspective, peer coaching becomes an alternative to offer teacher educators professional development regarding language test construction.

Parker et al. (2015) describe three steps for peer coaching to be effective: establishing a good relationship between peers, which involves agreeing on rules for interaction; foreseeing success by being aware of partial achievements along the process; and incorporating the abilities developed through peer coaching for participants to use them naturally and comfortably in other contexts.

> Peer coaching is a formal process of two teachers coming together to reflect and refine their practice through structured conversation. Like many other educators who have been involved in peer coaching, I am convinced that it is a powerful means of professional development for those who have a sincere desire for improvement. The power of peer coaching lies in the fact that a teacher voluntarily participates in this confidential process and it is not tied to his formal administrative evaluation. (Colucci, 2014, p. 6)

Research Report: Promoting Teacher Educators' Skills for Language Tests Design

Type of Study and Problem

By employing qualitative modes of inquiry, this action-research study intended to determine the impact of peer coaching as a professional development strategy to enhance teacher educators' competence to design language tests. As part of their assignments in the English teaching program, teacher educators are expected to conduct summative assessment that often takes the

form of traditional pencil-and-paper tests. However, coordinators registered regular inconsistencies in language tests, partially or entirely designed by teacher educators for summative purposes in language courses. Since relevant decisions affecting future language teachers are often based on these results, it is imperative for teacher educators to design valid and reliable classroom tests.

Context and Sample

The context in which this study took place is an English teaching program at a private university in Medellin, Colombia. Participants were seven teachers in charge of English language courses. At the time the study was conducted, one of them had eighteen years of teaching experience in the program, and the rest ranged from two to three years working as full-time teachers. Moreover, all of them had attended at least one course in assessment and testing. They were considered, among other teachers in the program, able to provide valuable data due to the characteristics of the tests they design and administer in the classroom. This strategy to select participants is known as *theoretical or concept sampling,* and the purpose is to "select persons or situations known to experience the concept/theory, to be attempting to implement the concept/theory or to be in different categories of the concept/theory" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 315).

Method

Initially, participants answered a questionnaire intended to recognize their knowledge on language testing, which helped determine topics for peer coaching sessions. On the other hand, they provided the researcher with language tests they had adapted or designed for summative purposes in their EFL courses. These tests represented useful data in order to determine participants' test-construction skills during initial and final stages of the study. Finally, teacher-made tests and a focus-group interview allowed to establish the contributions of peer coaching to teacher educators' development of language test design competence.

Regarding the way in which peer coaching was implemented, there were around eight formally arranged meetings with all the participants as well as individual informal conversations within a period of five months. These sessions were guided by the researcher, who has been involved in language assessment literacy development for about five years and also works as a full-time teacher

in the program. During group meetings, the teacher educators approached concepts and discussed understandings related to language testing. Individual encounters revolved around participants' doubts concerning their language test design skills.

Data obtained from the questionnaire, the teacher-made tests, and the focus group were analyzed through a content analysis method. The process of coding was conducted manually and followed the applications described by Saldaña (2009). On the other hand, triangulation of data sources, peer debriefing, and member checking were implemented in order to enhance trustworthiness of the research. According to Creswell (2014), converging varied sources of data, allowing inquiry from a person other than the researcher, and establishing accuracy of interpretations with the help of participants contribute to enhance the validity of the study in qualitative research.

Main Findings

In general, results from the study suggest teachers' progress in the design of classroom language tests after regular meetings among peers to discuss the extent to which their classroom tests reflected basic principles of language test construction. Moreover, it was evident that knowledge on language testing exhibited by most teachers at an initial stage in the research project was not sufficient to guarantee the design of appropriate classroom tests. Each session allowed teachers to be aware of the decisions they actually made when devising test specifications, items, tasks, and scoring and feedback procedures in classroom test construction. In the same vein, participants gained insight on available strategies to enhance validity and reliability in teacher-made tests. By doing this, they became aware of the importance to align course content and objectives with teaching and assessment in order to promote learners' achievements in the EFL class.

Aligning Test Purpose, Objectives, and Items

Although it was clear that classroom tests provided by teacher educators were used for achievement purposes, their design did not reflect this aim consistently. First, participants failed to include items covering the objectives that they claimed to be assessing. Second, they devised test items that did not correspond to any of the objectives contained in the syllabus, arguing that they measured what was taught in class. Third, although test objectives were described in terms of performance, items were intended to measure test takers' knowledge of linguistic forms. The excerpts below

illustrate participants' lack of awareness regarding content validity in tests shared during initial peer coaching sessions. Table 1 presents the case of a test intended to assess learners' ability to produce language which includes an item that assesses test takers' comprehension of language.

Table 1. *The Item does not Assess Any Objective Proposed*

Assessment Objectives[2]
Communicates through simple clear expressions, and accurate use of body language.
Describes personal and academic contexts using appropriate formal and informal vocabulary.
Describes people and places, using vocabulary learned in the course accurately.
Ítem
READING SECTION. The purpose of this section is to evaluate students' abilities to understand written texts in English. *Students will be given a piece of reading or article taken from one of the top most important written resources around the world such as newspapers or magazines which deal with topics about science, technology, culture, animals, society, health, education, sports and history etc. Students will have the opportunity to select the topic and resource they prefer. With the reading they have to do the following tasks:* *A. Read the article or news and work in the new vocabulary for them.* *B. To extract the core message, main ideas and supporting details given in the piece of information.* *C. Organize the information based on the Journalists´ Questions to understand the reading in a clearly and easy way.*

Table 2 shows the case of a test where three objectives are claimed to be assessed but the item proposed focuses just on the third one.

Table 2. *Items Fail to Cover All the Assessment Objectives*

Assessment Objectives
Identifies different types of texts and text structures.
Understands main ideas in written texts related to topics of general interest such as daily life, work, school, and free time.
Creates texts using formal text structures appropriately.
Ítem
Write/invent a story having in account their parts (ORIENTATION, COMPLICATION, RESOLUTION, CHARACTERS AND SETTING) Also include at least FOUR of the FIGURES OF THE SPEECH worked in class.

Although assessment objectives in Table 2 clearly focus on test takers' skills to use the language, a test designed by a different participant displayed an item that assessed knowledge of the language more than the ability to use the language, as illustrated in Table 3.

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[2] Assessment objectives and directions on tests were originally presented in Spanish; for the purpose of this chapter, they have been translated into English.

Table 3. *Items Assessing Knowledge not Skills*

Assessment Objectives
Identifies different types of texts and text structures.
Understands main ideas in written texts related to topics of general interest such as daily life, work, school, and free time.
Creates texts using formal text structures appropriately.

Ítem

Part I: Matching type (20 points). Write the letter before the number of the corresponding answer.

___ 1) clustering	A) that type of issue which have negative effects to the world
___ 2) controversial issue	B) we use this type of text when we write an academic essay
___ 3) narrative fictitious	C) that part of the text in which the conflict is presented
___ 4) problematic issue	D) that part of the text wherein the situation of the character is normalized
___ 5) brainstorming	E) this presents the stance or opinion of the author about an issue
___ 6) journalist questions	F) this text presents and informs about some ideas of an author
___ 7) inciting incident	G) characters, time, and place are verifiable or real
___ 8) exposition	H) also known as mind map
___ 9) narrative real story	I) that type of issue which has positive effects to the world
___ 10) resolution	J) American Psychological Association
___ 11) thesis	K) this is presented when the author's stance is against on an issue
___ 12) supporting argument	L) that type of issue which has conflicting views or opinions
___ 13) expository text	M) this supports the thesis of the author
___ 14) argumentative text	N) this refers to academic writing rules
___ 15) non-problematic issue	O) characters, time, and location are imaginary
___ 16) APA	P) we use this type of text for writing to friends
___ 17) APA format	Q) think, reflect, and write words as fast as you can about a topic
___ 18) alternative	R) the intention of the text is to convince the readers about one's opinion
___ 19) formal discourse	S) that part of the text in which the characters and place are presented
___ 20) informal discourse	T) wh-questions are used to identify the main ideas of the topic

Since the purpose of achievement tests is to know the extent to which learners have developed language ability regarding a specific lesson, unit, or course, test items proposed must adhere to established goals; otherwise, lack of content validity might prevent teachers from making accurate judgments. Therefore, teachers must ensure that every test item assesses what was taught according to course goals. Information obtained from teachers through the questionnaire evidenced a low level of awareness of the need to align test purposes, objectives and items when constructing language tests before the peer coaching experience. For instance, when asked about the sources from which they retrieved data to build their tests, just three of the participants referred to the learning objectives established in the syllabus for the course as one of the elements to be considered. However, comments from some teacher educators during the focus group interview offer evidence regarding their awareness of the importance of aligning test purposes, objectives, and items: "Now, I do not start to design the test without first looking at the objectives in the

syllabus. I also check that I include at least one item for each objective." (Participant 2, focus group interview). Additionally, Table 4 allows to see participants' progress in enhancing content validity in classroom test construction for achievement purposes, as a consequence of peer coaching.

Table 4. *Alignment of Test Purpose, Objectives, and Items*

Assessment Objective
Implements strategies for comprehension and production to interpret and communicate ideas related to content in literary texts.

Ítem
Making predictions – Read the final section of "Carnival" and answer the questions that follow: "The policemen look at the photo and they smile. Why? Jake doesn't understand. The door opens and Policewoman Day comes in. She looks at Jake. He looks at her. They are very surprised. 'It's you!' they say at the same time. 'Look at this photo, Maria,' the sergeant says. 'Here you are at the doctor's–or perhaps the carnival?'" 1. How do you think Jake feels? a. Surprised to see the sergeant b. Annoyed to see Policewoman Day c. Surprised to see Policewoman Day d. Surprised to see the picture 2. What do you think happens after this event?

Enhancing Face Validity

Information that test takers have the right to know must be clearly displayed in classroom tests. Teachers are expected to explicitly communicate the objectives the test will cover, the types and number of items included, the time allocated for their completion, and the criteria and point values for each task or item. With these indications the test will look more transparent, which might contribute to more accurate judgments on its face validity.

Nonetheless, initial tests provided by participants only showed the objectives being tested and omitted the rest of the expected indications. The fact that information about the value assigned to items or tasks was absent could, for example, make test takers feel uncertain about the priority they should ascribe to them and the time they should allocate to their completion.

On the other hand, when reading throughout teacher-made tests, it was evident that, in most cases, items and tasks proposed were presented in isolation, that is, without any apparent logical connection. Moreover, directions offered for developing test tasks were insufficient in terms of the required quality, detail, or elaboration. In order to guide test takers regarding performance

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expectations, Schedl and Malloy (2014) suggest "the inclusion of comments such as 'be sure to support your ideas with specific reasons and examples and the mention of a typical word range for high quality responses" (p. 5).

Fortunately, as peer coaching sessions advanced, teacher educators understood the importance of drawing up test specifications. As Table 5 presents, they started to incorporate relevant information for test takers to attain classroom tests.

Table 5. *Relevant Information for Test Takers*

Assessment Objective
Expresses feelings and opinions, showing understanding of literary texts read in class.
Ítem
Score_____/ 25 Grade: _____ Passing grade: 3.0 A. *Read the following excerpt from the short story the House on Mango Street and answer the questions below. Use information from the text. Use simple sentences. Pay attention to word order. Pay attention to verb tense, present or past. Maintain subject verb agreement. (5 points/ 1 each correct answer)*

Moreover, teacher educators attempted to provide scenarios in order to elicit a more natural and authentic use of the language, as illustrated in Table 6. Additionally, some of the participants' conclusion at the end of the focus group interview referred to the importance of sharing information about aspects of test administration, stating clear instructions and explaining scoring techniques to students. It is relevant to remark that no evidence of these concerns was found in the information provided through the questionnaire, although some questions were purposefully designed to uncover teacher educators' consciousness regarding face validity.

Table 6. *Eliciting Authentic Use of the Language*

Assessment Objective
Writes simple sentences about him/herself and others through e-mails, blogs, social networks, forms, etc.
Ítem
Part 1: Writing *Student organizes a comprehensible and correctly written information about himself/herself responding to a request from somebody outside the country.* *Context:* John is a British national who wants to have a transcultural experience in Colombia. He is looking for somebody who could be a friend and facilitate the experience. So he collected some e-mail addresses of Colombian university students for a possible contact and initiated the first stage of his project which is to have a contact person and have her/his personal information. Supposing you received the e-mail of John, how would you ***organize*** your reply? How would you organize the ***format*** of your reply-message?

Designing Test Tasks and Writing Multiple-Choice Test Items

Selected and constructed types of response were found to be commonly used by teacher educators in order to test trainees' achievements in the EFL class. Regarding the language of selected-response items and constructed-response tasks, Schedl and Malloy (2014) assert that it must:

> Be clear, precise, and unencumbered by superfluous or difficult language. If the item text is more difficult than it needs to be, then it will measure a test taker's ability to understand the item text in addition to the test taker's ability to comprehend the stimulus. (p. 3)

In addition, the authors recommend that "well-crafted stems are free of ambiguity and direct the test taker's attention to the part of the stimulus that contains the information needed for answering the item" (p. 7).

During initial stages of the research project, participants lengthened test items by adding unnecessary or redundant words to the stem, arguing that it provided some context to facilitate comprehension. However, test takers' attention can deviate due to this extra language and their performance could thereby be negatively affected. Table 7 illustrates teachers' lack of awareness regarding the importance of succinctness in item writing.

Table 7. *Use of Imprecise Language for Item Construction*

Case 1
In the text below you must...   1. Identify the **setting** of the story by identifying the **"where"** as we have previously done in class. Write your answer in a complete simple sentence. (1.5 point)   _____   2. Identify the **characters** of the story by identifying the **"who"** as we have previously done in class. Write your answer in a complete simple sentence. (1.5 point)   _____   3. Identify **the moment** in which the story happens by identifying the **"when"** as we have previously done in class. Write your answer in a complete simple sentence. (1.5point)   _____   4. Identify **main idea of the story** by identifying the **"what"** as we have previously done in class. Write your answer in at least **3 sentences**. (4.5 points)
Case 2
Writing: the purpose of this section is to evaluate students' abilities to communicate ideas by writing a specific text.   **I.** Students will prepare a power point presentation in which they will summarize the information having in account the given characteristics such as: 5-slide presentation, 7x7 rule for each slide, images included, etc.   **A.** Prepare a power point presentation in order to report the information to the group.

Teachers' inclusion of unclear stems or ambiguous options in classroom test design might affect the reliability of the test; as a result, interpretations driven from test results can lead to distorted judgments regarding learners' achievements. Therefore, teachers are expected to revise and adjust the language used for stating stems and options when designing test tasks or items.

One of the items in the questionnaire inquired about topics of participants' interest that could be developed during the peer coaching sessions. However, participants did not include the aspect of item or task writing as something they would need to focus on, although in their initial tests this was an issue. This can be explained by the fact that the lack of theoretical knowledge regarding language tests design prevented teachers from identifying aspects that needed to be reinforced or covered as part of their professional development in the area. In contrast, during the focus group interview, some participants referred to the sense of confidence they were experiencing due to the skills they had developed for item and task writing. One of them expressed: "I did not know that one could check or evaluate the items or tasks based on the criteria you shared with us. In that way, I feel more confident about the quality of my items and tasks". Moreover, teacher educators' ability to state clear and simple stems in classroom test construction was evident after peer coaching sessions, as illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8. *Clear and Simple Language for Item Construction*

Assessment Objectives
Interprets general ideas in short texts related to common topics, taking into account communicative purposes, and situations. Understands specific information in short passages related to past experiences with predictable content. Approaches content from informative, narrative and argumentative texts from a critical perspective.

Ítem
Listening Exercise *Listen to the conversation and carry out the exercise proposed based on the information provided.* **I-Multiple choice with ONLY ONE answer** **1. What is the man's main problem with his computer?** A. It crashes a lot. B. His computer has a virus. C. It has a lot of junk software. **2. What is the issue with the computer warranty?** A. The warranty has expired since he bought the computer. B. The warranty isn't valid because didn't register the computer. C. The warranty doesn't cover software issues and problems. **3. What can we infer from the first company's response to the caller?** A. They sent the man the wrong computer in the first place. B. The company doesn't provide warranties for their products. C. They are understaffed to handle customer complaints. **4. Which of the following is a main selling point for the second company being advertised?** A. Their products are the newest on the market. B. The computers are cheaper than those sold by competitors. C. The company manufactures secure and trustworthy machines. **5. What is the name of the second company?** A. Turbo Command B. Turvo Computers C. Turban Camando

Discussion

According to Hughes (1989), once the need for tests is accepted, their consequences on teaching and learning acknowledged, and their poor quality recognized, "we should do everything that we can to improve the practice of testing" (p. 4). As the findings suggest, participants could advance in the construction of classroom tests for achievement purposes through peer coaching, which might positively impact their testing practices in the EFL class. Their opinions during the focus group interview reflected both a sense of attainment and concern regarding their work as test designers. On the one hand, they felt that conscious construction of classroom tests allowed them to focus on the way they were teaching the language, as well as to reflect on the language knowledge they possessed. During the process of revising items against course objectives, teachers became aware of the extent to which their teaching and testing were not aligned and the consequences of this misalignment on students' sense of goal achievement.

Most participants acknowledged feeling more confident and comfortable with the tests they were going to administer in their courses after they had revised them, and started to perceive classroom test construction as a fundamental process to make accurate judgments on learners' achievements. Nevertheless, they considered this process time consuming and complex; in consequence, they advocate for more opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, and principles required for classroom test design as part of the professional development that the program offers. Altogether, despite the need for more training in classroom test design, teacher-made tests are unique to portray learning that occurs in particular contexts under determined circumstances (Glušac and Pilipovic, 2017). Therefore, the creation of more valid and reliable language tests for measuring learners' achievements must be encouraged in the English teaching program.

These results match those observed in earlier studies. In the first place, they support the idea of reliability and validity being frequently disregarded by teachers when developing tests, as found by Badara (2016) in research aimed at determining the quality of Indonesian language teacher-made tests at junior school level, and Quansah et al. (2019) in a study at senior high schools in Ghana. Moreover, they are in agreement with Coniam's (2014) claim regarding worldwide English teachers' need to be guided in order to develop assessment and test design skills, and consistent with those of Hartell and Strimel (2018) who concluded that "different constructs and purposes demand different ways of assessment; therefore, the importance of assessment literate teachers is key" (p. 20).

In contrast to Coniam's (2014) discouraging view of teacher-made tests being, "a waste of time, and unfair to students in terms of the results generated" (p. 247), findings from this study were to a great extent encouraging and significant. They provide evidence for the conceptual premise that systematic and professional support from peers can help English teachers develop assessment and test design skills that will lead to the construction of valid tools for examination and reliable results in terms of students' performance.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Being competent in the design of classroom tests is a fundamental property of teachers' assessment literacy. However, one of the most significant discussions in the field today is the validity and reliability of teacher-made tests. As the literature review suggests, a number of researchers have reported teachers' inconsistent design of classroom tests due to lack of awareness, knowledge, and skills required for it. This chapter defends the view that professional development is crucial in the rise of teacher educators' competence in classroom test design for achievement purposes. It intends to shed new light on current debates on this issue through an examination of the effect of peer coaching on participants' competence to develop language tests in higher education contexts.

This project provided an important opportunity to advance the understanding of teacher educators' deficiencies in classroom test design. The areas of concern identified relate to appropriate alignment among test purpose, course objectives, and test tasks or items; omission of relevant information from test specifications; logical organization of test structure and elicitation of authentic use of language; and clear and simple statement of stems. Moreover, the study offers some important insights into contributions of peer coaching to teachers' competence development to design language tests. Classroom tests designed by participants in the last sessions provide evidence of their progress in enhancing the qualities of test validity and reliability by revising and adjusting the description of test specifications and the writing and distribution of test tasks and items. Furthermore, participants' recognition of their mistakes in test design, their impact on decision making, and the need for continuous preparation are evidence of the positive impact of peer coaching on their test construction competence.

Implications derived from this research involve the revision and adjustment of professional development proposals for language teachers in higher education contexts in order to include training in classroom test design. Furthermore, as the literature review suggests, there is insufficient research about English language teacher-educators' competence in classroom test construction.

There is, therefore, a definite need for conducting empirical studies to expand knowledge in the field. Finally, teachers' development of testing skills should be a key priority for undergraduate and graduate teaching programs.

Due to practical constraints, this research cannot provide a comprehensive review of validation strategies used by participants after the administration of classroom tests, namely item facility, item discrimination, and distractor analysis indices. Although peer assessment of teacher-made tests represents an opportunity to examine their quality, it would be desirable to explore the extent to which items result easy or difficult for test takers, allow to differentiate low- and high-ability learners, and display efficient distractors in the case of multiple-choice items. Finally, further research could assess the effects of peer coaching on teachers' abilities to administer and use test results.

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LEXICAL GUIDELINES

To keep some structural, methodological, and lexical consistency across the entire book, we built a glossary with some lexical recommendations to refer to some concepts that were of common interest. Although based on existing literature, the glossary is not comprehensive or definitive.

Spanish	English
Research	
Vicerrectoría de Investigaciones	• **Office of the Vice-Provost for Research (First)** • Research Office (Second time onwards)
Línea de Investigación	• **Research Line**
Grupo de Investigación	• **Research Group**
Nodos o Campos de Investigación	• **Research Fields**
Estudios Culturales	• **Cultural Studies**
Políticas Lingüísticas	• **Language Policy**
Procesos de Lectura y Escritura	• **Literacies**
Formación de Maestros de Lenguas	• **Language Teacher Education**
Evaluación en Lenguas	• **Language Assessment**
Diseño de Pruebas	• **Test Design**
Identidad del Maestro de Lenguas	• **Language Teacher Identity**
Formación en Investigación	• **Research Training**
Investigación Formativa	• **Formative Research**
Semilleros de Investigación	• **Research Incubators** [preferred] (See Abad & Pineda, 2018; Machado-Alba & Machado-Duque, 2014) • **Research seedbeds** (Quintero-Corzo, Munevar-Molina, & Munevar-Quintero, 2008).
Curriculum	
Licenciatura en Inglés	• **B.A. in English Teaching (SNIES104645)** • Bachelor's Degree in English Teaching
Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés	• **B.A. in Foreign Languages Teaching with Emphasis in English (SNIES 106287)** • Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages Teaching -English
Registro Calificado	• **Register of Qualified Programmes** [RQP] (OECD, 2012)
Acreditación de Alta Calidad	• **High-Quality Accreditation** [HQA] (OECD, 2012)
Proyecto Educativo de Programa [PEP]	• **Program's Education Project**
Proyecto Educativo Institucional [PEI]	• **Institutional Education Project** (OECD, 2012)
Práctica Pedagógica	• **Practicum** (Gebhard, 2010)
Policy	
Ministerio de Educación Nacional	• **Ministry of National Education** (MEN for its acronym in Spanish)
Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo	• **National Bilingual Program 2004-2019** (PNB)
Programa Nacional para el Fortalecimiento de las lenguas Extranjeras	• **National Program for the Strengthening of Foreign Languages** 2010-2014 (PFDCLE)
Ley Nacional de Bilingüismo	• **National Law of Bilingualism** (Law 1651 of 2013)
Programa Nacional de Inglés – Colombia Very Well	• **The National English Program 2015-2025** (PNI: Colombia Very Well 2015-2025 (PNI)
Colombia Bilingüe	• **Bilingual Colombia 2014-2018** (CB)

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In 2010, teachers from the B.A. in English Teaching at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó formed CILEX (Construcciones Investigativas en Lenguas Extranjeras). Research and teaching in the program have grown synergistically ever since, but ten years down the road it was time to take stock of our research to project the direction in which we wanted to move forward. This book is the result of that effort to recognize our shared history and thus propel our upcoming academic endeavors.

The book starts out by presenting the epistemological foundations of CILEX, which is based on the threefold notion of the language teacher as an intellectual, an academic, and an educator. It thereon explains the system that arranges our academic production within five thematic nodes: cultural studies, language policy, literacies, language teacher education, and language assessment. Each chapter reports on one or two studies in which the authors participated as leading researchers or advisors. Hence, the book also reflects the formative research tradition that characterizes most of our practice.

Having language teacher education as a binding thread that cuts across the entire volume, authors present their particular perspective on topics as varied as college academic performance, early childhood literacy, language policy appropriation, teacher educators' assessment literacy, student teachers' practicum identity crisis, research training in teacher education, and critical reading instruction.

This book condenses the work of a group of teacher educators who believe in the power of research to galvanize teaching and inspire positive educational change. As readers go through its pages, it is our hope they will be able to recognize not only the singular value of each individual chapter but also the richness of our collaboration, which constitutes the fabric of our identity as an academic community.

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