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Contents

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Contenido

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Editorial

Possible Research Paths for English Language Teacher-Researchers in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly been one of those global events that force us to adjust our behavior patterns in practically all aspects of our lives. In relation to teaching, which is by definition an interactive and social activity (especially so in regard to foreign language teaching), its scope of action appears to have been reduced, at all levels, to distance education and virtual environments as the only available alternatives. Thanks to the digital era one could argue that the process of adaptation has been smooth; after all, teachers are no strangers to the use of digital platforms and computer assisted learning, as attested by the many articles revolving around these issues that have been published in the *Profile* journal (and in many others) since the turn of the century. However, and as implied above, the situation is new in that teachers have to rely almost exclusively on virtual methodologies to ensure learning processes; that is, they have been left with not much room for face-to-face interaction, which, arguably, is still paramount in reinforcing said learning processes.

Clearly, this situation has come with its own challenges, both for teachers and for students, and upcoming research in English language teaching is likely to focus on or revisit phenomena like (a) teacher burnout due to, for instance, overwork while preparing virtual lessons or to a lack of familiarity with digital tools; (b) the emotional responses of students and teachers during confinement and their experiences about working or studying from home; (c) class interaction mediated by electronic devices; (d) alternative assessment; (e) learning autonomy; and (f) the use of English as a lingua franca, among many other fertile topics.

What we learn from the current situation will certainly allow us, as teachers of English, to complement teaching practices and to take full advantage of what the digital era puts at our disposal so that students have a more comprehensive learning experience. This should also have an impact on teacher education which is expected to pay more attention to distance and virtual education. Additionally, and bearing in mind the increase in teachers' workload, it is also important to account for the factors that affect teachers' well-being in current times. Although *Profile* has not planned to devote special issues to gathering manuscripts around a unique theme, we would like to welcome contributions dealing with such issues.

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Another important aspect of the digital era that the pandemic has brought to the fore, and one which is related to current practices in academic publication, is the possibility of accessing available crucial knowledge immediately and without restriction; it is what lies at the core of the open-access movement. We, at the *Profile* journal, continue to embrace this spirit of sharing the insights of our authors in the hopes of advancing the academic knowledge of a growing community of scholars. Hence, at this critical moment, when access to trusted sources of information appears to be mainly obtained online, we also hope that the contents we publish for our readers in the journal site somehow contribute to the new teaching/learning dynamics.

Obviously, the quality of the journal contents could not be guaranteed without the invaluable help of our team of reviewers, to whom we want to express our acknowledgment and appreciation, especially in these trying times. Despite the disruptions brought about by the pandemic, our reviewers have kept on collaborating with the journal, which helps us in our objective of placing the journal as one of those trusted sources of high-quality academic information. The commitment of our reviewers, as well as that of our authors, is made visible in the articles selected for this issue.

In this issue, we are very pleased to share with you 12 articles. Eight correspond to the section *Issues from Teacher Researchers*, two to the section *Issues from Novice Teacher- Researchers* and two to the section *Issues Based on Reflections and Innovations.* The contributions come from four countries: Colombia, Chile, the United States of America, and Mexico.

The topics discussed by researchers in the current issue concern English language teaching, foreign language teacher education, and teacher professional development as regards (a) pre and in-service teachers, (b) novice and experienced school teachers and undergraduate and graduate foreign education students, (c) the development of skills from different perspectives and actors, as well as (d) language policies, assessment, and action research as the main topics.

The section *Issues from Teacher Researchers* opens with an article by Gloria Romero (Universidad de Santiago de Chile) that deals with English language teaching in the public, semiprivate, and private school contexts as provided by novice teachers. The paper reveals that novice teachers come across nonharmonic communities of teachers regardless of the types of schools where they work. Rather than being a detriment, these nonharmonic communities of practice positively impact novice teachers to strive during the first years of teaching. This article is followed by a paper dealing with language policies and elementary school teachers. Carmen Helena Guerrero-Nieto and Álvaro Quintero-Polo (Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Colombia) showed how a bottom-up approach to the study of educational policies can shed some light on how elementary school teachers deal with educational policies to make them work. The study revealed that teachers are very aware of the influence of the neoliberalist ideas but find ways to make policies work while being critical of the way policies are designed and implemented.

Our issue continues with a contribution from Ximena D. Burgin and Mayra C. Daniel, (Northern Illinois University, USA). These researchers report on Ecuadorian preservice and

in-service teachers' ability to conduct action research in the classroom as well as their skills to efficiently adjust instruction to address students' cultural and linguistic diversity. Findings suggest that training teachers to conduct action research will improve their ability to analyze data and improve students' learning outcomes. Our next article deals with policies regarding the results of high school students in the English proficiency state exam in Colombia. Researcher Jorge Eliecer Benavides (Universidad de Nariño, Colombia) analyzes the above-mentioned results and shows a worrying panorama between the goals established by the Ministry of Education and the final outcomes. Benavides proposes a review of language policies, which according to the study must emerge from a bottom-up approach which means a sustained impulse in teacher training, methodology, and curricular and pedagogical organization.

The next two articles deal with the mastery of writing with different participants and perspectives. The first paper explores how master thesis writers position themselves in the English language teaching academic community. Researcher Vicky Ariza-Pinzón (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico) accompanies the process through which novel thesis writers approach this new and challenging task. The results show how postgraduate student-teachers draw from a set of interconnected genres—descriptions of the object of study, definitions, and personal exemplum—that build a shared experience with the reader as well as provide the persuasive purpose of the text. The second article deals with preservice teacher education as regards the impact reflective learning has in the academic writing skills of English as a foreign language preservice teachers. Researchers Angélica Meza (Instituto Caro y Cuervo, Colombia) and Ingrid Rodríguez and Lorena Caviedes (Universidad El Bosque, Colombia) examined how the participants' academic writing skills developed when preparing for international writing exams while being accompanied by the researchers through reflections upon feedback and self-assessment. The results evidenced learners' writing skills improvement while implementing reflecting learning, which led to self-regulation and metacognition.

The last two articles of the section present research work coming from Mexico and Colombia. The Mexican contribution also deals with writing as the previous two papers but on this occasion analyzed from the perspective of teachers who teach writing. Elsa Fernanda González (Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, Mexico) explores the classroom assessment process of 11 Mexican teachers in the writing component through the incorporation of training. The results suggest an impact in three main areas: classroom teaching of writing, classroom assessment of writing, and teacher self-awareness. The Colombian study examines the relationship between an action research study about the exploration of local communities and the emergence of agency and value of rural identity. Results showed that when communities are linked with classroom practices and foreign language learning, English becomes a vehicle to explore their places, who they are as members of the community, and how to promote decision-making to help others. The researchers who worked on this fascinating quest were Lucelly Paredes-Mendez, Ingrid Alexandra Troncoso-Rodríguez and Sandra Patricia Lastra-Ramírez (Universidad del Tolima, Colombia).

Section 2, *Issues From Novice Teacher-Researchers*, includes two articles. Both of them come from representatives of Colombian universities located in different geographical points of the Colombian territory. Estefanía Durán and Katherin García from the Universidad de Pamplona, North-Eastern Colombia, explore the influence of English teachers' methodological practices on the learning processes of English as a foreign language undergraduate students. The methodological approaches of teachers varied and these influenced students' learning processes differently. From the Southern region of Colombia, specifically from the Universidad de la Amazonia, researcher Jaime Fernando Duque-Aguilar explores the assessment of speaking in a teacher education program as well. Results revealed teachers' preference for summative assessment practices to determine students' progress regarding speaking. The author proposes language assessment as a meaningful process in which students, teachers, and the institution involved should benefit.

Our issue closes with the section *Issues Based on Reflections and Innovations*. In this opportunity we welcome a joint venture between a Chilean researcher and an American one and the contribution of a Colombian academic. The joint effort between Malba Barahona (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) and Kristin J. Davin (University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA), tackles teacher education from the perspective of a practice-based approach in which student-teachers learn to teach a language by engaging in "actual" teaching rather than "talking" about teaching. They report on the implementation of a practice-based approach in two different contexts: an initial English teacher education program in Chile and an initial foreign language teacher education program in the United States. The findings demonstrate that incorporating a practice-based approach offers a useful affordance for examining and illuminating the complexities of foreign language teaching practice across contexts. Finally, we have the contribution made by researcher Frank Giraldo (Universidad de Caldas, Colombia). The reflection made by Giraldo examines the connections that exist between language assessment literacy and teachers' professional development. The article signals that there are existing language assessment literacy initiatives, and however limited they might be, they have the potential to advance teachers' language assessment literacy at large and contribute to their professional development.

As always, we hope that you find this new edition useful and interesting. Enjoy it!

Melba Libia Cárdenas
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PROFILE

Issues from Teacher Researchers

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Deconstructing Novice Teachers' Actions and Reactions to Nonharmonic Chilean School Communities of Practice

Deconstruyendo las acciones y reacciones de profesores novatos ante comunidades de práctica no armónicas en Chile

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This paper reports a small section of a larger study that uses a mixed-methods approach to examine participation experiences of novice teachers of English in Chile beginning their careers in nonharmonic public, semiprivate, and private school communities. Drawing on Wenger's framework of communities of practice, this paper reveals that novice teachers come across nonharmonic communities of teachers regardless of the types of schools where they work—that is, schools normally classified by socioeconomic background. As such, new teachers experience varying degrees of challenges that hinder their participation in such school communities. Rather than being a detriment, these nonharmonic communities of practice positively impact novice teachers to strive, including by joining diverse forms of communities, during the first years of teaching.

Keywords: Chilean context, English language teaching, novice teacher, school communities of practice

Este artículo informa una pequeña sección de un estudio más amplio que utiliza un enfoque de métodos mixtos para examinar las experiencias de participación de un grupo de profesores novatos de inglés en Chile que inician sus carreras en comunidades escolares no armónicas del sistema público, subvencionado y privado. Basándose en las comunidades de práctica de Wenger, este documento revela que los profesores novatos encuentran comunidades no armónicas en colegios que son normalmente clasificados por su condición socioeconómica. Allí, los profesores experimentan varios desafíos que dificultan su participación en dichas comunidades. En vez de ser un obstáculo, estas comunidades impactan positivamente a los profesores para salir adelante, quienes se unen a diversas comunidades al inicio de la profesión docente.

Palabras clave: comunidades de práctica escolares, contexto chileno, enseñanza del inglés, profesor novato

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Introduction

Ample ink has been spent on novice teachers and the challenges they experience during the first years of teaching. Some have compared a teacher's early teaching period as "reality shocks" or the "sink or swim processes" (Varah et al., 1986; Veenman, 1984)—the result of social, contextual, administrative, pedagogical, and affective challenges novice teachers experience in educational institutions (Falla, 2013; Farrell, 2012, 2016; Huberman, 1993). These challenges directly impact teaching practices and attrition (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Scheopner, 2010).

Studies on the experiences of novice teachers of English, a recent development in English language teaching (ELT), are strongly informed by what has been conducted in general education (Borg, 2008; Farrell, 2008). And Farrell (2016) asserts that in-depth understanding of novice teachers' experiences is still insufficient—hence, little is known about the first ELT years of novice teachers, especially those working in foreign-language contexts and complex educational systems.

This article approaches this debate from the multicontextual Chilean-school-system perspective. Drawing on Wenger et al.'s (2002) communities of practice (COPs) lens, this paper examines the participation experiences of novice teachers of English in public, semiprivate, and private schools. Wenger (1998) uses the concept of *harmony* to describe COPs' functioning. In harmonic COPs, learning happens through community members' co-participation. However, in the development of the COP theory, Wenger et al. do not conceptualize communities that fail to function. Rather, they briefly identify the downsides of communities within corporations such as the Hewlett-Packard Company (e.g., COPs with disconnected, overconfident, or arrogant experienced members or well-established COPs that leave no room for newcomers to contribute and participate). In this paper, I incorporate the term *nonharmonic* applied to teaching COPs, namely, English teaching school communities of practice. By these COPs, I refer to already-established communities, formed by experienced and novice teachers, recognized by the school community, and in which established member relationships (e.g., COPs with conflictive, closed, jealous, competitive experienced members) or external factors (e.g., school context) hinder the learning, participation domains, and opportunities of new teachers.

Using a mixed-methods design, this paper deconstructs nonharmonic ELT communities to determine how COPs in diverse school contexts operate, how new teachers navigate their first years, and how those teachers endure Chilean school challenges. It highlights (a) the coping mechanisms developed by Chilean novice teachers of English to survive in nonharmonic or challenging school contexts and (b) the extent socioeconomic resources do not significantly affect COPs' functioning (i.e., nonharmonic communities exist within school types classified by socioeconomic background).

This paper addresses the following questions: (a) How do novice teachers of English experience their participation in nonharmonic school communities? and (b) How do they cope with challenges to thereby thrive in their first teaching years? It begins by overviewing the Chilean school system and the theoretical framework guiding this study. I later present the study's research methodology and analyze and discuss the findings. The paper concludes with a call for research examining diversified school communities and new-teacher social participation.

Multicontextual Chilean School System

Novice teachers in Chile begin their professional lives in a multi-educational context characterized by socioeconomic issues rooted in educational reforms imposed by the dictatorship in 1980. This new "educational model . . . promoted the privatization of the school system" (Barahona, 2016, p. 17), the Ministry of Educa-

tion's decentralization of school administration, and the creation of semiprivate franchise schools (Elacqua et al., 2011), all of which eroded public education (McEwan et al., 2008; Santiago et al., 2013) and increased social and educational stratification between wealthy and low-income students (Avalos & Aylwin, 2007; Avalos & De los Rios, 2016).

This reality has had severe repercussions on teachers' working conditions. For example, private schools offer better salaries (40% more than public and semiprivate schools) and benefits; paid ongoing lesson preparation, meeting time, and extra hours (Avalos & Aylwin, 2007); and more professional support from principals and peers (Laborde, 2014). In this way, these schools can employ more rigorous hiring procedures and hire teachers considered to be the best qualified (Avalos & Aylwin, 2007; Barahona, 2016; Mizala & Torche, 2012; Valencia & Tant, 2011), thus increasing new-teacher demand and competition for employment. In contrast, teachers in public and semiprivate schools work under precarious conditions (Cornejo, 2009)—they are given inappropriate and poor teaching materials and have to work with inadequate infrastructure and facilities; have little or no time for preparation, collaborative planning, and adequate teamwork; and have little job security. On top of that, they experience burnout, often suffer from lack of social and professional recognition, and find their teaching performance affected (Cornejo, 2009). These conditions result in their diminished interest in pedagogy careers and decrease new-teacher retention in Chilean public schools (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016, Valenzuela & Sevilla, 2015).

From this multi-context perspective, I argue that new-teacher experiences in schools should be examined from diversified educational contexts. Studies focused on novice teachers' participation experiences in diverse school communities are limited (Avalos, 2009; Avalos & Aylwin, 2007; Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016), especially in Chilean ELT.

Theoretical Framework

The First Years of Teaching: Pushing to Survive

The first years of teaching can be daunting, especially for novice teachers unaware of school challenges (Farrell, 2016) that require new teachers "to act as fully formed teachers" (Barahona, 2016, p. 30), assume full teaching responsibilities, become familiar with school policies and curricula immediately following training, and usually, establish relationships with students, colleagues, parents, and administrative staff (Farrell, 2016; Hancock & Scherff, 2010). That novice teachers must cope with difficult classes, which experienced teachers do not typically want to teach, worsens this "reality shock" (Bartell, 2004; Billingsley et al., 2009; Veenman, 1984).

School organization and work environment are also critical to new teachers. Poor colleague and administrative-staff support, meager colleague feedback, lack of collaboration opportunities, and student discipline and demotivation negatively impact teacher motivation, self-esteem, commitment, and the desire to remain in the profession (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006; Scheopner, 2010). Additionally, new teachers find themselves immersed in "controlling" (Glas et al., 2019) school cultures whereby "points or grades are more important than meaningful learning" (Glas et al., 2019, p. 49) thus hindering student and novice teacher motivation.

ELT shocks result from factors like the gap between teacher preparation and real teacher development, limited contact with program educators after graduation (Farrell, 2012), and how novice teachers "from the first day must face the same challenges as their more experienced colleagues" (Farrell, 2012, p. 436).

Farrell (2016) identifies three main "complications" (p. 104): pedagogical, curricular, and collegial. Pedagogically—and because of administrative issues, isolation, or a need to fit into traditional ELT communities—novice teachers are compelled to modify or abandon approaches and methods, including inter-

active ones, learned in teacher-training programs (Farrell, 2006; Shin, 2012). Pushed by experienced teachers and fearing student-interaction noise and loss of class control, new teachers tend to discard group-work activities (Farrell, 2006). At a curricular level, novice teachers must choose between what they want to teach and department-required and -prepared content designed for test preparation. Collegially, novice teachers are excluded from group meetings and pedagogic activities due to individualistic school cultures or complex relationships (Farrell, 2006); thus, isolated novice teachers have "nobody (perceived or otherwise) to go to for help. This isolation does nothing to help them navigate these difficult waters because they cannot or do not reach out to others for advice and help" (Farrell, 2016, p. 104).

Despite these challenges, novice teachers thus develop mechanisms to "swim" (Varah et al., 1986). Farrell (2019) argues that reflective practice helps teachers examine their beliefs and teaching, become responsible for their professional evolution, and develop strategized survival "resolutions" (Farrell, 2006, p. 213) such as classroom interaction and extra material with which to complement school textbooks. Having realistic workplace expectations; familiarizing themselves with students, teachers, and administrative staff; and having a proactive attitude also help (Hebert & Worthy, 2001). Novice teachers cope better with hurdles if they already have social competence (e.g., they seek support from family, friends, and former classmates); personal efficacy (e.g., they take advantage of student, colleague, and department-head feedback); and problem-solving strategies (e.g., they "persevere, visualize solutions, and solve problems"; Tait, 2008, p. 69). School collaboration, acceptance, and inclusion of new teachers further alleviates the social stress of first years' teaching (Ulvik et al., 2009).

In sum, novice teachers thrive when they take action and make personal decisions (e.g., reflect, incorporate extra material, familiarize themselves with others, or develop proactive attitudes). However, in this paper, I add to the personal decision-making skills of new teachers, the social participation aspect present in the communities where they work, grow, and develop.

Theory of Communities of Practice

This study adopts Wenger et al.'s (2002) practitioner-oriented *domain*, *community*, and *practice* framework, wherein COPs are formed by "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p. 4). Even if an organization's members do not always work together, during their time together, they discuss and share issues, situations, experiences, time, information, and advice. This well-spent time helps them do their jobs better, solve problems, induct newcomers, and use technology (Wenger et al., 2002).

As social beings, we adhere to more than one community, and experience gained in one COP can be used and applied in a new COP (Wenger et al., 2002). Multi-community membership provides members the opportunity to deal with familiar problems, the "flexibility to face new challenges, and the support to develop creative solutions and knowledge" (Romero & Vasilopoulos, 2020, p. 4). Not all communities are COPs, though—that is, not all groups provide member recognition nor interaction and participation learning opportunities.

In this study's context, social participation in COPs can enable novice teachers to interact with other community members, do things together, think and reflect, develop belonging, and make sense of the teaching world (Wenger, 1998).

COPs have the following characteristics:

- Domain: Common grounds, purposes, goals, and a "shared domain of interest" and "competence" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2) encourage member accountability, community-development commitment, and collective-goal valuation.

- Community: Community members "engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2); a solid community fosters interaction, respect, trust, idea sharing, weakness acknowledgement, listening, acting, member involvement, and becoming.
- Practice: Community practice is "a set of socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain: a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a basis for action, communication, problem solving, performance, and accountability" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 38).

Though COPs offer interaction and learning opportunities, communities are not always harmonious or peaceful as member diversity and interaction complexity can generate disharmony and animosity (Wenger, 1998). Wenger et al. (2002) warn that communities have "downsides" and that we should not "romanticise communities of practice or expect them to solve all problems without creating any" (p. 139). COPs can create barriers for member learning, innovation, and participation and create community-growth-and-development obstacles. Wenger et al. stress these downfalls in confronting future challenges.

In this way and through the lenses of domain, community, and practice, I examine nonharmonic COPs as the driving force used by new teachers to navigate first years' Chilean school teaching.

Method

In addressing the research questions, I use a mixed-methods approach: collection and analysis of qualitative data gathered from an open-ended online survey, semistructured interviews, and observation. These data were integrated into a single study to tell a story (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell et al., 2006). All these data sources more completely demonstrate the participation experiences of novice teachers of English in diverse school communities in Chile. That said, and as Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) parallel, qualitative data capture more in-depth stories of novice teachers.

Recruitment

The study started once ethics approval was granted by the ethics committee from the Ethics Board at my university. Recruitment began with help from the English Opens Doors Program (EODP) in the Chilean Ministry of Education. Information about the study and my contact information were sent to novice teachers and to universities offering English-teacher-education programs. The EODP or the universities did not receive study-participant information, were not involved in the study, had no participant record, and had no study-data access. Respondents signed consent forms and were not asked to identify themselves; their confidentiality was secured by assigned codes: NTE/PU = novice public-school teacher, NTE/SP = novice semiprivate-school teacher, NTE/PR = novice private-school teacher.

Participants

The demographic data from the online survey (N=138) revealed 85% of the participants were women and 15% were men; with ages from 22 to 33; and worked in Northern, Central, and Southern Chile. Regarding place of work, 65% of the participants worked in public schools, 20% worked in semiprivate institutions, and 15% worked in the private sector; they had one to five years' teaching experience; worked at all levels from PK to Grade 12; and typically had a B2 English level.[1] Almost all novice teachers in the public and semiprivate schools declared they had side jobs after school or during the

1 A B2 level indicates a person can understand main ideas of complex texts on concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field; interact with fluency and spontaneity that enables regular interaction with native speakers, free of strain for either party; produce clear, detailed text on wide-ranging subjects; and explain a topical viewpoint and provide advantages and independent disadvantages of perspectives (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24).

week to make ends meet (e.g., ELT in universities and language institutes, worked at more than one school, or taught private lessons to adults or children). This confirms what Chilean scholars have stated about the working conditions of new teachers across different types of schools (Avalos & Aylwin, 2007; Mizala & Torche, 2012; Valencia & Tant, 2011).

Eleven participants took part in the interview and observation process described below. Nine of the eleven interviewees were women and two were men; all were from 23 to 27 years old; four taught in private schools, four in semiprivate schools, and three worked in Santiago's public sector; all had 1 to 4 years' teaching experience; and all worked at all levels, Grades 1 to 12. These novice teachers declared they had C2, C1,[2] and B2 levels.

Data Collection

This paper reports on a small subsection of a larger study that used a mixed-methods approach. In the larger study, data were collected in three ways: (a) An online survey developed with feedback from teacher trainers in Chile. Close-ended questions gathered demographic data about the participants (e.g., age, gender, years of teaching experience, etc.) and aimed at developing their profile. The open-ended section collected data about the respondents' experiences in diverse school communities (e.g., community participation, membership, school support, joint practice, etc.). The survey was designed and distributed with Fluid Surveys and took no longer than 30 minutes to complete. One hundred and thirty-eight novice teachers responded to the survey. English and Spanish versions were sent to allow for responses in preferred languages (van Nes et al., 2010). (b) Eleven novice teachers contacted me again to participate in semistructured interviews which were scheduled in advance with participants at times and places of their convenience. Interviews took approximately one hour, were audio recorded, and the English or Spanish option was given (van Nes et al., 2010). Questions resembled the survey's open-section questions and aimed at gathering in-depth stories from participants. (c) To understand how novice teachers navigate varying community types, I conducted nonparticipant observations (Lashley, 2018) of the interviewed study participants in their English-departments staff meetings. Letters were sent to the heads of the English teaching departments explaining the purpose of the study and indicating that attention would be paid to the participation of the interviewees in their COPs. All the department heads agreed to my presence at the meetings via email or phone communication. In the process, I did not interfere but rather took detailed notes about the participation of novice teachers. All meetings took place in schools during the school day at varying times, lasted approximately one and a half to two hours, and were carried out at the English teams' convenience.

In this paper, I report on the novice teachers who expressed working in challenging COPs. To illustrate the findings, I largely use participants' quotes from the interviews, some excerpts from the open-ended part of the survey, and one extract from one observation.

Data Analysis

Inspired by Wenger et al.'s (2002) COP framework, I sought to identify how novice teachers navigate their participation in nonharmonic COPs and how they cope with challenges in such English teaching communities. To address the research questions that guide this study, I started the "process of making sense out of data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 193) following Merriam's guide for qualitative data analysis. The data analysis process

2 A C2 level indicates a person can easily understand nearly everything heard or read; summarize information from spoken and written sources; reconstruct arguments and accounts coherently; express themselves spontaneously, fluently, and precisely; and differentiate finer points of proficient meaning, even in complex situations.

A C1 level indicates a person can understand a wide range of demanding, long texts; recognize implicit meaning; express themselves fluently and spontaneously with little obvious searching for expressions; use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes; produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects; show controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24)

involved seven steps: (a) transcription of the qualitative data collected from the open-ended questions in the online survey, the interviews, and the observations; (b) reading through the transcripts and making tentative notes of how the elements of a COP's domain, community, and practice manifest; (c) identification of patterns and tentative themes; (d) development of initial categories that illustrated the novice teachers' participation experiences while working in Chilean school COPS; (e) as the participants described more complex multiple experiences in their diverse COPS, new categories emerged linked to the three primary components of a COP; (f) development of a coding protocol in order to re-code the data and to identify the most relevant patterns related to the participation of novice teachers in nonharmonic COPS; (g) finally, use of the software NVivo 11 to cross-analyze the data.

Findings

That private schools offer better job opportunities and working conditions to new teachers is a longstanding norm belief, yet my deconstruction of nonharmonic COPS and novice-teacher participation revealed no difference between private, semiprivate, and public schools. Regardless of the type of school where the participating novice teachers worked, they experienced varying degrees of challenges that shaped their participation. This reveals that nonharmonic teaching communities were present in all types of schools no matter their financial resources.

Furthermore, nonharmonic contexts impelled new teachers to find survival and participation strategies. Teachers working in these contexts developed their own goals, formed new COPS, or joined COPS already established inside or outside their schools. For ease of reading and to be consistent with my theoretical framework, I offer my claims by way of Wenger's three COP characteristics (domain, community, practice) and provide excerpts from transcripts obtained from different qualitative-data sources.

Unshared Domains

Regardless of school socioeconomic background, participants characterized nonharmonic ELT communities as lacking clear shared domains and communal goals (e.g., domains were undiscussed or undetermined). New teachers were compelled to establish individual goals or *personal domains* (i.e., independently determined goals as members of teaching communities), which I subcategorized as *instrumental* or *motivational* goals. A novice teacher reflects this: "I don't know if the team shares this goal because we never talk about it. My own goal is to be able to guide the students, to be a good example, and not to teach them bad things" (NTE/SP).

On the one hand, novice teachers saw English as an instrument for students' futures and stressed the importance of teaching students English for the sake of better job prospects and salaries. One teacher asserted, "I want to make students understand that English can help them later to go to university and get a [well-paying] job" (NTE/PR). On the other hand, participants' motivational goals focused on helping learners to like or enjoy English, as illustrated by the following comment:

> I wish my students liked English. I don't mind if they don't learn much with me, but I'm happy if they love learning it. Learning English is necessary. It's fundamental because it opens a new world, new job opportunities. My goals are to motivate them to love the language, make them realize that they can learn if they want to and see that a whole world opens when you know another language . . . I have no clue if the team [teachers in the English department] shares this goal. What they do or want is unknown to me. (NTE/PU)

These statements indicate that undiscussed or unestablished teaching-community joint domains compelled novice teachers to develop their own—often revolving around student communities, not teaching communities. This evidences novice teachers were active, identifying other communities and resolving to direct their teaching despite primary communities' lack of direction.

(Mis)Community Life

Perceiving more downsides in nonharmonic public, semiprivate, and private communities, participants indicated poor integration and a "lack of support" from COP members. Some new teachers reported feeling unwelcome and "isolated," receiving "mistreatment," or perceiving "envy" from experienced English COP members. One young teacher commented, "it's been hard to feel integrated because experienced teachers do not welcome people without experience" (NTE/SP). A novice teacher from a public school shared a similar sentiment:

> During my teaching practice and at work, I have always found bitter and impolite colleagues. One notices that in very few places people are willing to welcome you. As a new teacher, one must learn that human relations are complicated. (NTE/PU)

Moreover, in such contexts, other members provided superficial or little support to new-teacher integration in ELT COPS, as illustrated by the following:

> When [experienced teachers] see that a new teacher already has a master's in second language, they feel threatened. The support or help they have given me is good but superficial. Teachers avoid talking about pedagogical issues or how to teach English. I work alone because no one shares their teaching experiences or what is good for a certain group of students. This community is individualist and hedonists [*sic*] to the point that I believe my colleagues are linguistic divas who believe they possess a higher level of knowledge and language than others. I don't feel integrated in this community. (NTE/PR)

However, this teacher dealt with the challenge by forming a new COP with other novice teachers: "Luckily, there are other new teachers in the science and math department. We have lunch together, give each other tips on classroom management, talk about students or simply laugh" (NTE/PR).

These and other novice teachers who experienced challenges in their immediate ELT COPS sought external communities to survive and thrive. External COPS were formed by teachers from other disciplines within the school. This extract showcases this issue:

> I don't feel integrated in my English community because they're just a group of people. I feel better with the other teachers in the school. I get on well with 99% of them. My colleagues validate me as a teacher, they respect me. I can tell because they notice me, they observe me, they ask me things, and show interest in what I do. When I'm at my table hiding, working on my things, they approach me and ask: What are you doing? Why are you doing this? (NTE/PU)

Internal COPS conflict also emerged from the data: Though members worked on joint tasks, novice teachers' suggestions and ideas were not considered by experienced teachers more concerned with internal problems than collaboration. A novice private-school teacher asserted,

> As a team we talk. We agree on things as teachers. For example, we choose the material, agree on the dates for evaluations, but I feel like Switzerland, in the middle. When I ask or propose ideas, they don't listen to me because they are more worried about their coexistence problems in the team . . . the team is divided. (NTE/PR)

I confirmed this conflict when I observed a staff meeting this novice teacher participated in, wherein two experienced teachers and the novice teacher were choosing readers (books) for their grades:

> **Teacher 1:** [Novice teacher], don't forget it's complicated if we mix the press publishers.
>
> **Teacher 2:** [Novice teacher] and this one? Peter Pan… for what class would it be?
>
> **Novice teacher:** I was thinking of Grades 7 and 8.
>
> **Teacher 1:** [Novice teacher], tell her that these are for KET (Key English Test) level. I don't think it should be 7 and 8. It's more for KET.

Novice teacher (looking at Teacher 2): These are for KET.
Teacher 2: I loved these.
Novice teacher: They are very good.
Teacher 2: And I like them a lot for the culture thing. Tell him that he has to read them this time.
Novice teacher: Hmmm (looking at Teacher 1). OK, it would be good if you read the books.

Data analysis indicated this young teacher possibly felt his community's conflict constrained his participation. Instead of being able to share ideas about teaching or teaching materials or benefiting from more experienced colleagues, he became a mere conflict mediator. Nevertheless, he joined an external COP formed by teachers from other disciplines he could contribute to:

> To avoid all this conflict, I spend more time with the other teachers. They know who I am, my pros and cons, my weaknesses and strengths. I feel valued and liked. They consider my opinion and abilities. I provide technology support. We talk. They tell me their problems. Yes, we help each other. (NTE/PR)

Findings possibly indicated that novice teachers joined external communities, formed by experienced or novice teachers from other departments, when COPs did not satisfy their own needs.

Hindered Practice

Some school communities did not offer novice teachers many joint-practice opportunities. A main factor hindering practice was the competitive relationship of some private-sector teachers:

> My colleagues here are, let's say, "special." Very competitive, always comparing themselves to others, and if you do something in the classroom that makes you feel proud, you share it, but they question everything, or they run to tell the head of department. They are all the time paying attention to what you do or don't do, and if they have a problem, they don't talk to you directly . . . they go straight to our boss. So, I end up doing things on my own, quietly and very low key. (NTE/PR)

This novice teacher cocreated a COP to compensate for this situation:

> With my university classmates we always talk about our lives at school. Some have a good time while others, like me, don't. So, we formed a WhatsApp group where we share ideas, material, talk about our days, what to do with students, or how to teach things. It has helped me because I don't feel lonely. (NTE/PR)

Survey and interview data revealed joint practice was also restrained by school policies or by challenges imposed by the broader community (i.e., stakeholders running public and semiprivate schools). Authorities did not give experienced and new English teachers enough time or resources to interact, meet, work together, and share ideas. For example, this novice teacher commented,

> I have realized that a lot has to do with the principals and coordinators in the institution—their leadership. Here, we don't have time to do anything together. We sometimes talk about our lesson plans or student discipline, but we don't do any activities together, plan, or design evaluations because of lack of time. (NTE/PU)

Another example of hindered joint practice came from a young teacher in a semiprivate school:

> In this school, we are paid only one hour every two weeks to meet and to plan lessons. The English team is known for having lots of face-to-face teaching hours, so it's very hard for us to see each other at the same time and work together. Only during our break time, we manage to do something. I normally use my break to prepare material, my PowerPoints, pick up the photocopies, or fill in the class book. (NTE/SP)

Again, public- and semiprivate-school novice teachers did not wait idly for ELT community members to provide joint sharing and learning opportunities—

instead, they joined *macro communities* (e.g., Redes de docentes de inglés or English teachers' networks from the Chilean Ministry of Education) to develop joint practice. One public-sector novice teacher said, "I've done more things with the 'RED de inglés than with my team. At the RED we talk and share experiences; we receive training, get feedback, etc." (NTE/PU).

Novice teachers of English experienced challenges in public, semiprivate, and public-school contexts. My Chilean school COPs deconstruction revealed that challenges in nonharmonic communities were manifested in a lack of community-established domains and shared goals and sometimes turbulent relationships among members. Working conditions directly and negatively impacted coexistence of COPs with novice-teacher practice. Yet despite COP challenges, novice teachers found ways to thrive: cocreating new COPs or joining multiple communities to compensate for their ELT COPs' lack of domains, community support, and joint practices.

In sum, despite schools' socioeconomic background and resources, novice teachers of English experienced challenges independent of the type of school they worked in. Despite each school's hurdles, novice teachers joined different kinds of communities to deal with their struggles.

Discussion

That Chilean private schools provide better working conditions because they have the economic resources to attract the best-qualified novice teachers, pay higher salaries, and offer better job prospects and resources than semiprivate and public-sector schools is a general belief (Avalos & Aylwin, 2007; Barahona, 2016; Cornejo, 2009). This study found that novice teachers from all school types (i.e., nonharmonic public, semiprivate, and private communities) experienced hurdles and turbulence, were not fully integrated, were given an unwelcoming attitude, and experienced conflict among department members. This implies that it is people rather than the school context that influences the quality of life in their communities.

Collegial relationships impact first years' teaching (Farrell, 2016). Novice teachers agonize in educational contexts where they are neglected, undervalued, excluded, or abandoned by colleagues (Farrell, 2006, 2008). This study found that novice teachers in all three school types reported isolation from more experienced, unwelcoming, and competitive colleagues or when there was conflict among COP members. In these contexts, other members were disinterested in discussing relevant teaching issues or providing minimum support of novice-teacher integration into the COPs.

Findings also revealed that these nonharmonic contexts shaped shared domains and practice (Wenger et al., 2002). Participants described their teaching COPs as having few common goals and simplistic or few joint practices. Moreover, the broader public- and semiprivate-school community and school working conditions impacted communal practices (Cornejo, 2009), implying stakeholder-management-policy obstacles which rendered the ELT-community joint practices unfunctional (i.e., school demands constrained novice teachers and colleagues from doing things together); hence, the school at large plays an important role in COP functioning.

Also significant, despite the abovementioned challenges, novice teachers coped with complications (Farrell, 2006) by forming new COPs or joining already-established communities. Findings show that when nonharmonic ELT communities lacked shared domains (Wenger et al., 2002), novice teachers developed their own learner-community-oriented goals. Similarly, when their internal communities (i.e., department heads or experienced teachers of English) failed to provide needed support or opportunities for doing things together, novice teachers sought assistance in the school's other communities (e.g., they asked and received help from teachers in other disciplines), who accepted and encouraged the novice teachers, gave feedback, asked questions, were respectful, showed interest, and provided a sense of inclusion and belonging.

Other novice teachers joined macro communities (i.e., communities external to their school context; e.g., regional ELT networks organized by the Chilean Ministry of Education, like "red de inglés" or Whatsapp COPs, cocreated with novice teachers' former university classmates). In these communities, novice teachers could share practice (Wenger et al., 2002), as reflected by the activities they described (e.g., asking questions, sharing ideas and materials, receiving feedback, and providing teaching/teacher support). I draw on Wenger et al.'s (2002) theory of COPs to argue novice teachers find better ways to thrive when they belong to at least one community whose members and interactions help them shape coping strategies and thrive in education.

Concluding Remarks, Limitations and Implications

This paper deconstructed downsides of ELT school COPs to better elucidate novice teachers' first-years' experience in the multi-complex Chilean-school context. It addressed novice-teacher and ELT-community concerns. Nonharmonic communities delimit new teachers yet impel them to navigate schools normally stratified by socioeconomic resources. Regardless of available external resources, novice teachers were able to find teacher-development strategies, including integration into diverse, supportive communities. Community support (or lack thereof) is critical at both COP and macro levels. Community members cannot develop if the broader community and stakeholders do not provide experienced and novice teachers' co-participation opportunities and time to share experiences and practice. Government role is key and directly impacts young teachers. In this paper, I introduced the concept of nonharmonic English teaching COPs. This adds to Wenger et al.'s (2002) downsides within COPs in the world of corporations. From the context of this study, young teachers perceive COPs as nonharmonic when there is a lack of actively engaged core members in the social functioning of the communities. As such, new teachers join ongoing COPs where there is tension among experienced members or enmity toward novice teachers; lack of joint practices and communally established domains; and nonfluid opportunities to participate and learn from others. Identifying how such COPs operate is valuable for novice teachers. In this way, they can learn how to turn the challenges of the first years of teaching into possibilities.

I acknowledge that the findings concerning the participation experiences of new teachers in COPs are limited to what teachers express. The current study did not query experienced teachers as participating members of COPs. A more comprehensive view of the participation experiences of novice teachers should involve the views of experienced members. The study may have benefitted from more than one perspective. Moreover, the findings and conclusions drawn from this study are context-bound and therefore, this may limit its generalizability. Still, some characteristics of the Chilean context and the impact of COPs on novice teacher participation can be identified elsewhere.

The narratives of novice teachers point to future directions for further research: what happens with experienced teachers in this process? How do they engage as members of COPs with young teachers? Another important avenue of research is to consider how Chilean schools receive and welcome novice teachers, how they support them and prepare them in their journey of becoming an experienced teacher. Indeed, there is a need to study the other side of the coin: How do novice teachers experience their participation in ELT communities that offer support and opportunities to grow? Future investigation may attempt to map the influences of harmonic and nonharmonic COPs in the new teachers' language teaching classroom practices. Ultimately, this paper could benefit authorities, stakeholders, and experienced teachers to think back and reflect on how they treat and welcome new teachers, how they can strengthen English-teaching COPs, and how to help them stay in the profession.

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Elementary School Teachers in Neoliberal Times: The Silent Voices That Make Educational Policies Work

Maestros de primaria en tiempos de neoliberalismo: voces silenciosas que hacen que las políticas educativas funcionen

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This paper aims at showing how a bottom-up approach of the study of educational policies can shed some light on how elementary school teachers deal with educational policies to make them work. This is a partial report on a larger focus group study conducted in Bogotá, Colombia, where a group of elementary school teachers shared their opinions about educational policies. The data collected allowed us to see that teachers take actions, have their own perspectives about policies, and feel negatively treated by the national government, which give way to three categories: Teachers' Micro-Practices, Clashing Visions About Education, and Mistreatment. We conclude that despite the pervasiveness of neoliberalism in education, which teachers are very aware of, they find ways to make policies work while being critical of the way these are designed and implemented.

Keywords: educational policies, neoliberalism in education, policy makers, teachers' micro-practices, elementary school teachers

El objetivo de este artículo es mostrar cómo el adoptar una perspectiva de abajo hacia arriba en el estudio de políticas educativas puede dar luces sobre el modo en que los maestros de educación primaria enfrentan dichas políticas para hacer que estas funcionen. Este es un reporte parcial sobre un estudio más amplio con grupos focales que se llevó a cabo en Bogotá, Colombia, donde un grupo de profesores de primaria compartieron sus opiniones acerca de las políticas educativas. Los datos recogidos nos permitieron ver que, frente a las políticas, los maestros toman acciones, tienen visiones encontradas sobre educación, y se sienten maltratados por el Estado, lo que generó tres categorías: microprácticas de los maestros, visiones encontradas sobre educación y maltrato. Concluimos que, a pesar de la omnipresencia del neoliberalismo en la educación, de la cual los profesores son completamente conscientes, ellos encuentran formas de hacer que las políticas funcionen, pero al mismo tiempo son críticos de las formas en las que estas son diseñadas e implementadas.

Palabras claves: diseñadores de políticas, maestros de primaria, micro prácticas de los maestros, neoliberalismo en educación, políticas educativas

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Introduction

This paper aims at presenting a bottom-up perspective in the understanding of the role of teachers in the implementation of educational policies. We think it is important to hear from teachers themselves how they experience educational policies and how they face the multiple challenges and conflicting discourses that surround their implementation. Each time an educational policy is issued, the national government expects it to work regardless of its feasibility, the provisions (or not) made for the implementation, and the training teachers receive to set the policy in motion. The government is particularly strategic in selling to the general public the idea that certain policy is needed by using two mechanisms. On the one hand, it circulates discourses that on the surface seem to represent the needs of the community, when in fact they are very far from them (van Dijk, 1997), and on the other, the government hires external agencies (so called "experts") to back up their educational polices showing that they value more the voice of "experts" than the voice of teachers.

Despite the call of many scholars and researchers to include teachers in the design of policies, in most parts of the world educational policies follow a top-down approach where policy makers design them and teachers are reduced to the role of implementers (Shohamy, 2009). Leaving out teachers, school contexts, and the needs and interests of communities results in monolithic and homogenizing policies. Colombia is no exception and teachers are constantly flooded by new policies; they are expected to achieve the goals set by the government which generally are not rooted in reality and are, therefore, unattainable and unrealistic. But, when policies do not work, the government does not take any responsibility and places the blame on teachers (Apple, 2002; Wink, 2000).

Our purpose, then, is to show that such a perception is not accurate because in fact what happens is that teachers do "whatever it takes" to make things work; they adapt policies in order to better serve the needs of their communities, and they search for different ways of compensating for their lack of preparation to teach English with the purpose of balancing governmental regulations and students' needs.

This piece is part of a larger study framed within the socio-critical perspective that highlights a dialogic relationship between discourse and society (Bourdieu, 2003; Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 1970/2005). Its purpose was to investigate the voices of some elementary school teachers about the design and implementation of educational policies, in Bogotá (the capital city of Colombia). The data were collected through five focus groups over the period of an academic year. The inductive analysis of the data led us to conclude that elementary school teachers are not passive implementers of policies but that they take actions, have their own perspectives about policies and their relationship with education, and are very aware of the treatment (or mistreatment) the national government gives them.

In conclusion, this paper attempts to leave the reader some food for thought to challenge the belief that teachers are passive followers; instead, we should see them as intellectuals (Giroux, 1988) who play a quiet yet effective role in both the implementation of educational policies and in filling the gaps left by policy makers and technocrats (Shohamy, 2009). The knowledge, expertise, and contributions of teachers should be regarded as a cultural capital even if, as in many cases, this form of capital is not institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1986; Foucault, 1972).

Background of the Study

The origins of this research can be located, on the one hand, in previous studies about the images of teachers in official discourses and in the media carried out in Colombia (Correa & González, 2017; Guerrero, 2010; Vargas et al., 2016) and on the other hand, on our own experience as teacher educators. In regard to images of teachers, Guerrero (2010)—using critical discourse analysis—shows that teachers are portrayed

in a very negative light in one particular document issued by the Ministry of Education of Colombia with the occasion of the implementation of the so called "National Bilingualism Program" (PNB for its initials in Spanish).

The role of mass media has also been critical in shaping teachers' negative images as found by Vargas et al. (2016) in a study in which they collected online opinion articles published from 2010 to 2014 along with the responses by users of the site. These opinion articles were published by the two major Colombian newspapers and dealt with three main educational policies. The main objective of the study was to analyze how readers constructed their own concept of educational policies; some of their findings show that journalists and readers alike think that teachers are unprepared, lazy, and do not care about students.

In another study that involved media and teachers, Correa and González (2017) conducted a research project in which they analyzed how major Colombian newspapers portrayed Colombian English language teachers. They collected news from 2005 to 2010 and found that not only were teachers presented in negative terms but also that these media had a strong influence on the negative perceptions Colombians have about teachers (particularly those working in public schools).

On the other hand, this study is also rooted in our own experience as teacher educators. Our professional careers have provided us with unique opportunities to interact with hundreds of school teachers around the country and to know firsthand their teaching stories. By listening to them in different scenarios (like conferences, workshops, and classes) we realized we should collect those stories in a systematic way to make teachers' voices heard. For this study we invited elementary school teachers for two main reasons. First, because they have to teach English in elementary school although they do not have any type of training to do so; and second, because they are the least heard by technocrats in charge of designing educational policies. The national government always favors the "expert" over teachers. In our context, "experts" fall into three broad categories: (a) International agencies like the British Council which has been present in Colombia since 1945; (b) National agencies like the Fundación Empresarios por la Educación which do not have anything to do with education but are organizations whose main objective is to procure quality in the education system (as stated on their website); and (c) University professors, especially those who work in the private sector and are regarded as more knowledgeable (and who in some cases align themselves with the neoliberal take on policies). As Méndez-Rivera et al. (2020) put it: The world today relies on a techno-scientific knowledge in which only certain organizations claim the right to certify others. This relationship between "experts and non-experts" stimulates dependency and submission and leads to homogenization, which is the ultimate goal of "experts" since their economic interest lies there.

The situation is even more critical in developing countries like Colombia because, as a former colony, traces of colonialism and coloniality[1] are still evident in governmental practices (González, 2007; Guerrero & Quintero, 2009) and which play very well with the neoliberal economic model adopted in the country in the late 1980s motivated, mostly, by the need (the same as other Latin-American countries) to renegotiate the external debt (Díaz-Borbón, 2009). In this context of colonialism, coloniality, and neoliberalism, teachers (in general) are not heard or consulted about the relevance and/or feasibility of educational polices, let alone elementary school teachers.

1 Ávila-Pacheco (2010) defines colonialism as the foreign occupation of a territory along with the imposition of racial and cultural superiority. Coloniality, on the other hand, refers to the ways in which the Western/Capitalist/modern world system has determined labor, social, and cultural relationships in former colonized countries, where racialized hierarchies have been naturalized. This imposition facilitates capitalist exploitation, subalternization, and invisibilization of other epistemologies. While colonialism ended with the independence battles of the 19th Century, coloniality is very much in effect today.

But while technocrats have the technical and theoretical knowledge, they lack the knowledge of reality that teachers possess. Colombia is mainly a rural country, affected by more than 50 years by an armed conflict, where teachers and students are the target of crossfire among paramilitary groups, guerrilla groups, and state agents. Studies like the one conducted by Lizarralde (2003) and Restrepo-Méndez (2019) show the distance between technocrats and teachers in regard to what is needed in terms of educational policies in a vastly complex context like the Colombian one.

Theoretical Framework

The relationship between educational policies, teachers, and neoliberalism is a rich, challenging, and provoking one. We have divided this section into two parts. In the first one we will discuss the pervasiveness of neoliberalism in education and in the profession; and in the second we will address conflicting discourses (which stem from neoliberalism) where teachers find themselves caught in the middle.

Teachers Under Suspicion: Neoliberalism in Education

The State plays a crucial yet contradictory role in school reforms in times of neoliberalism. On the one hand, loyal to the ideal that the State should provide and take care of its nationals, it is the State, through its government, that organizes and controls the school system; the government sets directions in terms of curricular content as well as in terms of financial resources like regulating teachers' salaries and students' fees (Apple, 2003). Some of these measures cover both public and private schools whereas others apply only to the schools funded by the State. Private schools determine their teachers' salaries, hiring modalities, teachers' duties, students' fees, and so on.

On the other hand, the State owes itself to the neoliberal principles that, as in the case of Colombia, it decided to adopt in the late 1980s. In that sense, it seems the State no longer exists to protect its nationals but to serve the interest of the market. As such, the State keeps reducing the monies allocated to finance public schools and facilitates the creation of private schools, covered in discourses such as efficiency, efficacy, and productivity which, in the short run, "subordinates education to commercial values and vocational skills" (Levidow, 2005, p. 156).

Neoliberal reforms in education have brought policies that have harmed the educational system at the level of content as well as at the level of schools' autonomy and employment stability. By adopting neoliberal discourses and practices in education, the public-school system has been debilitated and, as stated by Apple (2003),

> This involves conscious policies to institute neoliberal "reforms" in education (such as attempts at marketization through voucher and privatization plans), neoconservative "reforms" (such as national or statewide curriculum and national or statewide testing, a "return" to a "common culture," and the Englishonly [*sic*] movement in the United States), and policies based on "new managerialism," with its focus on the strict accountability and constant assessment that so deeply characterize the "evaluative state." (p. 7)

Although the context of this text is mainly the United States, it is very relevant to say that the current situation in Colombia is no different; as stated by Díaz-Borbón (2009), Colombia has been under the patronage of the United States in what has to do with economic policies. Sadly, these school reforms have changed the very nature of education; while for pedagogues the aim of education is the holistic education of the human being, for neoliberals it is about fulfilling the demands of the market and being productive moneywise; while for pedagogues students are unique human beings with the potential to be whatever they want, for neoliberals students are products that can be adapted according to the needs of the clients; for pedagogues there is an

epistemological relation between the teacher and the students while for neoliberals there is a transaction between seller and buyer (Díaz-Borbón, 2009).

Under the spell of neoliberalism, policies that search for the homogenization of education, the adoption of a national curriculum, the implementation of standardized tests, the marginalization of indigenous languages, and the promotion of English as a superior language are all measures established to enhance productivity and guarantee revenue (Bruno, 2007; Shohamy, 2009). Instead of moving forward to a more inclusive and diverse world, we are walking backwards to the 18th century to claim "one language one nation" as the way to economic and social progress. But more problematic is that by adopting these measures, we witness, as put by Apple (2003): "the reproduction of both dominant pedagogical and curricular forms and ideologies and the social privileges that accompany them" (p. 7). So, it is not only that education is being taken over by those with neoliberal ideas but also that it segregates those who can have access to privileges from those who cannot.

Therefore, teachers are trapped within these discourses, practices, and policies and are deskilled (Sayer, 2012) by the minute. In the neoliberal models, teachers are not there to think but to do, and students are there not to learn but to acquire the necessary skills to perform in the labor market. Teachers are viewed as technicians who have to follow directions, obey distant authorities (Giroux, 1988), and make things work, and of course they are under constant suspicion: That is why the government fosters the implementation of surveillance devices like tests, periodical teachers' performance evaluations, lesson plans, working plans, and tons of other formats for teachers to "prove" they are really working (Escalante-Gonzalbo, 2019).

Teachers Between Dichotomies

Shohamy (2009) calls for the need to include teachers in the design of educational policies. As many of us think, she claims that teachers could greatly contribute to designing polices that are more connected to school realities; their expertise and knowledge can help set attainable goals since, as Shohamy states:

> A big disconnect exists between powerful policy statements and those which are practice-driven; this can help explain the reasons why policies often fail as they are driven by wishes and aspirations, which may be good in themselves but not always feasible. (pp. 46–47)

Unfortunately, with the adoption of neoliberal models in education, this is far from happening; meanwhile, teachers are still caught up in dichotomies and tensions that have to do basically with their having to take sides, either with the mandates of the government or with their students and their needs.

Heterogeneity vs. Homogeneity

When talking about education, official discourses foster, on the surface, the idea that schools should be heterogeneous and favor diversity of all sorts: language, gender, class, race; teaching methods, class contents, school materials, and so forth; but practices go in an opposite direction (da Silva-Pardo, 2019). Aligned with neoliberal discourses of competitiveness, the government implements different mechanisms geared towards homogeneity; according to Shohamy (2009), the test is the most powerful one. She claims that the use of tests unfolds a series of actions that make people, whether they like it or not, end up accepting, embracing, and demanding homogeneity. Teachers are caught up in the middle of these conflicting discourses, juggling with the ambiguous demands of the government.

The School as a Site for Reproduction vs. the School as a Site for Change

The school, as a concept, has been studied, analyzed, and problematized. For some scholars (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990; Freire, 1968/1996; Gramsci, 1995; McLaren, 2015) it is a site where the superstructures of society are reproduced. They see the way school life is

organized, from the special layout to the contents studied and the ways they are delivered, as the perfect architecture for reproduction where little or no room exists to think critically. The school exists to discipline the body and the mind (Foucault, 1975/2012) in order to produce a submissive individual who obeys the rules of society and incorporates its practices without questioning them. But to others (Fraser, 1997; Hogan, 1982; & Wong, 2002 as cited in Apple, 2003) schools are places where social change can take place. For these authors, schools have been critical in challenging dominant powers and in bringing about social change. For them, there is a relationship between the school, as a government institution, and the school community where the latter have a rather active role in contesting the hegemonic practices of the former.

Teachers are then caught up in this dichotomy; on the one hand, they are part of the school as an institution, but on the other, as teachers, their role is to educate their students as holistic human beings. As we found in a previous research study (Guerrero & Quintero, 2016), teachers are caught in between deciding whether to comply with government regulations and mandates or to serve students' needs. For many schoolteachers, students come first. This does not mean that they leave policies aside, but that they find a way to make policies work. These actions, or micro-practices, as we call them, should be visible and known by the rest of the society in order to understand the value and the contributions that teachers make for the same society.

Method

Our study is framed within a poststructuralist paradigm because we do believe that teachers' voices do not simply reflect reality, but construct it while speaking (Agger, 1991); along with their voices, we will try to problematize and destabilize the given. We agree with Baxter (2008) and Hatch (2002) that there is not only one single story, let alone one single truth (Merriam, 2009), but many that deserve to be told. As stated above, this piece is part of a larger study conducted in Bogotá, Colombia. Using the social network strategy, we invited elementary school teachers from different localities of the district of Bogotá, and with the participating teachers we were able to form five focus groups in five localities.[2] Each focus group was made up of eight to ten teachers whose ages ranged from their twenties to their fifties; there were female and male teachers.

According to Galeano-Marín (2010) focus groups fall into two main trends: the European and the American. The European differences itself from the American in that the former does not allow the moderator to intervene too much, while in the latter, the moderator controls the conversation. In our case, we adopted the European format because it was our interest to collect as much genuine information as possible. Also, focus groups lend themselves as a suitable methodology because we wanted to gather teachers' opinions, ideas, and perspectives on one particular issue: the implementation of educational policies. We met with the teachers at their own schools (all of them public schools) over a year. Data consisted of recorded audios and videos and teachers were asked to sign a consent form.

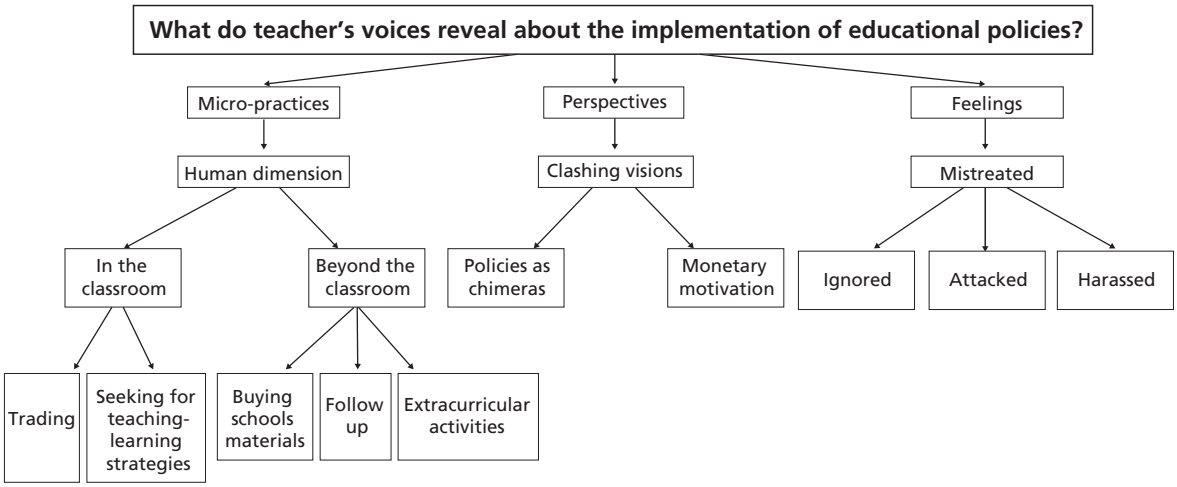
Grounded theory was the approach we used to analyze data because, being consistent with the post-structuralist approach, our interest was to dig deep into the data to theorize by finding emergent categories. The unit of analysis was chunks of data where teachers made declarative statements expressing actions, opinions, perceptions, or ideas. The analysis was guided by the research question: "What do teachers' voices reveal about the implementation of educational policies?" and was done manually using both open and axial coding. We also used two forms of triangulation: peers' triangulation, in which we invited other researchers to cross-examine the data and our interpretations, and theory triangulation, in which we confronted the emergent categories with existing literature.

2 Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia, is the largest city in the country with a population of eight million inhabitants. The city is divided into eight "localidades," that is, political districts.

Findings and Discussion

After immersing ourselves in the voices of elementary school teachers, and as an answer to our research question, we found that teachers take actions—which we have called micro-practices—have their own perspectives about policies, and feel negatively treated by the national government. In Figure 1 we illustrate these categories and their subcategories.

Figure 1. Categories and Subcategories



Teachers' Micro-Practices

This category allows us to see that despite the pervasiveness of neoliberalism in education (Apple, 2003; Bruno, 2007; Díaz-Borbón, 2009; Levidow, 2005; Shohamy, 2009) teachers still put their students and their needs first when implementing educational policies. Teachers are very engaged with the profession and with the responsibilities it carries, which, many times go beyond the instructional or disciplinary aspects of teaching. We observed that teachers carry out lots of different actions either within their classrooms or beyond, that were neither part of the curriculum nor in their capacity as teachers; and that they did not share with other colleagues or administrative staff. We called this pattern *micro-practices* and define them as actions that teachers do on their own, quietly, either within the walls of their classrooms or beyond those walls.

These actions are their own because they are not initiated by the principal of the school, by any external agent, research group, consultant agencies, or official projects or initiatives. The other characteristic is that these actions take place quietly; by this we mean that teachers do not brag about what they are doing, and they do not invite anyone to be part of this action. By talking to them we figured out that they do not share their actions because they think they are meant to do these things as teachers, it is their job, and they do not see anything extraordinary about what they do. The third characteristic of micro-practices has to do with the scenario where these actions take place. Sometimes teachers engage in actions that reach beyond the classroom, but most of them happen within their classrooms while they are teaching. The classroom is the place, as we reported somewhere else (Quintero

& Guerrero, 2013), where teachers feel powerful (in professional terms); they know their children and their contexts, and invent multiple ways to serve their students' needs and expectations; to fill in the gaps left by policy makers and to fulfill the immediate needs of their contexts is a priority. As one of our participating teachers puts it:

> If you are a teacher, you always want to do more for your students and then, as much as possible, because if you see that something…is missing…fortunately in primary school we have that…like that advantage, that as we are almost all the time with the group, yes? So, uh…we can within closed doors, when one is in the classroom eh… do something that you see that the kids are needing and that…that arises from your experience, of observing, of what to do, right? that is happening naturally, that is the contribution that one can make. (AC–N)[3]

The Human Dimension of Teaching

When looking at the way many educational policies have been drafted, one can see they seem detached from reality, cold and distant. As stated by Shohamy (2009), policy makers' decisions are influenced by ideology, politics, economy, but "lack a sense of reality" (p. 46). It seems that policy makers forget that the act of teaching–learning is an act of humanity, or an act of love, as Freire (1992/2004) would say. Teachers, instead, are very clear about the nature of their profession. Students are human beings who, beyond grades, tests scores, and rote learning, have their own lives, which, of course, they bring into the classroom.

We learned that the human dimension of teaching is the driving force behind the micro-practices, that is, teachers' actions are informed, driven, and inspired by it. Teaching is not a result-oriented practice that focuses only on doing as superiors say. In the participants' declarations there are recurrent references to the place of caring in their teaching and the decisions they make in order to better serve the needs of their students. The excerpt below illustrates this point:

> What does one do in the classroom: The children arrive, one greets them, one looks at them, one asks them if they had lunch, who brought them, who brings them, with whom they sleep, why they did not do the homework, why the mother and father are not living with them. One also helps them academically when they do not understand a task; after a weekend they come home without the homework, what happened? Why did he not make the homework? Nobody helped them at home so one takes him, separates him from the group and dedicates some time to the children that have problems. (PN_Solecito)

In the data we identified that teachers' micro-practices fall into two main kinds: one that has to do with teaching per se, and happens in the classroom, and one that spans beyond the classroom and implies other forms of caring.

Micro-Practices in the Classroom. As we stated above, the classroom is where teachers feel powerful (Quintero & Guerrero, 2013), they feel their knowledge matters, and they feel they are really in charge and can make their own decisions. Being aware that they lack the preparation to teach English (teachers in elementary school do not receive any training in this matter), they find ways to compensate for this by taking informed actions. They "trade classes"; this means that if, by any chance there is a teacher who is good at teaching English, they switch groups, as we can see in this excerpt:

> I have always looked for her, to deal with English in my group, so I had to go to her classroom to teach her kids religion, physical education, ethics, drawing, whatever I had to do, and she would come to mine to teach English to them. At least, the children take away a little foundation, a base for their high school. (AN–P6)

3 At the end of each excerpt, we identify it with a codification, in parentheses, that starts with the two initials of the school, and ends with either the initial of the participant's name or their pseudonym.

Another micro-practice is using others' knowledge to learn some tips and strategies. For example, when there are student-teachers in the school, teachers ask them to come to their classrooms so they can take notes on both their pedagogy and their language usage (particularly in pronunciation which is something that worries them a lot). Others, led by intuition, search for materials or activities that they think might help children learn English. They adapt those materials to the number of students in the classroom, to the English level of the kids, their age, the particularities of the context, and so on. Although teachers find ways to cope and compensate for the lack of previsions in the design of the policies, these micro-practices have their dose of anguish, as the teacher in the excerpt below shows.

> Then one makes moderate efforts, I say…the fact of being a teacher is definitely love, that is, I cannot say that I am a teacher by vocation, because it is not true, but I assume it with great responsibility, I cannot say what it was what I dreamed of…no, it was life circumstances that confronted me…but I think that when one assumes something, one has to assume it with full responsibility and then in those terms I assume it, well, I said well, I will have to do something and more with young children, well, one says, let's use playful activities, let's use songs, let's use whatever tools we might know…but it is difficult. (AC–JO)

Micro-Practices Beyond the Classroom. The other kind of micro-practices we identified are those that span beyond the classroom, which are also informed and motivated by the human dimension of teaching. On the one hand, we found that many teachers buy classroom materials for those kids who cannot afford them, and without second thoughts, they do this from their own pocket money. We also found that, in some cases related to child abuse or children with cognitive disabilities, they made a personal decision to visit the State offices in charge of dealing with those cases, and/or visiting children at home. And a third set of micro-practices beyond the classrooms was that in which teachers used their free time to teach children non-academic activities like playing chess or playing music. The excerpt below illustrates these micro-practices.

> There are no spaces, there are no times, but sometimes one has the will, for example I work here with a small group teaching them chess, here in this lounge I work a few days, I have a small group but I would love to have a large group. (PN–Biribis)

Summing up, micro-practices constitute an alternative (in parallel) to teaching practice, in which the latter is the bulk set of activities that teachers must do: grade, instruct, discipline, punish, fill out forms, hand in report cards, behavior cards, attend meetings, and so on and so forth. Micro-practices, on the other hand, are those tiny actions teachers carry out in or out their classrooms and that are not contemplated in the syllabus, or on any administrative check list.

Perspectives

Under this category we present the perspectives teachers have on educational policies and show how divergent these are in regard to those held by policy makers. In what follows we delve into those perspectives.

Clashing Visions About the Purpose of Education

Teachers' voices reveal that their visions about education differ greatly from those who design them. As discussed in the theoretical framework, most of the Western world has adopted a neoliberal model that crosses all instances from economic to educational. For teachers, it is very clear that educational policies are dictated by supranational organizations like the IMF, the World Bank, and the OECD (Nussbaum, 2011); in that sense it is clear to them that these policies have nothing to do with our context and needs. The data led us to identify two prominent ideas about educational policies: (a) Policies as a Chimera; (b) Policies Have a Monetary Motivation.

Policies as a Chimera. There is a generalized idea among teachers that policies are acontextual, homogenizing, and do not respond to the needs either of the society or of the students. By examining the educational reforms adopted under the neoliberal model, as stated by Apple (2003), it is apparent that these are not intended to improve the quality of education but to set the grounds for capitalism to consolidate in our emerging economies. Therefore, the promises of better education become a chimera. As stated by Díaz-Borbón (2009), for teachers, education has to do with caring and helping human beings to achieve their epistemological potential; for neoliberalism it has to do with maximizing the use of financial and human resources while reducing policy implementation to filling formats and reporting figures (Han, 2017). The following excerpt presents this clashing vision:

> I would like to say something about the coverage policy, I think it is important to keep in mind that the established parameters are inadequate, they are not the most appropriate; 35 or 40 students per classroom; overcrowding; mega-schools; there is a great deal of investment in infrastructure but they have not invested in the quality of the education of the teachers; not of the students because after all, if one is well prepared, if one does research (not only doing things by trial and error) it can provide…provide a better quality education, that should be, among other policies, should be quality-oriented, it should not be oriented towards how many children pass the school year, and what the dropout rates are, and how many are repeating the grade; so, not to focus on the numerical part, but more on the knowledge part. Right now, everything is numbers, how many passed the test, how many passed the ICFES, how many children passed and how many failed. So that is failing the truth. (AN–P4)

Monetary Motivation. Policy makers, probably with good intentions, prioritize labor the market and the demands from the OECD (Colombia became a member in 2018) and those of the free trade agreements signed by our country. As a consequence, policy makers bring neoliberal practices to schools (Apple 2003; Ayala-Zárate & Álvarez, 2005), which changes the humanistic nature of education for one that cares about the production of goods. As such, discourses that include lexical choices like *indicators*, *quality assurance*, *efficiency and efficacy*, *client*, *budget* and others have been naturalized by schools.

Teachers claim that the economic interest is at the core of policy making and that the State makes decisions depending on how much money a policy will cost and what the revenue will be. The excerpt below voices this concern:

> Or we see in Decree 230…the background of everything is an economic background, why? because each child who repeats a year has an economic cost for the governments. The 230 was intended to cut expenses to the maximum; only 5% of children could repeat a year, uh…Article 9, I think is the one that talks about 5% repetition in the courses, so you can see clearly…that…money-saving process, what economists call fiscal adjustment. (JP–Misudo)

Here, teachers are talking about a decree that rules on the percentage of repetition per course. It cannot be over 5%. Teachers interpret this decree not as a strategy to improve the quality of education but as a way to save money. Unfortunately, in this neoliberal system, money that goes to schools is not seen as investment but as waste (Apple, 2003; Manzano & Salazar, 2009). This other excerpt reinforces this vision of the prevalence of the economic aspect over the educational one:

> If you see the need for Colombians to be taken into account, for the population to be taken into account—because that is what matters least to them, for them matters that a teacher has 45 students in a classroom; they don't care if they are well prepared, or not; they care that there are 45 students per a teacher; that the teacher produces, yes? And it is advantageous in the economic aspect, but they do not care if the child can learn, or the

> child cannot learn. And we see that right here in Bogotá, the children who are studying in this area are different from those of xxx, they are different. (AN–Lucecita)

All and all, teachers are very aware that policies are strongly attached to economic interests in two ways: (a) making schools sites for the reproduction of the status quo (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990; Freire, 1968/1996; Gramsci, 1995; McLaren, 2015) and as a key piece in the gear to supply a cheap workforce for the labor market; and (b) seeing schools as money drainers, in which case, the objective is to reduce their budget and force them to survive. This, of course, enhances the inequality in the country (Colombia is the fourth most inequitable country in the world, according to the World Bank Group, 2016), because if teachers do not have all the financial resources to offer a good education, their students will drop out school to thicken poverty belts.

Feelings

An unexpected category emerged in our analysis which had to do with the feelings teachers hold in regard to policies. We found that they felt, constantly, negatively treated by State agents; their voices led us to characterize this category as follows:

Teachers Feeling Mistreated by State Agencies

Teachers voices also reveal that they feel mistreated by the National Government and by policy makers. This is consistent with Guerrero's (2010) findings which show that the Ministry of Education has constructed a very poor image of teachers. Indeed, teachers feel ignored, harassed, abused, and attacked (which are the most common words they use to express their feelings):

> Many times, we feel attacked, that is the truth. Because they attack us; this is how we feel, they attack us, they practically attack us, because they subject us to doing things without our consent and without seeing what the characteristics of our children are; what our characteristics are, and what are the means we have to make those changes and those approaches that they bring. So really, the aggression is strong and we feel it that way, and many times you do not participate…that is why, or many times you do things wrong because you do not have a personal motivation to do it, because one realizes that one is not taken into account at all and neither are children. (AN–P2)

As stated by Giroux (1988) teachers are viewed as mere technicians, their role is reduced to implement policies with no questions asked. Teachers are then, as Sayer (2012) puts it, "deskilled"; ripped of their knowledge, expertise, and abilities. Their voices are ignored because they are not considered "intellectuals" but implementers. And teachers do feel this disdain from the State which, in turn, leads them to stop participating when the State calls for feedback on new policies; of the older ones, experience has taught that their ideas will never be taken into account. Here the voice of one of the teachers:

> All the voices were not heard, so, this policy is not accompanied by the voices of the teachers, so at one point they said that if we all participated, this would be it, but now, at the time of implementation, they have never come to ask "how is it going teachers?" They have never evaluated the impact of this policy in the schools. About the Decree 1290, they have never asked what has happened in the schools, is it working? Is it not working? and it turns out that now they call the headmasters and the coordinators and they are told we have to get our act together because a lot of children are going to fail. (AC–AID)

Teachers also claim they feel harassed, and as we stated in the theoretical framework, teachers are constantly under suspicion; they have to fill in endless forms to prove they are good teachers. Paradoxically, to prove they are good teachers they only need to fill in forms; teaching is reduced to a report. This means that teaching is not important; what matters is whatever is written in the form. And school directors

flood teachers with these assignments which leave very little time for actual teaching. Here is what one of the teachers says about this:

> And then, the directors end up harassing the teachers, telling them "I need these formats, I need this implemented, I need them to develop eighty thousand projects" and because all those policies respond more to a "boom," completely like this. They absorb us and we end up saying: "Well, what am I going to do with all this?", what we do then, is to try to comply. To comply, but processes are not really being executed; school administration only and exclusively care for the formats, we are required to fill in the formats, that is what they pay attention to, but not the real work we do with the kids; the most important, which is the child, is completely forgotten. (AC–JO)

We can conclude here that opposite of what is constructed in the media about who teachers are (Correa & González, 2017) and the constant neglect of governments to include teachers in the design of policies, teachers are critical of the norms imposed top-down by the government. Also, that neoliberalism in education takes a toll, not only in the quality of education per se, but in the personal and professional lives of teachers who feel despair more and more about their role in the implementation of policies, but who also find the strength to keep fighting for their ideals.

Conclusions

The adoption of neoliberal models in education are here to stay. Day by day those discourses and practices become more and more naturalized which makes it harder to problematize and, eventually, eradicate them. Discourses about the internationalization of education, globalization, and standardization for the sake of freedom nurture the ideas that neoliberalism does serve the individual needs of subjects. What it fails to show is that education is not a factory; students are not products for the market, and teachers are not clerks (Giroux, 1988). Teaching and learning are human activities, which imply a dialogical relationship that cannot be reduced to forms and figures. As stated by Escalante-Gonzalbo (2019) it is true that education should prepare people for work but it is also true that there are other purposes which are important too, like teaching students to be good human beings, to act ethically, and to care about others, for example. Unfortunately, in the race for pleasing the markets, policy makers are leaving out these other purposes and stripping teaching of its true meaning, emptying it of its humanity.

But, as a consequence of this, teachers do not give up, and despite feeling mistreated and silenced, they keep working to compensate for those flaws; teachers find different ways to resist the deskilling practices brought on them by neoliberalism to fight for their ideals and to secure a better future for their students.

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Examining Current and Future Ecuadorian Educators' Experiences Using Action Research in the English as a Second Language Classroom

Análisis del rol de la investigación-acción en la práctica de futuros docentes en Ecuador en aulas de inglés como segundo idioma

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This paper reports on Ecuadorian pre-service and in-service teachers' ability to conduct action research in the classroom as well as their skills to efficiently adjust instruction to address students' cultural and linguistic diversity. A qualitative case study approach was implemented to collect information from teacher candidates in 2015, in-service teachers from a public school in 2017, and in-service teachers from a private school in 2019. Data were collected through focus groups and interviews conducted in Spanish. Findings suggest that training teachers to conduct action research will improve their ability to analyze data and improve students' learning outcomes.

Keywords: action research, Ecuador, English as a second language, teachers' knowledge

Este artículo se enfoca en la capacidad de los maestros en su labor diaria y de futuros docentes ecuatorianos para realizar investigación-acción en el aula, así como ajustar la instrucción tomando en cuenta la diversidad cultural y lingüística de sus estudiantes. Este proyecto cualitativo investigó el conocimiento de docentes y estudiantes de licenciatura con respecto a la investigación-acción como un medio para mejorar la instrucción en el Ecuador. Para ello, se implementó un enfoque cualitativo de estudio de caso con el fin de recopilar información de los estudiantes de licenciatura en 2015, docentes de una escuela pública en 2017 y docentes de una escuela privada en 2019. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de grupos focales y entrevistas en español. Los resultados sugieren que los maestros que se capacitan para realizar investigación-acción mejoran su preparación pedagógica y su capacidad de analizar datos. Esto contribuye al aprendizaje de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: conocimiento de los profesores, Ecuador, inglés como segundo idioma, investigación de acción

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Introduction

In recent years the landscape of educational mandates and both teacher preparation and professional development (PD) in Ecuador have changed, with empowerment of the country's educators becoming a stronger focus. The country's educators have been asked to implement pedagogical practices with an increased focus on learner-centered instruction and fewer teacher-led lectures. As a result, our research team developed a project to explore current action research (AR) practices and examine in-service teachers' and teacher candidates' knowledge of AR as a means to modify and improve instruction in Ecuador's classrooms.

The theoretical framework of this study was based on Carr and Kemmis's (1986) definition of AR as "a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (p. 162). The term AR was coined by Kurt Lewin in the 1930s (Mills, 2007), and since then, scholars have developed several models (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Wells, 1994) to explain the relationship among all the steps that compose AR methodology. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) indicated that the purpose of AR is to solve educational problems, and Hendricks (2006) described the AR process as a "systematic inquiry based on ongoing reflection" (p. 9). AR models may look different due to the focus placed on improvement, such as reflective practice, that looks at one's reflective practices as a continuous improvement (Mills, 2007; York-Barr et al., 2016). On the other hand, participatory research looks at a study's participants to provide insights about the dynamics of the organization or a community to participate in designing a project, data collection, interpretation of findings, and development of recommendations for future action (McIntyre, 2008; Wyatt, 2011).

The study's researchers are teacher educators, one from Ecuador and the other from Cuba, whose work focuses on the preparation of teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students in the United States and Latin America. Data gathered in this three-phase investigation are relevant for educators in diverse educational environments because they allow teachers to gain insights for improving their practice. The research team collected information from practicing teachers (open-ended questions and interviews in 2017 and 2019) and teacher candidates (focus groups in 2015) to assess teachers' understanding of AR and its implementation. In addition, we delivered workshops focused on preparing the educators to use different instructional and affective strategies to teach students from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds. In this article, the focus is a workshop aimed at enhancing teacher candidates' and practicing teachers' knowledge of and ability to implement AR practices. Findings from the workshop's activities were examined to identify effective steps that would help educators overcome instructional challenges and reflect on their pedagogical practices as part of their educational role.

Ecuadorian Educational Reform: A Brief History

At the end of the twentieth century, Ecuador did not have a long-term educational plan for achieving its educators' and government leaders' desired educational objectives. In addition, there was not a single unified policy that regulated implementation of a curriculum across all K–12 educational institutions (Kuhlman & Serrano, 2017). Ecuador's Department of Education provided the curricular requirements, while educational institutions were responsible for its implementation. Institutions were given the flexibility to deliver instruction according to their own needs and resources. Working groups were formed to analyze suitable implementation for the specific educational institution. English language standards were developed during 2012 and 2013 to ensure quality instruction for

students to meet desired proficiency in English (Díaz-Maggioli, 2017).

Toward the latter half of 2002, Ecuador designed a national plan that was hotly debated in the nation's educational institutions (Isch-Lopez, 2011). The plan aimed to increase educational expectations; however, it was never implemented. By 2016 the "Plan Decenal 2006–2015" (10-year plan) included eight guidelines the government proposed for approval by the Ecuadorian people (Ministerio de Educación y Cultura del Ecuador, 2006). These guidelines incorporated a renewed focus for schooling focused on equity and a vision of increased cultural tolerance and inclusiveness. The goal was to strengthen the readiness of all Ecuadorian citizens to advocate for the rights of its diverse citizenry. To achieve the plan objectives, the Ecuadorian government created a national curriculum that made free education the duty of the State. The plan stipulated that teacher positions would be selected on a merit system: Teachers would be trained and evaluated based on the curriculum and the teachers' professional competency. Mandates were subject to the specific legal rules indicated in the General Law of Education, Educational Reforms, and Ministerial Agreements of the Ministry of Education (Organic Law of Intercultural Education, 2012).

Population Diversity in Ecuador

Rodriguez (2013) explained that awareness of the "racial, cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic differences that exist among student populations and teachers in many educational settings is imperative for creating teaching-and-learning environments characterized by mutual understanding" (p. 87). The concept of ethnicity applies to groups working to maintain their cultural and political identity and ensure their protection, advancement, and access to resources in a national system (Helmberger, 2006; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). The magnitude of the diversity in Ecuador's classrooms poses instructional challenges for all stakeholders. The Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC, 2015) reported that 93% of Ecuador's population speaks Spanish and 4.1% speaks Quechua. Census information documented the country's population was composed of 71.9% mestizos (mixed Amerindian and white), 7.4% Montubio, 7% Amerindian, 6.1% white, 4.3% Afro-Ecuadorian, 1.9% mulatto, 1% black, and 0.4% other (INEC, 2015). According to the Ethnologue website (https://www.ethnologue.com/country/EC/languages), Ecuadorians speak 21 indigenous languages (e.g., Cofán and Quechua).

Action Research in Other Countries

Action research has been used to foster the development of higher levels of knowledge and skills in language teachers as part of PD (Edwards, 2020). AR has been utilized in several countries in Africa to help teachers navigate/determine/re-envision their teaching roles. In Lesotho (Mokuku, 2001), Malawi (Stuart & Kunje, 1998), and Ethiopia (Jebessa-Aga, 2017) researchers worked with teachers utilizing the AR cycle. The teachers found the process useful; however, they did not realize the time and effort needed to implement AR, potential to improve teaching practices, and limited resources to sustain the process long-term. Edwards and Burns (2016) conducted a study with 16 in-service Australian teachers, reporting that the AR program had a positive impact on teachers' self-confidence about their teaching, connections established with students, teachers' engagement with research, and teacher's recognition for their efforts. Time and support from the administration was cited "as crucial in helping them to pursue their research interests and facilitate positive effects of the AR program" (p. 13). Burns et al. (2016) reported that after an AR workshop focused on the AR process, six bilingual (Spanish–English) in-service teachers in Chile indicated the AR process was valuable; however, teachers specified time to be dedicated to AR as an issue due to the demands of their profession. In another study (Rahmani-Doqaruni, 2014),

16 Iranian teachers participated in AR within their classroom context demonstrating the potential to support teachers' development of research skills and knowledge. Mehrani (2017) identified challenges and opportunities for language teachers conducting action research. The opportunities included the participants' understanding of language education as a framework to reflect on the teaching profession, and the opportunities to advocate for students' needs. The challenges reflected teachers' time limitations to devote to the effort, their limited research knowledge, unpredictable administrative support available, and the overall lack of collaboration across all educational sectors. Another study conducted in Spain (Soto Gómez et al., 2019) highlighted the results of 10 years of using lesson study combined with AR to address teachers' practical knowledge about teacher training. The findings indicated that lesson study helped the teachers reconstruct their thinking and strengthened the teaching community.

Data from these aforementioned studies suggest the strong possibility that AR serves to empower teachers to improve their pedagogy. According to Wood et al. (2019), AR provided pathways to understand critical educational questions regarding the creation and use of knowledge within schools or classrooms, and educators to engage in transformative practices when systems were in place to support the sustainability of their efforts. Furthermore, Soto Gómez et al. (2019) stressed the importance of practical experience and reflection for teachers to gain knowledge and change their attitudes and pedagogical practices. The AR process can support changes through curriculum reform, innovations that support institutional change, and/or educational system changes. AR processes can help educators address problems (Stuart & Kunje, 1998); however, AR is clearly a transformational process that requires teacher engagement, critical reflection, and innovative ways to build knowledge (Wood et al., 2019).

Exploring the Rationale and Possibilities for Action Research in the Ecuadorian Context

To date, discussing whether Ecuadorian teachers have adequate knowledge and training with AR methods to implement this type of research has not been a priority. Patera et al. (2016) conducted a participatory action research (PAR) study at the Centro Audiovisual Don Bosco in Ecuador to develop teachers' competencies and capabilities to produce quality multimedia products for education. The study's results identified the need for PD to examine the PAR process in Ecuador and engage teachers in a continuous evaluation of the learning environment.

Nugent et al. (2012) indicate that AR links theory and practice through its goal "to make the theory explicit in order to justify the actions" (p. 7). AR involves stakeholders in reflection leading to dialectal critique to show whether existing systems work efficiently to support each other. All voices are considered significant in collaborative AR due to triangulation of data collected and analyzed in allowing for a plurality of interpretations. This freedom of expression is needed in all school systems undergoing reforms.

The AR process varies as individual teachers recursively implement its steps in their classrooms until the problem is solved. Teachers typically "(a) identify an area of focus, (b) collect data, (c) analyze and interpret data, and (d) develop an action plan" (Mills, 2007, p. 263). Teachers engage in practitioner research work to improve their classroom practices through data gathering and analysis. Teacher inquiries include a cycle to identify a problem, find solutions, implement solutions, and assess the effects on the students (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Through inquiry, teachers become researchers who consciously test their own theories and explanations about teaching and learning (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). AR provides a path to effect the type of change for which Ecuadorian

authorities are advocating. Teachers might focus on a specific topic to investigate, commit to gathering data to learn new pedagogies to improve the focus of study, and systematically reflect on the processes and results (Mills, 2007). The steps help educators understand their approaches to the problem and do more than measure results. Edge (2005) argues that English language teachers should reflect on their teaching practices and philosophies to grow professionally. Stakeholders collaborate to create a community that works through the AR process to mobilize resources and/or to understand ideas and practices that empower them to transform the problems under analysis into solutions (Mehrani, 2017; Santoro Lamelas, 2020).

This research asked if programs of teacher preparation in Ecuador might more effectively incorporate educational mandates through AR implementation (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2008). The researchers of this study posited that teachers need the freedom to examine educational practice within their own socio-cultural context, and that AR consists of human interactions to originate meaning (Mills, 2007). In this work we proposed that conducting AR would lead Ecuadorian practitioners to create teaching and learning environments characterized by cross-cultural understandings that support constructivist pedagogical practices.

English Language Programs After Ecuadorian Educational Reforms

Ecuador's constitution asserts the rights of its citizens "to engage in interpersonal intercultural communications in all dimensions" (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2008). Language policies in schooling practices showcase the power of English in Ecuador's educational system. Although the constitution acknowledges Spanish as the country's official language, and while Quechua is spoken by its indigenous populations (Constitución Política de la República del Ecuador, 1998), they are not part of required school curricula. English is the language of commerce; textbooks used in many tertiary programs are written in English, and Ecuador's official currency is the US dollar. Therefore, it is key to ensure educator awareness that in bilingual and multilingual practices there may be a hidden underlying assumption that "coming to voice takes place in English only… while students' vernaculars are denigrated and ignored, rendering bilingual education colonial-like in nature" (Macedo & Bartolomé, 2014, p. 24).

To prepare English teachers to deliver English as a second language (ESL) instruction, the Ecuadorian government signed agreements with the Alliance of Progress from the US and the British Council. By 2012, agreements with select tertiary institutions in the US were in place (e.g., New Mexico State University and Kansas State University; Reforms for Education in Ecuador, 2014). The agreements were to provide assistantships for teachers and teacher candidates to study English in the US and be better able to improve the education system in Ecuador. The program "Teach English 2014" was designed to improve teacher preparation, teachers' level of English language acquisition, and teachers' knowledge of English language teaching (ELT) theories and practices. Grants were provided to help Ecuadorian teachers study second language pedagogies in English-speaking countries in order to have opportunities to interact with English-speaking cultures to meet with the mandate of teaching English from the 8th through the 12th grade levels (Agreement 0041-14, 2014).

Ecuadorian Teachers' Ideologies

Effective methods of ELT require educators to hold implementable visions of empowerment and positive ideologies of advocacy that support all stakeholders. In ELT, besides a focus on the target language of instruction, teachers need to examine the design of their lessons and how methods help students develop mastery of the content presented. This study investigated possibilities for implementing AR as a means to support English teachers' ideologies of equity in their educational practice

(Díaz-Bazo, 2017; Macedo & Bartolomé, 2014). While Ecuadorian teachers accepted the charge of making curricular changes to the delivery of English language instruction across all grade levels in their country and the mandate to do so quickly, they were taxed with simultaneously receiving the PD that would enable them to do so (Isch-Lopez, 2011). This research brought teachers' knowledge and beliefs about their role as second language educators to the fore as we presented methods of AR to support culturally responsive pedagogy (Díaz-Bazo, 2017). The type of ongoing reflection that is enhanced in AR (York-Barr et al., 2016) appeared to be an overlooked cog in the wheel of designing curricular changes that could result in higher levels of academic achievement for students. ELT as a semiotic tool is supported by teachers' ability to think thoughtfully about the application of theory in the classroom context (Gonzalez et al., 2005). We posited AR would serve to enhance the links between theory and practice in ELT (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Edwards, 2020).

Envisioning Action Research in Ecuador's Schoolhouse

Numerous top-down mandated changes to Ecuador's educational system have been implemented in recent years (Van Damme et al., 2013) with little room allotted for teachers to contribute input as the curricular changes were incorporated. At the same time, increased PD required of teachers was based solely on learners' academic achievement in examinations. Prior to beginning this research, we hypothesized Ecuadorian teachers might not be engaging in reflective processes that would allow them to evaluate whether the enacted curriculum addressed students' educational needs. In this environment, it seemed unlikely that top-down mandates imposed by the government supported teachers' efforts to perform AR.

For teachers to gain expertise throughout their careers, they need time to conduct AR so they can reflect, evaluate, reflect again after analyzing gathered data, and take action. Thus, current and future teachers could learn how to analyze social, economic, and cultural relations in their society. Teachers' identities as educators (Fitts et al., 2008) require that they have opportunities to empower themselves and their students. This inquiry into the presence or absence of AR in Ecuador's schools sought to establish whether teachers have opportunities to engage in reflective practice, if they are taught how to conduct AR, if they know how to document and examine formative and summative data, and if the educational system in Ecuador supports bottom-up changes and the creation of teacher leaders and researchers.

Method

The researchers of this study implemented a qualitative case study methodology to examine the level of implementation of AR in Ecuador's classrooms from the participants' perspectives. This study utilized focus groups and interviews conducted in Spanish for one hour to collect data from three different groups of teachers to answer the research questions for this exploration of AR methods in the context of Ecuadorian schooling. The methodology selected for this research considered that through participation in focus groups, group discussions, and interviews (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), the practitioners could reflect on their experiences as teachers. The interviewer was an interpreter of what was heard in the research context (Fontana & Frey, 2003).

Data Collection

The collected data document the participants' knowledge of AR and their ability to implement AR processes in their classrooms. Researchers had access to three different school settings to explore the use, knowledge, and implementation of AR in Ecuadorian classrooms. The first group of participants included teacher candidates completing their formal education training in 2015. In-service teachers from a public

school comprised the second group in 2017. Data were gathered from a third group of teachers from a private school in 2019. Although the data collection procedures were similar, the open-ended questions were different for each group. As the project evolved from work with teacher candidates in their teacher preparation program, to in-service teachers, and their implementation of AR practices in the classroom, the AR inquiry method changed.

Researchers obtained Institutional Review Board approval before conducting the research to comply with human subjects' research requirements. In 2015, teacher candidates participated in focus groups before the AR workshop and completion of a hands-on activity to practice the implementation of AR. In 2017, in-service teachers from a public school participated in focus groups before and after an AR-focused workshop. In 2019, in-service teachers from a private school participated in in-depth interviews.

The purpose of the data collection was to explore how in-classroom teachers used AR and to establish the level of knowledge teacher candidates had about the purposes and benefits of conducting AR in the classroom. The questions that guided this study were:

1. How are teacher candidates and practicing teachers prepared to conduct AR?
2. How do teacher candidates and practicing teachers implement AR in their teaching practices?

The qualitative data were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed utilizing a constant comparison technique to develop codes and themes. Constant comparison is an analytical process to compare existing findings with new information to develop codes by reading the entire set of data. The qualitative technique allowed for inductively coding the data so the codes could emerge during the iterative process. The data were coded (categorized) and codes were compared and grouped by similarity (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

AR Workshops With Teacher Candidates and In-Service Public-School Teachers

The AR workshops were performed at a state university in Ecuador that prepares teachers to teach ESL in the K–12 school system. A total of 40 teacher candidates completing the last semester (eighth level) of their studies were invited to participate in the 2015 workshop. A total of 26 in-service teachers from a public school participated in the 2017 workshop. The workshop was designed to teach teachers how to implement AR processes in their classrooms.

The 5-hour workshop included topics such as (a) the basics of action research, (b) research design, (c) data analyses, (d) interpretation of results, and (e) hands-on application of AR. The workshop started with a definition of AR as a form of self-reflective inquiry that can be used to investigate and improve an educational problem (McIntyre, 2008). The next step was to communicate instruments and techniques to collect data (e.g., grades, interviews, and observations). Finally, an activity was implemented to give the teacher candidates and in-service teachers the opportunity to practice their new knowledge. Participants were divided into groups to create (a) a lesson plan including objectives, topic, duration, and assessment tools and (b) an AR plan including a problem to be researched, methodology and instruments to be used, and data analyses to be performed. In the debriefing, participants presented their work to be critiqued regarding what could be improved, how it could be improved, and why it needed revisions. Throughout the workshop, the researchers shared the different aspects of AR such as (a) the use of data to adjust lesson plans and improve outcomes, (b) the use of data to adjust instruction based on a needs assessment of the content background, and (c) understanding and identification of pedagogical strategies to address students' educational needs.

Participants

This study reports findings from the data collected from three groups of participants: (a) 2015 teacher candidates, (b) 2017 in-service teachers from a public school, and (c) 2019 in-service English teachers from a private school.

2015 Teacher Candidates

Four focus groups (each with eight candidates 22 to 25 years old with balanced gender representation) were conducted with future teachers from an urban-rural area of Ecuador. The participants were completing requirements to graduate from their teacher preparation program such as internships in K–12 schools as well as writing a thesis and undergoing clinical placements which included experiences with two different mentors in their respective classes. Three open-ended questions were posed to the teacher candidates:

1. What have you learned about AR?
2. How do you implement AR in the classroom?
3. How would you use AR to adjust instruction in the classroom?

2017 In-Service Teachers From a Public School: Workshop Participants

The participants were 26 practicing teachers (6 men and 20 women) with a range of 4 to 30 years of teaching experience. The participants taught literature and ESL at the secondary school level (Grades 9–12). Four focus groups were organized before and after the workshop. The open-ended questions for the focus groups aimed to understand the participants' training and knowledge about implementing AR:

1. How do you know how to implement AR in the classroom to adjust instruction?
2. If you know how to implement AR, please provide an example.

2019 In-Service English Teachers From a Private School: Interview of Participants

Eight practicing teachers with 10 to 18 years of teaching experience participated in one-on-one interviews. The teachers had spent their entire teaching career teaching English at different grade levels in a K–12 institution in an urban area of Ecuador. These teachers did not participate in the workshop because they were already informally using AR in their classrooms. Instead the interviews sought information about their implementation of AR through the following questions based on the steps in the AR process:

1. How do you identify academic problems in the classroom?
2. What type of information do you collect after having identified the academic problem?
3. What process do you use to study or interpret the identified academic problem?
4. How do you develop an action plan after having identified the academic problem?

Qualitative Analyses

Analysis of the findings generated three themes related to knowledge about the AR process from all three groups of participants. The first theme demonstrates the limited formal instruction about AR during program preparation or PD opportunities. The second theme shows the implicit knowledge teachers possess about the AR steps. The third theme communicates the explicit knowledge about the AR process expressed by teachers.

Limited Formal Instruction on AR

Participant responses gathered in 2015 from teacher candidates demonstrate insufficient understanding of how to find answers to educational problems using AR for data collection and subsequent analysis. During the focus group sessions held prior to the AR workshop, teacher candidates indicated they had not received any formal training focused on AR. One trainee said AR was not necessary because "educational mandates from the

Department of Education tell teachers what to teach and how to teach." Another teacher trainee added that "the lack of available time would be a barrier to implement AR in the classroom." Many of the teacher candidates related AR to other types of research such as using the World Wide Web to find information for completing classroom assignments. For example, a teacher candidate stated, "Lately we have had the opportunity to take students to the computer lab to search the internet." Another mentioned: "While working on the thesis, I realized that we are used to traditional methodologies; the teacher comes and delivers instruction." Another trainee stated that "in millennium schools, each student has his/her own computer to do research." These statements suggest that teacher candidates were not exposed to adequate modeling about how to plan, implement, and use AR in the classroom as a systematic approach for exploring and resolving pedagogical problems.

In the focus groups held with in-service teachers before the workshop in 2017, participants were asked about their knowledge and skills in implementing AR and how they utilize information to adjust instruction. After a participant stated, "I know little about the subject," others agreed, further indicating they had not received sufficient training either during their formal education to become teachers or through their post-graduate PD. Other teachers described AR as research that involves students. One teacher said: "It is important to look for new strategies to help students," and others supported the comment with examples of how to get students' attention (e.g., games).

A majority of the 2017 in-service teachers were unsure of how to implement AR to adjust instruction. Three teachers related AR to writing a research paper. One teacher indicated: "Research topics are provided and forums created for students to express their thoughts based on their culture." Another teacher stated that "students' research habits help them maximize the lecture time because of students' content knowledge prior [to] the lesson." A third teacher mentioned: "This topic [AR] could be interesting. However, the number of students and the physical space in the classroom do not allow for it." Four teachers provided examples of classroom research topics such as African slavery. One suggested "web self-evaluation and projects" as an example of AR. A second teacher stated: "I can be innovative and consolidate knowledge with AR in the classroom when I apply knowledge through forums, projects, etc.," while yet another teacher mentioned, "adjust[ing] classroom instruction, a teacher should always motivate the students to be part of the complete process."

The examples provided by the teachers in the focus groups involved content-related activities in which the student was the researcher looking for new information rather than the teachers trying to solve an academic problem based on their students' responses. Analysis of the responses indicated that teacher candidates would benefit from learning to conduct AR (Patera et al., 2016; Stuart & Kunje, 1998). Answers to the open-ended questions did not demonstrate reflection on how teaching practices could support students from diverse backgrounds or those learning ESL. The teacher candidates and in-service teachers did not demonstrate familiarity with how AR helps monitor students' learning and adjust instruction, nor did they provide accurate examples of what AR might look like (Nugent et al., 2012).

Implicit Knowledge About AR

The answers provided by the participants indicated they connected their teaching practices to AR concepts; however, the process of adjusting instruction was not explicitly addressed and the examples showed that teachers had limited understanding about how to adjust instruction using a systematic AR approach. The participants shared the AR process as informal and usually there are no records of its implementation.

Some participants from the 2017 in-service teacher group demonstrated implicit knowledge of the AR process. When they were asked how they identify an academic problem in the classroom, they all indicated

they use anecdotal observations of students' academic achievement. Several teachers made reference to having had a student in their classroom the previous academic year and thus being familiar with the student's behavior and academic performance. One teacher talked about a "student who was cheerful until one day the teacher saw the behavior change from cheerful to sad." She said, "I asked him what was wrong and encouraged him to grasp that he was not responsible for the problems in his family." Other participants explained that in these cases, the teachers tried to provide academic activities for the students to help them concentrate on assigned tasks.

The researchers asked about the types of data the teachers collect in their classrooms, teachers shared how "at the beginning of the school year, we administer a content test to understand the level of knowledge of the students and that information is used to study and inform instruction." When this group of teachers was asked about the action plan they developed after the AR cycle was completed, they indicated that they based the action plan on the results obtained after identification of the problem. The participants described the AR steps; however, information detailing their practices through a reflective process to identify a problem was not stated (Hendricks, 2006). Moreover, the implementation and testing of theories and interventions with students to determine the impact of implemented solutions were not clearly identified (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The data did not adequately indicate the level of inquiry. Thus, the information presented by the participants shows an informal implementation of the AR cycle in which teachers' experiences influence their use of interventions to solve academic issues.

Data from the 2019 in-service teachers from a private school demonstrated an implicit knowledge of the AR process. When participants were asked about identification of an academic problem, two teachers indicated that

> before the lesson starts, I have an activity, such as a game, to determine the level of knowledge of the students about the objects in the classroom. This activity helps me to categorize my students into groups based on their responses.

Other teachers noted that the English lesson about identifying parts of the body started by singing the song "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes." The children enjoyed the singing, which allowed the teacher to move to the next activity and show the students both the names of the different parts of the human body (e.g., legs and head) and how sentences are formed utilizing proper grammatical structures. A teacher stated that as the English lesson about the body continued, he provided examples such as "I have a head," "He has two arms," and "They have hands." Other teachers started the lesson with a game using puppets in which the teacher named the members of the family (e.g., grandmother, sister, and father) using the puppets. The teacher asked the students to repeat the names. Two teachers stated they give first-grade students a test before the lesson is conducted. "I may decide to group students with more knowledge and students demonstrating less knowledge in small groups."

The teachers used information gathered through an activity or a test to frame the next steps of instruction. Some teachers "deliver instruction utilizing a variety of strategies (e.g., lecture, working in groups, and worksheets)." Then "I ask the students several questions to assess the level of comprehension of the new knowledge." Other teachers provide worksheets for the students to practice recognizing the body parts and generating sentences. Another strategy was working together to match pictures with sentences: "This matching activity in groups helped the students who did not understand the lecture…his/her friends in the group would help him/her to recognize the days of the week in the classroom assignment." Other teachers used a coloring/matching activity "to teach the names of the different objects in a house (e.g., chair and table)." One noted,

> I also provide a worksheet including words and a house for the students to circle the objects in the house. If a student does not recognize the name of the objects in the house, s/he is expected to ask, "what is that?"

Prior to the workshop debriefing, when the teachers were asked about developing an action plan to support learning based on the students' needs. A teacher noted,

> I will have to tailor instruction because the homework shows that I have to reinforce the information for some of the students...Most likely, I will divide the students into groups. Each group will be assigned a different activity while I work with the students that need extra instruction.

One teacher listed her next steps to ensure mastery. She noted that concepts from a lesson are included in follow-up lessons, assignments, and assessments. She claimed this gives her "the opportunity to follow up with my students to monitor the gaps in knowledge." Other teachers indicated there are always more opportunities to reinforce information in the future. Another teacher indicated that

> at this point, I am not going to assess any content knowledge for this lesson because I am going to continue building on this knowledge for the next two lessons…I will assess content at the end, and I will decide what needs to be done.

Other teachers noted,

> The students will have other opportunities to learn the names of the objects. I am interested in their listening skills, speaking skills, and how they would ask about what they don't know (e.g., "what is that?" "what is the name of that?").

When asked about the next steps, the teacher indicated: "This knowledge will be included in the next lesson…the new words will be used."

The participants explained identification of the problem, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and an action plan (Mills, 2007), which are part of the AR cycle; however, connecting the reflexivity process to the problem to be solved was not clearly indicated (Hendricks, 2006). Moreover, the interventions presented by the participants seemed to indicate classroom strategies instead of testing the impact of interventions on students' academic achievement (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). These results demonstrated that in-service teachers in the public school and the private school applied the AR stages to enhance pedagogical approaches and classroom assessments and to adjust instruction in their classrooms without explicitly knowing it.

Explicit Knowledge About AR

Three in-service public-school teachers in the group from 2017 expressed understanding how to use the AR process to adjust instruction. They collected information by administering content pre-tests, analyzing the results to identify academic and behavioral problems, and identifying strategies to be implemented with specific students. They incorporated the strategies into academic plans involving three pillars: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective. During data collection, the teachers used classroom activities and homework to determine concepts that needed to be retaught as suggested by the gathered data.

When teachers developed an action plan, they described previously implemented instructional strategies, such as engaging students in an activity in games or small groups work. They shared that they monitored the students' knowledge and knowledge gains through scaffolded instructional tasks. Although the AR steps were identified, the participants did not explicitly identify the self-reflection component of AR. Self-reflection is important to improve teachers' teaching methods, so the absence of this process might indicate the teachers depended on their experience to implement strategies to improve students' academic outcomes.

The findings show teacher candidates had limited exposure to the AR process during their formal educa-

tion about how to enhance pedagogical approaches, select classroom assessments, and adjust instruction based on the students' needs to meet the desired academic achievement. On the other hand, the results from practicing teachers in the public school and the private schools demonstrated they applied the AR stages in their classrooms without explicitly knowing it, as only three in-service teachers explained the AR process and how they used it in the classroom. Furthermore, a common thread was the teachers' limited use of self-reflection to improve teaching pedagogies and students' academic achievement outcomes. Having teachers with the knowledge and skill to adjust instruction based on students' needs will enhance the education system (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Van Damme et al., 2013).

Conclusions and Implications

This paper investigated Ecuadorian pre-service and in-service teachers' ability to conduct AR in the classroom and their skills to efficiently adjust instruction to address students' cultural and linguistic diversity. The participants' knowledge of the AR cycle demonstrated insufficient clarity of the definition and appropriate use of AR. After exposure to AR concepts in the workshops, data suggest teachers grasped the benefits of AR for improving their teaching practices; however, a discussion of limitations such as time and resources to sustain the methodology was also present, evidencing obstacles to be overcome. Several researchers (Burns et al., 2016; Edwards, 2020; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Mehrani, 2017) identified the benefits of AR for supporting teachers in their educational role; however, they also found that issues with time and administration support created a formidable challenge to the sustainability of AR in the classroom.

It is evident that Ecuadorian educators found the AR process informative and applicable to their practice, paralleling research that has demonstrated the importance of implementing the AR cycle based on the teachers' reflections (Edwards, 2020; McIntyre, 2008; Mills, 2007; Santoro Lamelas, 2020; Soto Gómez et al., 2019; Stuart & Kunje, 1998; Wyatt, 2011; York-Barr et al., 2016). Edwards (2020) stated that teachers benefit from AR by increasing their awareness of teaching-related practices and research-related development that can lead them to new skills, beliefs, and engagement as well as identification of their educators' roles.

Findings in this study indicate the need to prepare teachers to understand AR and be able to implement the AR process to improve academic outcomes. Currently, participants seemed to perform the AR steps in their formative and summative assessments of students as well as for students' performance to adjust instruction, but collectively, none of the three groups described the reflection process as a means for adjusting instruction to meet desired academic goals based on students' needs, particularly students learning ESL, or to adjust instruction based on the multicultural and multilingual environment of the classroom (Organic Law of Intercultural Education, 2012). The awareness of the process will improve teachers' practices and "(possibly) maintain a reflective research perspective" (Edwards, 2020, p. 9). AR is a tool for systematically approaching the improvement of teaching practices through reflection to connect theory to practice (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

There are a few implications. First is the importance of reflecting on AR as a journey instead of implementing a "fixed set of ideas" (Mokuku, 2001, p. 197). If the ability to implement AR in classrooms is essential and Ecuadorian teachers, like those in this study, do not seem to have had formal exposure to this practice in training programs, teacher education institutions may want to look at increasing this type of training. Collaboration with university researchers can provide mentorship opportunities to train teachers as researchers to improve teachers' pedagogical practices and students' academics (Edwards, 2020; Rahmani-Doqaruni, 2014). Second, the school community influences the need of merging PD with AR for teachers to improve academics in the classroom. As the AR process uncovers instructional

gaps and/or other academic issues to be solved, the process to explain them will create opportunities for teachers to support all students, including those with multilingual and multicultural backgrounds. Finally, the findings of this study could drive change in school policy and practice to empower those committed to the AR process to improve themselves and lead other teachers to better their teaching practices. The limitations of the study include the reality that AR is scarce in Ecuador as are the qualitative data focused on a small portion of AR and its conditions to implement it in the classroom.

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Level of English in Colombian Higher Education: A Decade of Stagnation

Nivel de inglés en la educación superior colombiana: una década de estancamiento

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This article analyzes the results of the Saber Pro, the state exam for students completing higher education, during 2007–2017 concerning the English language section. This analysis uses the reports and databases from the Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación (ICFES) repository and explains the policy in its historical context. The results warn of a quite worrying picture between the goals established by the Ministry of Education and the final achievements. The level of English of future Colombian professionals is not only very low but also without improvement from its beginnings in 2007 to 2017. As a conclusion, it would be necessary to review, from the universities' perspective, the language educational policy and propose bottom-up structural alternatives that allow a sustained impulse in teacher training, methodology, and curricular and pedagogical organization.

Keywords: achievement gains, educational policy, Colombian university students, language tests, proficiency tests

En este artículo se analizan los resultados de la prueba Saber Pro, el examen de estado para estudiantes que terminan la educación superior, en el módulo de inglés del periodo 2007-2017. Este análisis utiliza los informes y bases de datos del Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación (ICFES) y proporciona un breve contexto histórico de la política educativa. Los resultados advierten un panorama preocupante entre las metas establecidas por el Ministerio de Educación Nacional desde el inicio de la prueba de inglés y los logros obtenidos. El nivel de inglés de los futuros profesionales en Colombia no solo sigue siendo muy bajo, sino que además no se observa mejoramiento importante. Como conclusión, se propone revisar desde las universidades la política educativa con alternativas estructurales que permitan un impulso a la capacitación docente, la metodología y la organización curricular y pedagógica.

Palabras clave: estudiantes universitarios colombianos, mejoramiento educativo, política educativa, pruebas de inglés, pruebas de eficiencia

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This article is part of the institutional project funded by the Sistema de Investigaciones at Universidad de Nariño (Colombia) that seeks to identify the level of English in all its faculties, programs, students, and teachers for the design of an improvement plan and a policy of use of the foreign language.

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Introduction

The importance of not only knowing but also mastering English as a foreign language (EFL) is undeniable in our era of the "Global Village" where information in the scientific, technological, political, and economic fields at the spoken and written levels are mostly found in this language. Hence, we speak of a global language such as a "lingua franca" that allows different peoples, nations, and races of different languages to communicate through a common code (Cromer, 1992; Ku & Zussman, 2010; Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN], 2006a). This characteristic growth of the importance of English has also produced the phenomenon of the native speaker displacement as a standard. At the level of native English speakers in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, it has been found that there would be almost five times more speakers of EFL than natives throughout the world (Jenkins, 2003).

In the educational field, the importance of English, especially in developing countries, has been growing due, for the most part, to frequent opportunities for educational mobility offered worldwide to students of higher education (British Council, 2015; Pennycook, 2012; Sánchez-Jabba, 2013). Therefore, the inevitable requirement of mastery or proficiency of EFL has been on the increase. This reality has recently been boosted by the so-called "internationalization" factor that has been taken into account by the universities in Colombia to improve the mobility rates for the accreditation of programs and eventually of the institution. The national and international visibility of the universities required by the Consejo Nacional de Acreditación[1] (CNA) as one of the factors for accreditation (Agreement 03 of 2014) and the internationalization dimension by the MEN for the Modelo de Indicadores de Desempeño de la Educación Superior (MIDE, higher education performance indicator model) university rankings has very recently included the results of English from the Saber Pro tests[2] at university level as one of its indicators, among others such as student and teacher mobility, and international co-authorship of articles (MEN, 2014; Resolution 18583 of 2017).

According to recent reports in Colombia, the level of English has been identified as low, when considering the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) adopted by the Colombian government since 2006 (MEN, 2006a). This drawback has had direct implications for public education policies aimed at counteracting low language proficiency results for university students at both national (ECAES,[3] Saber Pro) and international level (English Proficiency Index, EPI) exams for young professionals. On the other hand, taking into account the results of standardized tests, student performance, especially in higher education, has not changed significantly (Consejo Privado de la Competitividad, 2007; Sánchez-Jabba, 2013).

In this study, the reports from ECAES, Saber Pro exams, and the databases from the repository of the Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación (ICFES) are used for the analysis of the results in two moments along ten years (2007–2017). After a brief historical contextualization of the policy and the exam, the results that determine the different levels of English are compared with reference to the goals established by the MEN for that period of time. Finally, the implications for the future development of the linguistic and communicative competencies of English in the Colombian education system are examined in the discussion and conclusions parts.

1 The entity in charge of ensuring high-quality standards of educational institutions and programs in Colombia.

2 Saber Pro is the name of the Colombian state exam used by the government to test five different competencies, English among them, in students finishing higher education (ICFES, 2018a).

3 The ECAES exam was the original version of Saber Pro and went on from 2003 to 2009. Saber Pro was established by Law 1324 of 2009 and started to be administered in 2010.

International Context

In the early 1990s, with the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc, the Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall, the Cold War, and other political, economic, and cultural barriers between East and West, there was an increase in student mobility in European countries, after more than 50 years of strong restrictions on entry to the countries of the Eastern Bloc. The same happened with the countries of the American continent that saw greater possibilities of international mobility with Europe. Both government agencies, industrial and commercial companies as well as institutions of higher education launched their different policies of rapprochement and cooperation with European countries and vice versa. EFL thus gained greater momentum as a means of global communication for education (Council of Europe, 2001; Gilpin, 2011; Lasanowski, 2011; McBurnie, 1999).

This resulted in the resurgence of interest in learning and teaching the different languages involved, especially English, from fields such as science, economics, industry, technological development, and the growing impulse of global culture (Nault, 2006). Also, the qualification of people in various languages was particularly important, as was the implementation of evaluation and measurement mechanisms. In addition, it was necessary that actors interested in cooperation and interaction in the new context could show mastery of the target language, making certain forms of institutional certification of their competence in the different languages at stake necessary (Coleman, 2006). This resulted in the need for the standardization of assessment and measurement instruments of internationally validated exams or tests (Benavides, 2015; Council of Europe, 2001; Willems, 2002).

In this way, the option of a standard for the different global certification needs of EFL was born, as well as for the other languages at stake (French, Spanish, German, etc.). Since the 1960s, there have existed language certifications from institutions such as ETS (Educational Testing Service) in America and universities such as Cambridge and Oxford in Europe that used various tests to measure linguistic and communicative skills. Many test developers at that time realized the need for a standard that could serve as a reference for the various certifications of the mastery or proficiency of a foreign language in the new world context.

In the mid-1990s, the Council of Europe proposed a series of guidelines—to be recognized throughout Europe—for learning, teaching, and evaluating qualifications in foreign languages. (Schneider & Lenz, 2001). The resulting effort was the development of the standard called Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) that would eventually become a reference manual for aligning tests for the different language competencies: linguistic, communicative, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic (Willems, 2002).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The CEFR was published as a revised version of a Council of Europe manual in 2001. It aimed at helping European countries in their search for standards, criteria, and points of reference to assess and evaluate different levels of language in order to guarantee and promote interaction among peoples, especially in the field of education. One of its main objectives was:

> To encourage practitioners of all kinds in the language field, including language learners themselves, to reflect on such questions as: What do we actually do when we speak (or write) to each other? . . . how do we set our objectives and mark our progress along the path from total ignorance to effective mastery? . . . what can we do to help ourselves and other people to learn a language better? (Council of Europe, 2001, p. iii)

The main advantage of the CEFR from its conceptions has been, as the name implies, to serve as a common reference for language teachers, researchers, and policy-

makers in establishing their objectives and challenges, taking into account their needs, interests, and contexts (Council of Europe, 2001). However, in recent years and from the pressure of a global economy and the need for policymakers for language choices, most of the attention placed on the CEFR has been focused on the achievement of the different levels built around descriptors and rubrics. In other words, the emphasis has been put on the adequacy and application of tests and achievement exams in the areas of international relations and business and commerce (Neeley, 2012, 2013; Spolsky, 2009). Despite the more pragmatical orientations and applications from its original aim by the Council of Europe, it can be of particular interest to policy designers, agencies and government institutions, curriculum designers, teachers, and institutions to implement curricula around these new standards to eventually have programs developed around descriptors of the international level (Little, 2007; Westhoff, 2007).

The Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo (National Bilingualism Program)

Colombia has prepared the path towards commercial, scientific, and educational openness using the Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo (PNB) since 2004 as an ambitious driving mechanism for the country's development. Several reforms designed for EFL in the Colombian educational system preceded this program. In its design and implementation, however, structural obstacles were found that prevented its realization. Among them was the large number of students per classroom that became a great pedagogical obstacle to learning objectives. Also, these reforms revealed the wide gaps between national initiatives issued by the Ministry of Education for the policy implementation of English and the development of communicative competence of Colombians. These policies have been carried out *amid* the lack of continuity in their implementation due to (a) misconceptions of the term "bilingualism" (Gómez-Sará, 2017); (b) not enough available resources, the necessary contextual conditions, and the scarce hourly intensity and content (Jimenez et al., 2017; Sánchez-Solarte & Obando-Guerrero, 2008); (c) the lack of a culture of evaluation (British Council, 2015); (d) disregard of language educators in policy decision making and in-service teacher training and preparation (Cárdenas, 2006); and (e) impoverished opportunities of degree qualification for primary school teachers by the Ministry of Education (Bastidas et al., 2015).

It is noteworthy that during the periods 1991–1996 and 2011–2015, and in the context of decentralization promulgated by the new Colombian Constitution of 1991, the MEN, supported by several private and official universities and with the logistics of the British Council, promoted teacher training in the different participating English programs. This led to a mobilization of English teachers from several universities to enforce internal curricular reforms that would ultimately leverage English learning processes based on new approaches, methodologies, and pedagogical paradigms (Aparicio et al., 1995). The mobilization mentioned above nurtured the development in 1999 of the *Curricular Guidelines for Foreign Languages* as pedagogical orientations for teachers who could appropriate conceptual elements and make university autonomy effective in guiding the pedagogical processes for curricular needs (MEN, 1999).

Only until 2006, and in the context of the "Educational Revolution," did the MEN publish the *Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages: English*, a product created by university teachers with experience in the field and with the support of the British Council. These standards implied the adoption, selection, and application of the descriptors and rubrics of the CEFR, which were accepted as criteria to identify the development of English language linguistic and communicative competencies in the country (MEN, 2006a).

The PNB aimed at "achieving citizens capable of communicating in English, so that they can insert the country into the processes of universal communication, in the global economy and that of cultural openness, with internationally comparable standards" (MEN, 2006a, p. 6). The purpose, made explicit by the Ministry of Education, was intended to achieve levels of mastery or proficiency of English in Colombia for 2019. However, it could also have represented the adherence of the country to globalization as a mass phenomenon, synonymous with the "commercialization" of higher education, as seen by some critics of this process (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011; Pennycook, 2012; Robertson, 2010). Conversely, Piekkari and Tietze (2011) have reminded us of the difficulty, if not the impossibility, to dictate general policies for language use and rather recommended a sensibilization process before setting any policy implementation. It seemed that this process was made to appear somewhat easy to achieve or it was intended to be perceived as too simplistic, without having considered the complexity of contextual aspects: needs, interests, motivations, the programs (form, duration, and orientation), coverage, participants, institutions, students, and teachers at the regional and national levels. Therefore, the introduction of language policy should have been for the most part an integration of the many factors, actors, and conditions of the process in the country as a precondition to its successful implementation, without neglecting any of the complexities while considering most issues at stake.

Analysis of the Goals Projected for the Development of the Level of English in Colombia

Through the PNB as a policy for the development of EFL in Colombia until 2019, the MEN aimed to develop communication skills in English for educators and students to favor the insertion of human capital in the knowledge economy and in the globalized labor market. For this reason, it considered the achievement of the goals as mastery of English (MEN, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). All accomplishments and achievements would have to be referenced to the standard adopted by MEN since 2006, that is, the CEFR and the consequent use of the new terminology: CEFR levels, performance descriptors, rubrics, scales, ranges and sub-ranges for the different language and communication skills that had to be guaranteed.

A scale of three ranks, for the six levels of the CEFR (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) was a more simplified manner addressing the levels: *basic user* (A1, A2), *independent user* (B1, B2), and *efficient user* (C1, C2). However, the latter two levels, according to the CEFR descriptors, refer more to the optimal levels of achievement of an ideal user who would resemble that of a native speaker of the target language. The *basic user* and *independent user* ranks were further divided as: Beginner A1, Elementary A2, Intermediate B1, High Intermediate B+. These were the levels obtained after the piloting of the test between 2005 and 2006 and the first results appeared in 2007 (see Table 1).

With the PNB as a base policy, the MEN considered that the specific goals for students who completed basic and middle education would be the achievement of levels A2 and B1, respectively, and B2 for teachers. For students who finished higher education levels, B2 and also B2+ would be expected, and C1 for graduates from English bachelor's degree programs at university level (see Table 2).

However, since the results at baseline (2005–2006) were lower than expected, projected goals were established in percentage figures for middle and higher education levels (see Table 3).

Table 1. CEFR Descriptors for English: Basic and Independent Users

Independent users	**B+**	• Exceeds level B1
	B1	• Are able to understand the main points of clear and standard language texts that deal with everyday issues • Know how to cope with most situations that may arise during a trip • Are able to produce simple and coherent texts on topics that are familiar to them or in which they have a personal interest • Can describe experiences, events, desires, and aspirations, as well as briefly justify their opinions or explain their plans
Basic users	**A2**	• Are able to understand frequently used phrases and expressions related to areas of experience that are especially relevant (basic information about themselves and their families, shopping, places of interest, occupations, etc.) • Know how to communicate when carrying out simple and daily tasks that do not require more than simple and direct exchanges of information • Know how to describe in simple terms aspects of their past and their surroundings, as well as issues related to their immediate needs
	A1	• Are able to understand and use everyday and frequent expressions, as well as simple phrases designed to meet immediate needs. • Can introduce themselves, ask for and give basic personal information about their address, belongings, and the people they know. • Can relate to others in a simple way as long as their interlocutor speaks slowly and clearly
Low level	**A-**	• Does not reach level A1

Note. From the ICFES (2010), Saber Pro database. Dirección de evaluación.

Table 2. Achievement Goals for English: Basic, Middle, and Higher Education

Basic and Middle Education
Grade 11 students: Intermediate level (**B1**)
English teachers: High Intermediate level (**B2**)
Higher Education
Future English teachers: Upper Intermediate level (**B2+, C1**)
University students from other careers: Intermediate level (**B2**)

Note. From *Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo: Colombia 2004–2019*, by Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2009, (https://bit.ly/3h1Bnif).

Table 3. Percentage Indicators, Baseline, and Goals (2011–2014)

	Indicators	**Baseline**	**2011 Goal**	**2014 Goal**
1.	% of 11th grade students proficient in English at the pre-intermediate B1 level	11%	15%	40%
2.	% of English teachers with an intermediate B2 English proficiency	15%	19%	100%
3.	% of English BA degree students who reach the intermediate level B2	31%	45%	80%
4.	% of university students from other careers other than BA degrees in English that reach the intermediate level B2	4%	6%	20%

Note. From *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2010–2014: prosperidad para todos*, by Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2011 (https://bit.ly/2ZsOoNu).

Given the baseline, an increase of four percentage points as a goal for 2011 (see Case 1) could be understood as moderate. However, an increase of more than 100% in the following three years (2014) appeared very ambitious. In Case 2, the goal pointed to more than 500%, an increase in the same three-year period for teachers of English in basic and secondary education, something very difficult or impossible to achieve without having some kind of special intervention plan.

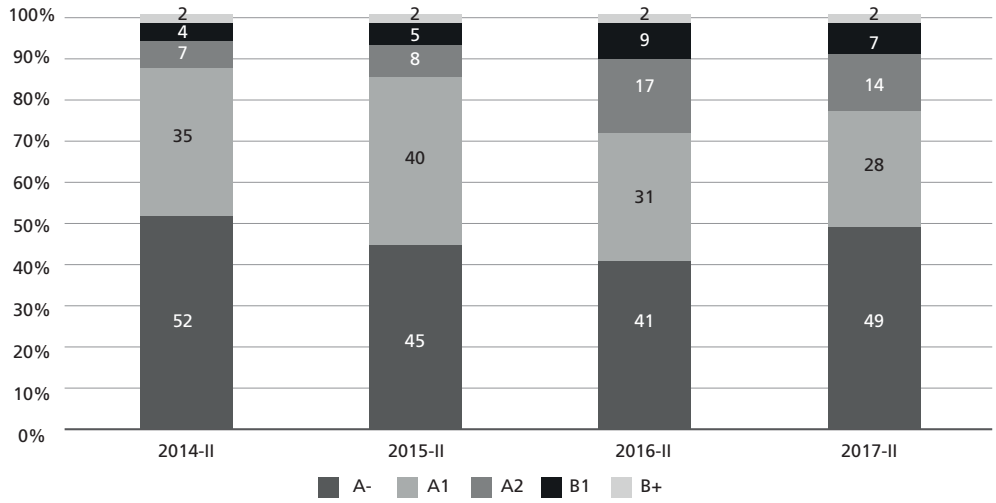
In the context of a globalized world, pressure for a foreign language policy has been exerted internally and externally. First, by governmental agencies such as MEN and the ICFES and the Consejo Privado de la Competitividad that would allow Colombia to be a competitive country with its insertion into the global economy and with better preparation for the academic and labor global world. Second, by international organizations like the OECD as a demand for the country to be in a better position in the education field by performance indicators on standardized tests. One of these indicators has been English as a primary means of communication in all fields ensuring the educational policies from international organizations dealing with market participation and adherence to a global and neoliberal context of higher education (Apple, 1999; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Phillipson, 2008; Price, 2014). Within this state of affairs of providing the expected results satisfying both sides, the MEN would have adopted two positions. First, a minimalist position for basic, middle, and higher education cycles, in the first three years of the English test for 2011, and second, a maximalist approach for the next three (2014) in the development of foreign language competencies according to the projected goals.

Results of Saber 11 Exam

The results of the level of English for primary and secondary education in this study are taken only as a reference for comparison and the subsequent analysis of higher education. For consistency purposes, the following nomenclature is used as terms of the scale: *low levels* (A- and A1), *intermediate levels* (A2 and B1), and *high level* (B+) or higher.

The following results of the Saber 11 exams carried out between 2014 and 2017 could be used to compare the scope of the goals projected by the MEN around the levels established according to the CEFR criteria and the real situation of English in basic and secondary education in Colombia (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage Results of Saber 11 National Exams (2014–2017)



Note. From the ICFES (2018b).

In these four years (2014–2017), the level of English in basic and secondary education appears practically as A1, A2, and B1 of the CEFR with their respective achievement descriptors (see Table 3).

In 2014 (year of the first goal of the MEN), 87% of the students of 11th grade who took the test were in the low levels (A- and A1), and only 4% reached B1 which, according to the MEN, for that year should have been 40%. Three years later, the results are nothing better since the goal for 2017 should have been much higher. However, 7% was obtained, 3% higher than (2014), that is a 1% increase per year. In these four years (2014–2017), there is no significant change to talk about language "mastery" as was proposed in the goals for 2014, with 40% for B1 finishing secondary education (MEN, 2006a, 2006b).

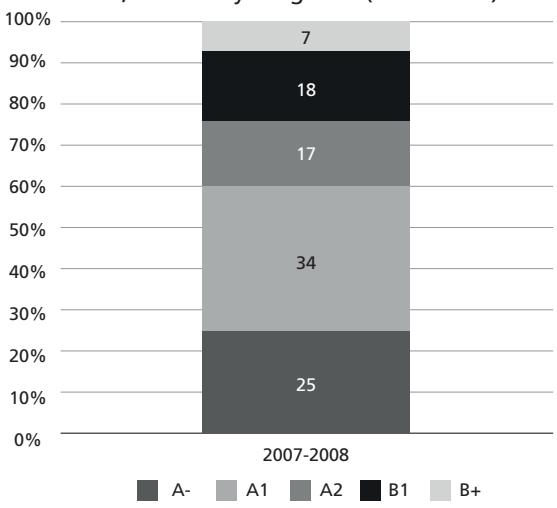
It is worrying to see that practically half of the population of students finishing Grade 11 in 2017 is at Level A- according to the CEFR, that is, the student "does not overcome the questions of less complexity" (see Table 1). If these were the results obtained at the end of the secondary education for 2017, these would be the levels of entry of students to higher education. Seventy-seven percent of the population with low levels (A- and A1) are even lower than what should be achieved, according to the MEN, at the end of primary school. Without obtaining Level B1 for secondary education, the projected goals for higher education would suffer in that same proportion affecting the overall level of English in the Colombian education system.

Results From the ECAES Exam for English (2007–2008)

With the issuance of Law 1324 of 2009, the regulatory framework of the System of Quality Assessment of Higher Education was introduced and new criteria for the English exam were defined. Decree 3963 of 2009 regulated the application of the exam, and Decree 4216 of that same year made its completion an additional degree requirement for students at the end of this level of studies. Since 2010, with the review of the exam, it was called the Saber Pro exam, and its results served as a source of information for the construction of indicators for evaluating the quality of higher education in Colombia.

The following results (2007–2008) are the benchmark for subsequent comparison with the period 2016–2017 and they refer to professional programs at the university level in higher education. It can be noted that about 60% of the population that took the English exam in that first period is at low levels (A- and A1), 35% in the intermediate levels (A2 and B1), and only 7% in the high level (B+; see Figure 2).

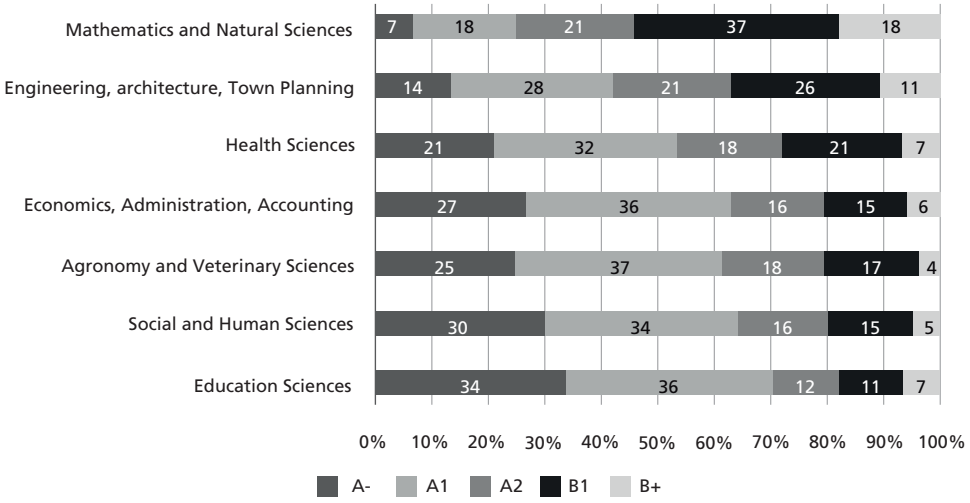
Figure 2. Percentage Results of ECAES National Exam, University Programs (2007–2008)



Note. From ICFES (2010, 2011), results (2007–2008).

For the same period (2007–2008) the differences among the reference groups are notable between the extremes of the distribution. Mathematics and natural sciences with 25% of low levels (A- and A1), 58% in intermediate levels (A2 and B1), and 18% in the high level (B+). They are followed, in descending order, by engineering, architecture, urban planning, and health sciences. At the lower end are education sciences and social and human sciences. The education sciences group has 70% of the students in the low levels (A- and A1), 23% in the intermediate levels (A2 and B1), and only 7% in the high level (B+; see Figure 3).

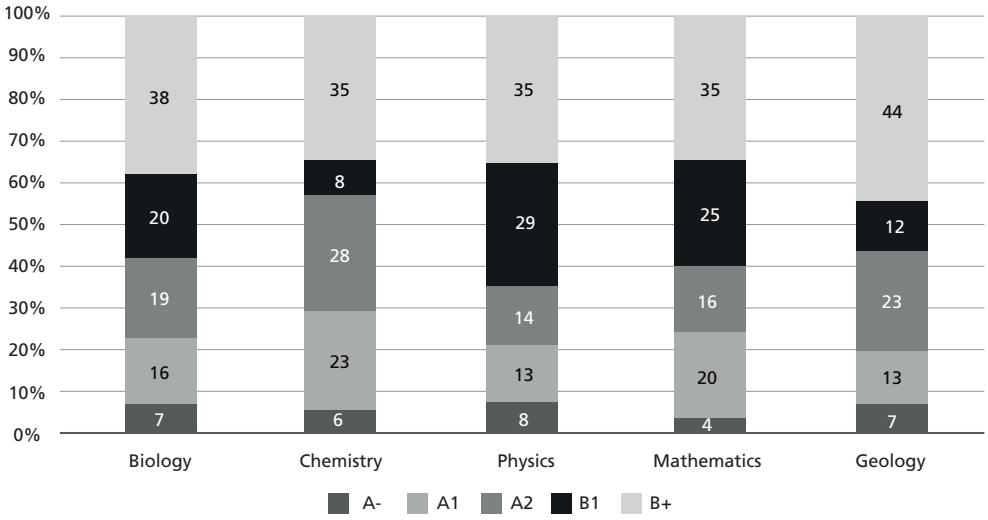
Figure 3. Percentage Results of ECAES National Exam, Groups of Reference (2007–2008)



Note. From ICFES (2010), results (2007–2008).

For a better comparison within the reference groups, some of the programs within them at the extremes of the distribution have been taken for comparison: mathematics and natural sciences contrasted with those of education sciences (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Percentage Results of ECAES National Exam: Mathematics and Natural Sciences (2007–2008)

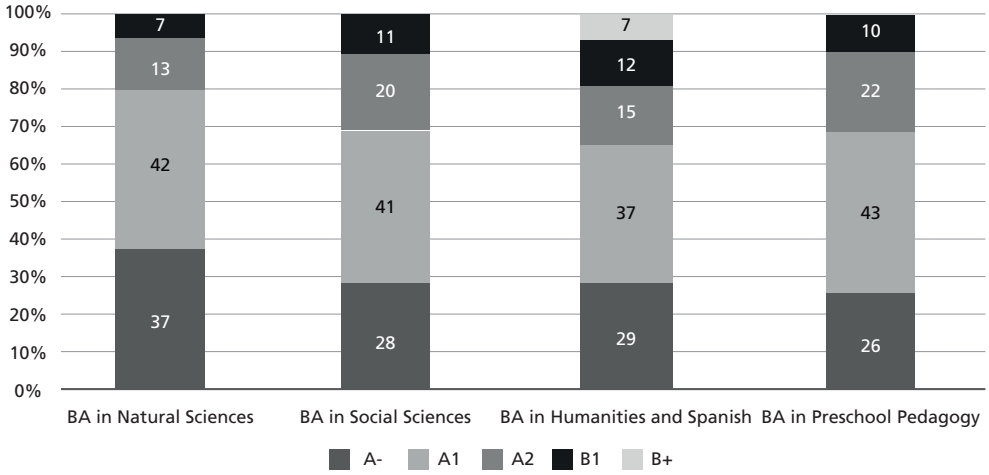


Note. From ICFES (2010), results (2007–2008).

These programs stand out due to the low percentages at the low levels (A- and A1) and high percentages at the high level (B+). It is important to note that the low levels are between 20% and 29%, while the high between 35% and 44%, which significantly differentiates them from the results of the population.

For the second case, in the bachelor's degree programs from the education sciences group, high percentages in the low levels (A- and A1) reaching about 80% in one of them are observed, and the absence of the high level (B+) in the others (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Percentage Results of ECAES National Exam: Education Sciences (2007–2008)



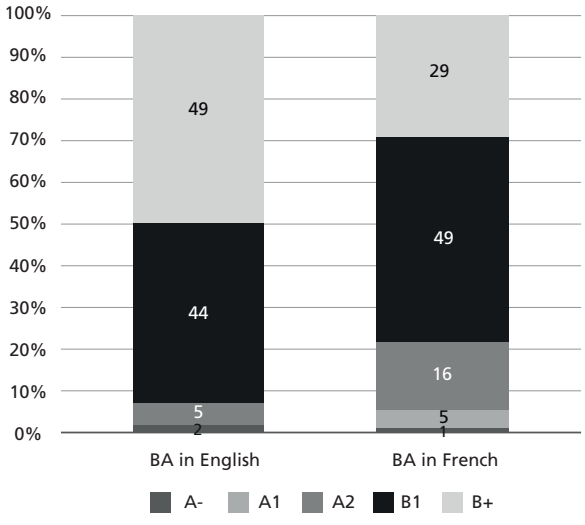
Note. From ICFES (2010), results (2007–2008).

Unlike the programs in the area of mathematics and natural sciences (Figure 5), these would be those with the lowest performance of the population: the highest percentages at the lowest levels (A- and A1) and the lowest at the high level (B+).

However, within the education sciences, the differences considerably increase when it comes to programs whose emphasis is foreign languages and particularly bachelor's degrees in English (Figure 6)

Even 2% of low levels (A- and A1), 49% intermediate levels (A2 and B1), and 49% at high level (B+) in programs with an emphasis in English, would not be sufficient for the goals established by the MEN in 2006. These programs, given their subject matter characteristics, would be the exception to the rule of what happens with the other university programs of higher education. Therefore, it would have been necessary to consider them separately.

Figure 6. Percentage Results of ECAES National Exam: Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages (2007–2008)

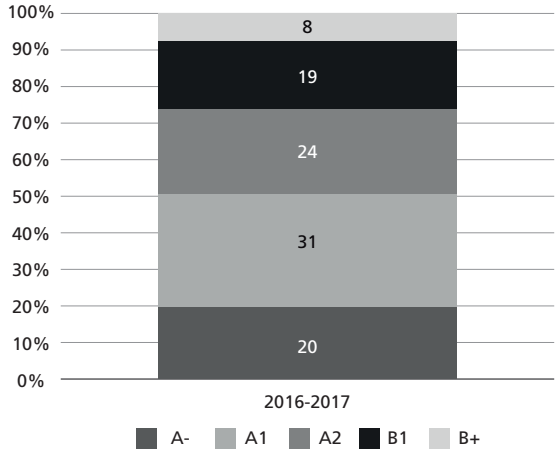


Note. From ICFES (2010), results (2007–2008).

Results of Saber Pro for English (2016–2017)

After ten years of the first application of the English exam, and with the modification of Level B+ as B2 after a revision of the test, roughly half of the population (51%) of those who took the test are still at low levels (A- and A1), 43% in the intermediate levels (A2 and B1), and only 8% in the high level (B2; see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Percentage Results of Saber Pro National Exam (2016–2017)

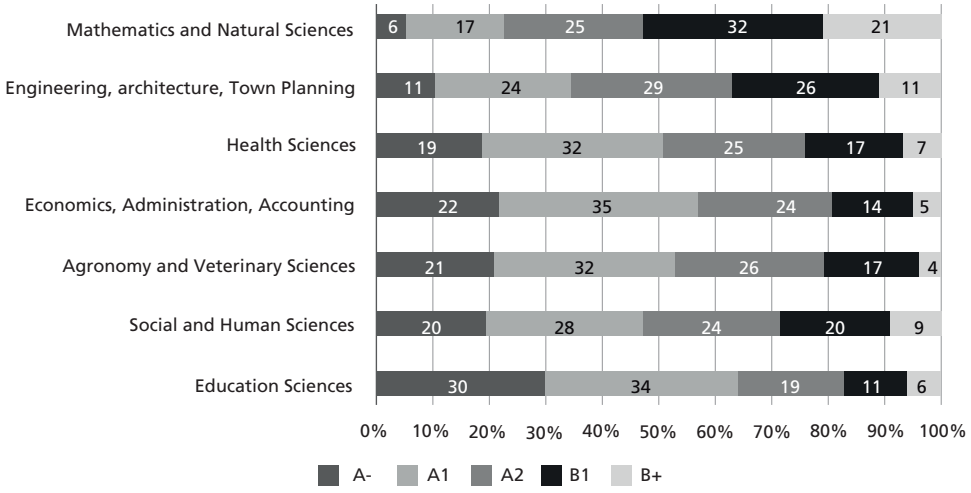


Note. From ICFES (2018c), database results (2016–2017).

The results are similar to those obtained in 2007–2008, ten years previously. There is a decrease of eight percentage points (5% for A- and 3% for A1) in the low levels, that is, less than 1% annual improvement for 2016–2017. There is an increase of eight percentage points in the intermediate level (A2 and B1), less than 1% annual improvement, and practically no difference in the high level (B2) concerning the results of 2007–2008. These do not represent any significant improvement in English for higher education over a period of 10 years, considering the magnitude of the goals established by the MEN in 2006.

Concerning the reference groups, it is worth noting a marked difference in the extremes, like in the period 2007–2008. Mathematics and natural sciences with 23% at low levels (A- and A1) are far better than education sciences at those same low levels: 64% in a one-to-three ratio. In the high level (B2), 21% for the first case and 6% for the second, in a three-to-one ratio. However, there is a small improvement due to the reduction of the low levels of the two extreme groups, but more for the second, 0.2% and 0.6% annual improvement, respectively. The rest remains relatively the same (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Percentage Results of Saber Pro National Exam: Groups of Reference (2017)



Note. From ICFES (2018c), database results (2016–2017).

When these results are compared with those of 2007–2008, there is consistency at both ends of the two groups. The only difference is from social and human sciences that now rank third in the reference group scale in 2017. The rest remains relatively invariable. It can be determined that in ten years, no major changes are observed. Therefore, a relative stagnation is evident in the development of the level of English as a generic core from the results of the ECAES, Saber Pro exams for higher education.

Discussion

The results of the English module of the ECAES, Saber Pro exams show that in Colombia, there is a significant percentage of university-level students who are still below the A1 level of the CEFR (25% in 2007 and 20% in 2017) at the end of their careers. In ten years, Level A- only shows a reduction of five percentage points, which represents an average of 0.5% annual improvement. The next level (A1) has a reduction as an improvement trend of three percentage points, for a 0.3% annual improvement. The best gain is at Level A2 with an increase of seven percentage points, for a 0.7% annual improvement. The intermediate and high levels (B1 and B+), which are the focus of the goals for English projected by the MEN, remain virtually unchanged with a slight gain of one percentage point in ten years, from 18% to 19% and from 7% to 8% from 2007 to 2017, respectively, that is, a 0.1% annual improvement in each case.

The improvement trend seems to move towards Level A2, which shows the best gain. However, the overall improvement is too small to be considered important for the "mastery" of the foreign language. Therefore, it could be said that the results show a process of stagnation of the development of English competencies in ten years. For example, the improvement of Levels B1 and B+ is a clear indicator of stagnation, because they are the focus levels by the MEN in setting the goals. If these goals were applied to 2017 as a requirement for graduation (as seems to be the case in the near future with Resolution 18583 of 2017), only about 8% of higher education students at the university level will be able to graduate.

Taking the goals established by the MEN as a point of reference, and the results obtained, it can be determined that the level of English in higher education is still very low, confirming previous analyses (Consejo Privado de la Competitividad, 2007; Sánchez-Jabba, 2013). In other words, it is not only the level of students who finish their university level that is very low but also there is not enough improvement during a ten-year period (2007–2017), as this study shows. In addition, the above findings are confirmed by the level of English of young professionals in the results of international exams where Colombia appears 68th among 100 countries in the 2019 world rankings. As for Latin American countries, Colombia is hardly above Ecuador and Bolivia, according to the 2019 results of the EPI (Education First, 2019).

The differences in terms of the results obtained in the period of this study for English communicative competence and the goals set by the MEN are so broad that a considerable gap has been created between them, and it is safe to say that the State is in debt with the language education system for the stagnation of the process of foreign language development. Consequently, this area would probably take a considerable amount of time, effort, and investment in order to catch up.

This gap started with the results of the Saber 11 exam, as seen in 2014, with more than 50% of the population at Level A-. Then the same debt must have been transferred to higher education in the professional careers at university level in those ten years and could be still happening. University programs would have been carrying that burden without any possibilities of medium and long-term solutions given the low level and minimum progress seen in a ten-year period for the development of English language competencies in the Colombian educational system.

It is also important to highlight the results of the reference groups that relate to a greater or lesser degree with the areas of knowledge. The large differences shown

are consistent in the upper and lower end groups, with no major change in ten years, apart from a small decrease in the lower levels, 0.2% and 0.6% per year in the two extreme groups, respectively. However, it is important to consider the most likely reason for these differences in favor of mathematics, natural sciences, and engineering in contrast to education sciences. These differences are most probably due to the fact that in the programs of the first group, the students have to be reading bibliographic sources directly in English, which mostly cover up-to-date information on science, research, and technology. This would imply the use of bibliography and subscriptions to specialized journals in English and access to databases of specialized journals in science and technology over the Internet. The fact that students have to read directly from these sources in English would be guaranteeing them the learning through language use and consequently obtaining significantly better levels of English than those of the other programs.

Finally, it is contradictory that Resolution 18583 of 2017 demands that by 2019: "Higher education institutions must guarantee that graduates of all bachelor's degree programs in teaching have a B1 or higher level in a foreign language, according to the CEFR." Equally unlikely, would be to obtain a B2 level as a requirement for students of the other professional careers in the country in the long term. Even the goals required for programs with an emphasis on English expected to be at level C1 for 2020, according to the above-mentioned resolution, would be currently very difficult, if not impossible to obtain if the results of this study are taken into consideration.

Conclusions

The very low level of English communicative competence shown in the period 2007–2017 from the ECAES, and Saber Pro exams for university professional programs concerning the English module reveals a relative stagnation of the development of the linguistic and communicative competencies showing the real difficult situation of English in the Colombian educational system. Despite the overestimated goals of the MEN that insisted on a "mastery" of English in Colombia for 2019, the evidence shown by the results in this study is more than alarming. With the overall importance attributed to the knowledge and mastery of English as a lingua franca for the purpose of internationalization, student and teacher mobility, research and openness to other cultures, there would be no major change and development in the future without the redesigning of an effective foreign language educational policy and innovations and suggestions for teachers' professional development at local and national levels as those proposed from research and implementation by Alvarez et al. (2015), Cadavid et al. (2015), and Cárdenas et al. (2015).

The absence of an effective state educational policy that fosters the development and use of the foreign language in all its competencies seems to have severely affected higher education and particularly the university programs. If there ever was a foreign language policy or the same with different denominations, these have not worked properly due to several reasons, but mainly for lack of continuity. The PNB, the Programa para el Fortalecimiento y el Desarrollo de Competencias en Lengua Extranjera, the Programa Nacional de Inglés, and Colombia Bilingüe, however, according to the results in this study, seem to have stayed on paper, or in theory, or only in their initial stages in the heat of the enthusiasm of the participants for the expected goals.

Moreover, it should be taken into account that the results of the Saber Pro exam are increasingly being considered by the CNA in order to grant Colombian universities program and institutional accreditation. One of the purposes of this exam is to serve as a source of information for the construction of indicators for evaluating the quality of higher education programs and institutions. By evaluating the level of EFL in the internationalization factor, the CNA assigns a weight of 2% from the new MEN-MIDE 2.0 ranking of Colombian universities.

Therefore, It would be necessary to undertake a drastic revision of foreign language policy as a joint research effort by the different English language departments, language schools, or language centers in charge of the administrative and academic organization of English courses and curricula to delve into the analysis of the foreign language policies of each higher education institution. The end result of this effort would be a more consensual view of foreign language policy and thereby a shared view of language education in general. This joint effort by universities would promote the effective development of English and its linguistic, communicative, and pragmatic competencies starting at primary and secondary education as an initial working platform. Foreign language educational policy should be revised and implemented, and a series of structural alternatives that would allow a sustained development in terms of teacher training, methodology, curricular organization, and use of the language in the programs should strongly be considered.

Finally, a macro research project by the universities in the country is needed. One starting in every institution that encourages awareness of the need for analysis of the situational context using the information available from the ICFES databases. This effort would launch a joint improvement proposal for a medium and long-term intervention strategy as an active and permanent mechanism for a foreign language education policy of development and the use of English in higher education. This course of action should eventually involve and impact the basic and secondary education cycles through the Municipal and Departmental Secretariats of Education.

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Analysis of MA Students' Writing in English Language Teaching: A Systemic Functional Linguistic Approach

Análisis de la escritura de estudiantes de maestría en la enseñanza del inglés: un enfoque lingüístico sistémico funcional

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This study explores the ways in which master thesis writers position their research in the field of English language teaching in a context where academic literacies are still a developing field. From a social semiotic perspective, this paper aims to identify the resources writers use to represent their object of study and provide a context and justification for research. The analysis focuses on the ideational and textual metafunctions to account for patterns of meanings in seven introductory chapters of master theses in English teacher education. The results reveal a set of interconnected genres—descriptions of the object of study, definitions, and personal exemplum—that build a shared experience with the reader as well as the persuasive purpose of the text.

Keywords: academic writing, genre, research strategies, systemic functional linguistics, thesis writing

Este estudio explora las formas en que los escritores de maestría posicionan su investigación en el área de la enseñanza del inglés, en un contexto en el que la literacidad académica sigue siendo un campo en desarrollo. Desde una perspectiva semiótica social, este documento tiene como objetivo identificar los recursos que los escritores usan para representar el objeto de estudio y proporcionar un contexto y una justificación para su investigación. El análisis se centra en las metafunciones ideacional y textual para dar cuenta de los patrones de significado en siete capítulos introductorios de tesis de maestría en la enseñanza de lenguas. Los resultados revelan un conjunto de géneros interconectados —descripciones del objeto de estudio, definiciones y ejemplos personales— que conforman una experiencia compartida con el lector, así como el propósito persuasivo del texto.

Palabras clave: escritura académica, escritura de tesis, estrategias en la investigación, género, lingüística sistémico funcional

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Introduction

Writing a master dissertation constitutes a big challenge at the end of any educational program when students engage independently in their first research project. In this stage, students are expected not only to draw from their personal and professional experience to find a topic for research but also, they are expected to "negotiate some of their prior literacy experiences associated with academic and non-academic domains and the academic writing requirements of their current degree program" (Kaufhold, 2017, p. 84). In addition to the academic and institutional requirements, students are expected to know the disciplinary conventions of the genre (Autrey & Carter, 2015). These considerations—the relationship between the institution, the literacy practices, and the disciplinary conventions—define master thesis writing as a critical social space in which students have to develop a purposeful academic text on their way towards becoming part of a professional community.

However, more often than not, students fail to recognize the social nature of master thesis writing—in terms of the organization of knowledge and the organization of intellectual and educational practices within a context (Christie & Maton, 2011). The difficulties to recognize thesis writing as a social practice seem to derive from at least three aspects identified in the context of Latin America, particularly in Mexico. First, there is a generalized view that considers writing as a set of skills students are supposed to come equipped with to deal with the reading and writing tasks at the university. Students who struggle with writing assignments are labeled as having a deficit that needs to be "fixed" (Lea & Street, 1998). It goes without saying that this view disregards the broader social context of writing practices. Focusing only on technicalities makes thesis writers lose sight of the institutional context, the conventions of the written text, and the relationships with their immediate readers. This may create scenarios of inequality and disadvantage when negotiating legitimate participation in a professional community.

Second, there is a wide variety of theoretical trends, influences, and emerging epistemologies for literacy studies in Latin America that make it difficult to nominalize what writing entails (Ávila-Reyes, 2017). Given a context in which the study of writing is a developing field, the predominance of "heterogeneous" theoretical trends causes contradictory uses of epistemological concepts (Navarro, 2019). As a result, the random use of epistemological trends creates a tension among educators' differing perspectives of literacy. For example, some educators regard writing as a complex social interaction influenced by cultural, social, political, and economic factors; others still see writing as an orderly skill which is set unvarying and transferable across contexts (De Silva Joyce & Feez, 2016).

Finally, it is likely that having differing views on writing has an effect on how writing pedagogy is enacted within the classroom. Preconceived ideas about literacy and the lack of explicit instruction of writing in higher education programs obscures the particularities of the thesis genre and the subtleties of disciplinary discourse for students to write more effectively. I argue that in order to understand master thesis writing as a social practice, it is necessary to address issues of epistemology, identity, and power relations within a broader social context. The purpose of this paper is to address that gap. First, I intend to identify the linguistic resources that novice writers use to open a legitimate space for their research in the area of English language teaching (ELT) from a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) perspective. Second, I aim to explore the semiotic potential for meaning making in a critical social space where English is used as an academic language for disciplinary writing.

Master Thesis Writing as a Social Practice

Writing as a social practice is defined as an interplay of practices, literacy events, and texts. According

to Barton and Hamilton (2010) literacy practices are related to different domains of life, as they are shaped by social institutions and power relations as well as by epistemology (Lea & Street, 1998). The literacy events are situations that reveal particular forms of written language that are used to represent values, attitudes, and feelings in a text. Practices, events, and texts are essential to comprehending writing practices as a holistic social phenomenon for they are built and shaped in a community and in relation to other people that go beyond individual acts. Following, I discuss some social practices that illustrate master thesis writing as a social phenomenon.

The first aspect that defines thesis writing as a social practice is the use of disciplinary knowledge. The fact that writing occurs in socially situated practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) demands particular ways to build knowledge in disciplinary spaces such as ELT. In other words, writers generally write for someone and what they write is shaped by a set of rules and conventions that are taken for granted. In this way, what is possible to say and how it must be said is determined by the discursive conventions of the discipline and its members (Ivanič, 1998). These conventions, represented in oral and written discourse, give an account of the social tensions that the participants face in order to have a sense of habitual permanence in a given community (Fairclough, 1989). However, this "common sense"—the way of acting and thinking of a community in disciplinary spaces—is not evident for thesis writers, which places them at disadvantage.

The second aspect for considering writing as a social practice is related to the interpersonal or power relationships that underlie thesis writing in a second language. Typically, in the context of ELT, undergraduate or masters' students write their theses for a very small audience and under the guidance of a supervisor. However, the practices that occur around the genre development are occluded (Autrey & Carter, 2015; Swales, 1996); and it is difficult to know exactly how this genre is learned and taught (Paré et al., 2009). However, it is to be expected, as Coffin et al. (2003) point out, that the relationship between the supervisor and supervisees exerts some influence on the way writing takes place in higher education, particularly in a crucial document such as the thesis. It is likely that under these circumstances, readers feel they have the authority, as established members of a community, to serve as gatekeepers (Lillis & Curry, 2010), and to determine what constitutes "appropriate academic writing" according to the conventions of the disciplines or academic communities. It is precisely the unawareness of these academic conventions that puts membership into a professional community at risk.

Finally, the third aspect to consider writing as a social practice involves issues of identity shaping. Those may occur in the process of becoming part of a professional community. In addition to learning to communicate in particular ways, thesis writers also have to learn to "be" particular types of people, and forge an identity as academics, professors, or as researchers (Coffin et al., 2003). Thesis writing, then, is a legitimate form of incursion into a disciplinary community but the path for insertion into that community is not explicit. In sum, master thesis writing as a social practice—as suggested in this paper—involves the understanding of the complex interplay of disciplinary knowledge, interpersonal relationships, and identity shaping. However, its study has received little attention in the context of Latin America, particularly in Mexico.

Academic literacies and SFL offer a framework to address that gap because of their focus on practices in context and texts in context (Coffin & Donohue, 2012). These contrasting perspectives complement each other to explore the social and linguistic practices entailed in the introductory chapter of the master thesis in the area of ELT, which is the objective of this paper. In addition to that, it seeks to explore the semiotic potential for thesis writing development in a context where English is used as an academic language. The following research

questions orientate the objectives of this study: (1) What are the linguistic resources instantiated in the introductory chapter of master theses in the area of ELT? and (2) What practices are common for thesis writers to create a legitimate space for research? The rest of the article presents the theoretical underpinnings of both frameworks and how they support the methodological proposal of this study.

Academic Literacies

As has already been mentioned, the concept of literacy means different things to different people. Lea and Street (1998) have conceptualized a range of theoretical trends in three writing models: the skills model, the socialization model, and the academic literacies model (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Street, 1984). The skills model is related to structural views of language as well as cognitive learning views. In this model, writing is considered as an instrumental ability and as a transposition from oral language to written language. The inability to transfer writing skills from one context to another is considered a deficit as concerns students. The second model is that of academic socialization, where students are exposed to specific genres of the community to which they must integrate. According to Lea and Street (2006), it is through an acculturation process where "students acquire the ways of talking, writing, thinking, and using literacy" from the members of a professional community (p. 369). In this vision, it is assumed that the genres possess certain stability and that students will acquire those genres from simple exposition. Even though this model considers contextual factors for the development of writing, the superficial vision of language as a form of transparent representation "fails to address the depth of language, literacy and discourse issues involved in the institutional production and representation of meaning" (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158).

Finally, the academic literacy model considers literacy as socially constructed under situations of power relations, epistemology, and identity (Lea & Street, 1998). This implies looking at academic practices in higher education as events shaped by the configuration of the social space in which they occur and by power relations. In this way, each space "is concerned with meaning making, identity, power, and authority, and foregrounds the institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in any particular academic context" (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 369).

Clearly, there is a critical stance in the academic literacies paradigm; one that focuses on practices to enhance transformation of social inequalities (Coffin & Donohue, 2012). That view is shared with SFL where writing is considered as a social and goal-oriented practice with a specific purpose in a broad social context (Martin, 1997). This text-based perspective aims to "teach the students about whole texts as the main unit of purposeful language use and about varieties of language to use in different contexts" (De Silva Joyce & Feez, 2016, p. 24). Emphasis is given to the types of genres involved in the master thesis writing as well as its development for which a theory of language that considers social and contextual factors is necessary.

A Functional Model of Language

SFL offers an explanatory model beyond the descriptive nature of language. This model allows decoding the meaning systems that regulate human behavior (Hasan, 2001; Martin, 2001). In other words, when we use the language, we are able to choose from a variety of linguistic resources that make it possible to explore the relationships among the text, context, register, and genre to reveal the meaning of social practices. This linguistic framework deconstructs these relationships in such a way that it allows to capture semiotic systems that are not perceptible to the naked eye and allows one to critically evaluate the ideologies that emerge in the text.

In order to know more about the social context in which a particular text is used, SFL provides a multilayer description of the clause in light of three metafunctions. The ideational, which represents the experience of the

world (*field*); the interpersonal, which expresses the relationship between the participants in a communicative event and how language organizes social interaction (*tenor*); and the textual, which gives value to the text and its components to achieve a coherent discourse (*mode*). Together, field, tenor and mode represent the register of the text (Martin & Rose, 2007). In this sense, we can say that the metafunctional nature of language allows semiotic activity and the choice of meanings; and the creation of meaning is a semiotic act (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Master thesis writing in ELT is a case in point of a semiotic act. When we write the introductory chapters, these metafunctions are expressed simultaneously in the text and each contains three layers of meaning namely phonology and graphology, lexico-grammar and discourse semantics (Martin, 1992; Martin & Rose, 2007). These layers of meaning—also known as strata—display realizations of language at the level of sounds and letters, at the level of the clause and at the level of the whole text. Phonology and graphology are used to represent an oral or written expression (Martin, 1992). The lexico-grammar layer focuses on the meaning of clauses, while the discursive semantics focuses on the holistic meaning of the text. Essentially, the integration of the discourse semantics and the lexico-grammar strata as an analytical framework offer the means for the study of the generic structure of the introductory chapters of a master thesis.

Summing up, the analytical tools of SFL bring to the surface the subtleties of written language. It also distinguishes the subtleties of the academic language used in the disciplines; most importantly, it shows how these are shaped according to the context in which they occur. As Martin (2008) points out: "A model of this kind provides a social semiotic perspective on knowledge structure; and, knowledge is by and large realized through, construed by, and over time reconstrued through ideational meaning via the modalities of language and image" (p. 34).

A Functional Perspective of a Micro Genre: Thesis Introduction

This study focuses on the micro genre of the introduction which belongs to a larger genre—the whole thesis. Traditionally, Swales' (1990) CARS model (Creating A Research Space) is widely used for article introductions. The model has three moves to perform various rhetorical functions whose purpose is to establish the research topic and justify the need for more research. When writing the introductory chapter of the master thesis, the writer is asked to follow those moves in order to persuade the reader that his or her research is significant, that there is room for new knowledge, and that a contribution can be made to it. Although moves in the writing of research articles are a useful pedagogical tool, it lacks a functional explanation of language which limits the potential to distinguish subtle differences between disciplines, discourses, or genres (Hood, 2010). Swales himself recognizes the need of a model that provides frameworks for the study of social action (Swales, 2009).

A second limitation is that there is no consensus in the interpretation of the moves because there are no explicit lexico-grammar patterns that indicate what move it is. The validation of the arguments in the CARS model is based more on the experience and intuition of the experienced reader rather than on a theory of language. This causes the particularities of the genre to be occluded before the eyes of the inexperienced writer.

From a more functional vision, Hood (2010) proposes a more transparent model, capable of revealing the ways in which knowledge and academic arguments are socially constructed in discourse, through discourse, and through dialogue with other knowledge and other knowers. In other words, a functional model is intended to achieve an understanding of what it means to create meaning in the academic sense and to recognize what literacy practices are privileged in a context in which new knowledge is being built. Those patterns of meaning can be viewed from three perspectives: "The relationships that are enacted by language, the experiences

that are construed by it and the role language plays in the context" (Rose & Martin, 2012, p. 22).

Hood (2010) formulates the notion of *research warrant* as a discursive context where writers not only state their claims but are able to support them before the objectivity and criticism of their readers. The social purpose of the research warrant is to justify the need of the research in a given area of study. In this particular case, identifying the distinctive structure of introductions of master theses allows certain purposes to be achieved such as legitimizing research in the area of ELT.

In this view, chapter one is typically composed of a series of genres, each playing a role in the process of legitimizing a contribution to knowledge by establishing a research warrant (Hood, 2011). The author mentions that writing an introduction involves building an evaluative representation of one or more fields of knowledge, with the purpose of persuading a community of readers of the legitimacy of the research project. This represents a double challenge for novice writers in the area of ELT because, in addition to mastering aspects of genre and register, they have to negotiate knowledge construction in a second language. This becomes relevant since writing constitutes a social field where experience is constructed in a dynamic way that goes from everyday knowledge to the synthetic and elaborated way of written grammar (Halliday, 1993). The following sections describe the methodological design to address these issues.

Method

In order to investigate the complexity of literacy practices from a social perspective this qualitative research follows a textual and ethnographic orientation (De Silva Joyce & Feez, 2016). In that regard, SFL and academic literacies explore the social and linguistic practices entailed in the introduction chapter of a master thesis. As an analytical method, SFL would be able to bring to the surface the regulatory principles that underlie the invisible practices of reading and writing in higher education that unconsciously regulate our behavior (Martin, 2001). It is expected that a linguistic analysis of thesis writing shows the social positioning of the speaker, the visible features of the text, and the discourse that links certain texts in different ways (Hasan, 2001). On their part, academic literacies allow the interpretation of those features to identify what practices are more evident in the process of thesis writing. This, in order to find answers to my two research questions (see section Master Thesis Writing as a Social Practice).

Context

This study was carried out in the School of Languages of a public university in Central Mexico. The school offers an MA program in ELT. Master students are generally in-service teachers from different contexts and backgrounds. Towards the end of the program, they have to write their thesis in English as part of the graduation requirements. During the two-year program students write different types of academic papers; however, the program does not offer any explicit instruction nor writing courses in the curricula. As an immersed participant in the field (Edwards, 2002), I am well aware of the practices of the community, their legitimate participants and newcomers, such as the thesis writers. However, awareness about the text is another basic principle for literacy research (Eggins, 1994); one that allows establishing a distance from the research field and separate any interpersonal relationship between the writer and the researcher and maintain confidentiality, ethics, and objectivity (Creswell, 2012).

Corpus Selection

The corpus of this research consists of seven introductory chapters of master theses in the program of ELT, one per year during the period of 2010 to 2016. Its selection considered three main criteria. The first one had to do with the identification of the five most prolific supervisors as thesis directors in five cohorts of the program. The purpose was not only to identify consistency in the patterns of the thesis genre, but also

to analyze the writing conventions of this community by analyzing its members' supervision practices. The second was related to the institutional validation of the thesis and the degree completion process. In other words, those theses had been legitimized and validated through an oral and written examination process. The intention was not to judge whether a thesis was "good" or "bad." Rather, the objective was to identify the writing conventions widely accepted by the community. Finally, the last criteria focused on the whole text and its subtle variations in response to social contexts in terms of function and meaning (Eggins, 1994).

Quantitatively, the corpus represented 9% of the total sample, which may not be statistically representative. However, from a qualitative standpoint, a small corpus gives meaning to the analysis and it is relevant as the analysis focuses on the instance and not on the language system, as referred to in the following quote: "Instantiation involves the way we observe metastability in social semiotic systems" (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 310). In other words, there is an inertia between instantiation and the semiotic system. Table 1 shows the title of the theses of the corpus, the graduation year, and the code assigned to each introductory chapter.

Table 1. Titles of Master Theses in the Period 2010–2016 Which Constitutes the Analyzed Corpus

Number	Year	Title
1	Intro_2010	*Teachers reflections on teaching English to children through content-based instruction*
2	Intro_2011	*Supervision in higher education research contexts: Understanding expert research supervision*
3	Intro_2012	*Exploring the effects of an ELT MA program on teachers' professional development*
4	Intro_2013	*Promoting project-based learning in higher education learners to enhance their performance in learning a foreign language*
5	Intro_2014	*Experiential grammatical metaphor in English and Spanish linguistic research articles: A comparative study*
6	Intro_2015	*English teachers' journals: From description to reflection and development in Mexican public basic education*
7	Intro_2016	*Dyslexia and children's English language learning in a Mexican elementary school: A crowdsourced intervention study*

Data Analysis

After corpus selection, the sample chapters were transcribed for analysis. In order to find the recurrent linguistic patterns in the texts, I used codes to differentiate between simple and complex clauses following the procedure suggested by Butt et al. (2003). After the texts were annotated, all verbal groups were underlined to identify the number of clauses. In total, the texts yielded 491 clauses and 94 clause complexes, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Clause Analysis by Introductory Chapter

Chapter 1	No. of clauses	No. of clause complexes
Sample 2010	63	10
Sample 2011	80	14
Sample 2012	46	12
Sample 2013	97	15
Sample 2014	51	10
Sample 2015	76	17
Sample 2016	78	16
Total	**491**	**94**

This analysis generated a characterization of the structural elements of the master thesis genre at a lexico-grammar level. It was possible to identify the subtleties of discourse through a search for linguistic evidence that supports the tenor that the text establishes with its readers, its function, and the language in use to fulfill certain social purposes (Eggins, 1994). Establishing the text as the focus of analysis allowed lexical-grammatical patterns to reflect by themselves different constructions of novice writers. In order to grasp those constructions, it was necessary to extend focus to the discourse semantic strata (Martin & Rose, 2007), and look for the patterns of meaning that unfold in the text to establish halfway points between grammar and genre (Hood, 2011). Those results are described in the following section.

Results

This section reports the findings that shed light on the social practices around master thesis writing in the area of ELT. By explaining how this genre is linguistically constituted and what its social function is, I attempt to respond to the research questions of the study. First, the orientation to the topic section addresses the linguistic resources and the patterns of meaning used in the introductory chapters of master theses. Second, the writer's experiences and the portrayal of identity represent two common social practices—or rhetorical strategies—that justify research in the area of ELT, create empathy with the reader, and legitimize research.

Orientation of the Topic in the Master Thesis Introduction

Thesis writing at a master level requires students to draw from their literacy experiences, both academic and non-academic to engage in a research topic (Kaufhold, 2017). One of the findings reflects a flow of events built throughout the text that helped to characterize the introduction genre as a whole (Martin & Rose, 2007). In the corpus analyzed, there was evidence of some genres used within the introduction to open a space for research. The object of study—or its definition—, the description of the local context, and the report of studies are recurrent practices that orientate the research topic of the writers. Those events do not occur in a particular order along the introduction, but they are present in the chapters analyzed.

The following example illustrates how the writer constructs the object of study by means of patterns of lexical choice (Martin & Rose, 2007). It also provides a description of the local context in relation to the object of study and supports it with a report of studies. In the first paragraph of Intro_2010, the representation of the field centers on the teaching and learning process of English as a second language. The field is construed using the word chain: *content-based instruction*, *language learning*, *second language acquisition*, and *educational and cognitive psychology*.

> **Intro_2010**
>
> **As Grabe and Stoller (1997)** report, *Content Based Instruction* (CBI) contributes enormously to successful *language learning*. They present research evidence that range from studies in *second language acquisition*, controlled training studies to research in *educational and cognitive psychology* (p. 5) . . .
>
> **Thus, the purpose of this study** is to present my own research in this area as well as the framework used to carry it on. The current research presents a case study which addresses the issue of Content Based Instruction (CBI) . . .
>
> **A number of significant studies** have been done based on CBI. Early versions of CBI were used in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) . . .
>
> **There are a considerable number of studies** that have focused their attention on the implementation of the approach (CBI) rationale, curriculum design, materials, learning outcomes, etc.) (See Met, 1999, Brooks & Sandkamp, 2000, Richards & Rodgers, 2001, Brown, 2005).
>
> **However, to my knowledge**, CBL teachers' impressions have not yet been deeply explored.

This lexical pattern represents only a first orientation to the research topic from an ideational perspective. In other words, readers can get an overview of what the research topic is about. From a textual perspective, the themes used in the introduction display how other meanings are construed throughout the text (Hood, 2011). As we can see in Intro_2010, the theme "Grabe and Stoller (1997)" assists the writer in introducing the topic of the thesis: the use of content-based instruction in the teaching and learning process of English as a second language. Alignment with these authors aids in qualifying their research as important. After alignment, the writer shifts themes in order to introduce her own research. The theme "thus, the purpose of this study" sets the basis for a case study in a very local context. Finally, the themes "a number of significant studies" and "there are a considerable number of studies" introduce a list of reports that support the writer's own study. These thematic changes contributed to building a shared experience with the reader and the persuasive purpose of the text. The theme "However, to my knowledge," indicates that further research is necessary.

The second example, Intro_2014, follows a similar pattern as the previous one. The field is construed using the following word chain: *academic writing*, *skill*, *high literacy*, *academic and professional disciplines*, *rhetorical moves*, *schematic structure*. This lexical pattern identifies "academic writing" as the object of study. The expressions "Although these studies have been very significant" and "This study" emphasize not only the importance of current studies, but also a possible contribution to knowledge from the writer's research.

Intro_2014

Academic writing is seen as a *skill* and as a crucial concept in the *high literacy*. Students and scholars are expected to show expertise and mastery in their *writing tasks* as they get immersed in their *academic and professional disciplines*.

The characterization of academic writing in research articles has placed special interest on *rhetorical moves* and *schematic structure* like that by Swales (1990) for instance. **Although these studies have been very significant**, it is also crucial to concentrate not just on the rhetorical perspective, but also on the lexical and grammar angle in research articles. Halliday (1994), in relation to this, considers grammar as a key element in discourse analysis . . .

This study was done since academic writing plays a crucial role in research articles publishing. **Researchers need to cope with academic writing skills**, and I believe that the exploration of Grammatical Metaphor is a way of succeeding in writing.

From the examples above, we can see that the orientation to the object of study plays an important role to establish the importance of the research in the introduction. This finding is consistent in four out of the seven theses analyzed. Thesis writers in the area of ELT make use of definitions and reports of studies to create a need for research in their local contexts.

The Experience as a Rhetorical Strategy to Justify Research

The analysis of the introductions brought to light another practice used to create a "research warrant" (Hood, 2010). That is the inclusion of the writer's voice from within the field of study. In other words, master thesis writers legitimize their research based on the experiences they have in their local settings. By means of the anecdote or the exemplum, thesis writers create empathy with the readers. In addition to that, the experiences they display in the text highlight the struggles they undergo in the process of writing a thesis as we will see farther on.

Intro_2012 provides a representation of the field which focuses on teachers' professional development. The word chain: *teachers' professional development*, *reflective teaching*, *language diaries and collaborative practice*

contextualize the topic. That lexical chain specifies an orientation to the study by presenting a list of studies related to the writer's object of study, followed by an indication of the lack of research in his local context.

> **Intro_2012**
>
> **Teachers' professional development** has been studied from different perspectives, including *reflective teaching* (Bartlett, 1990; Richards & Lockhard, 1996; Wallace, 1991; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), teachers' use of *language diaries* (Bailey, 1990; Jarvis, 1996), and teachers' *collaborative practice* (Bailey, Curtis & Nunan, 1998; Edge, 1992; Johnston, 2009) . . .
>
> **However,** there are very few studies focusing on teachers' development during and after an MA level. For instance, Maaranen & Krokfors's (2007) study investigated reflective processes in primary school teacher education when conducting research for a master's thesis.
>
> **I** got interested in this topic because what I learned in the master's program has helped me to develop professionally in my teaching context, especially when I teach research classes.
>
> **Thus, I** wanted to investigate how other English teachers have developed personally and professionally during and after their MA programs and how they perceived this development has changed and shaped their teaching in their working contexts.

However, in Intro_2012, the writer opened a space for his research differently. In this example the writer made use of a personal exemplum as a rhetorical strategy to build empathy with the reader. In the third paragraph, the writer introduces a personal experience to justify the relevance of the investigation. In this case, the thesis writer expressed that the master's degree program had an impact on his professional development as a teacher. For that reason, he explicitly mentioned that he wanted to investigate this topic to see if other teachers shared his experience. The themes in the sample above introduced the topic of the thesis "teachers' professional development," but the shift in themes did not address the object of study. Instead, it addressed the writer himself in the use of "I."

The use of the personal exemplum was evident in six out of seven samples analyzed where the use of "I" indicates an account of the experience of the writer. In Intro_2011, the writer indicates "Academic writing, research and supervision" as the objects of study. She also makes reference to "a number of studies" to validate the importance of supervision. However, in the introduction there is not any report of such studies. Instead, the writer linked the notion of supervision with her personal experience.

> **Intro_2011**
>
> **Academic writing**, **research** and **thesis supervision** are related terms that play a crucial role in all levels of tertiary education.
>
> **Supporting this idea, a number of studies** have identified the importance of supervision in the overall success [of a] student (Phillips & Pugh, 2000).
>
> **The overall purpose of this study**, thus, is to attempt to understand the processes of thesis supervisors when engaged in thesis supervision. The particular focus is to try to understand the processes of 'expert' thesis supervisors to understand what they do . . .
>
> **I** am particularly interested in this thesis supervision topic because before getting involved in it I [underwent] a difficult situation when trying to get a dissertation supervisor for my graduate thesis project. I was looking for a supervisor when I got an offer from one of them. This person agreed to help me with my project as the thesis supervisor but later rejected me and my project and I found myself without a supervisor.
>
> **This** led me to think further about the processes of supervising. Was this treatment customary? . . . So, I thought that it might be an important study.

In the fourth paragraph, the use of "I" introduces a critical incident she had while finding a thesis supervisor. After telling her story, she packs her experience in the theme "This," indicating that her experience led to thesis supervision as a research topic.

The Writer's Identity

This section describes how the writer's identity reflected in the texts helps thesis writers to build the field of experience. From a social perspective it sheds light on how thesis writers position themselves as members of the community where they carry out research. Based on the results of the previous analyses that build a representation of the writing in the teaching of languages, this section focuses on the writer from a discourse-semantic perspective since "the clause construes an activity involving people and things" (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 74). In order to have a broader view of all the aspects involved in writing as a social practice, I also focused on the writer's identity that is portrayed in the text.

In the next paragraph, in Intro_2016, the writer identified herself as an English in-service teacher, as a mother of a child with dyslexia, and as a person with dyslexia herself. The processes underlined in the sample text represent her experience in the words being and feeling. From this position, she is aware of the problems encountered in the educational system for language teaching, and of a reality that limits access to knowledge of English to students in conditions of dyslexia. Addressing this problem in her research project highlights the fact that the subject is very close to her experience. In her introduction, she encourages reflection of the English teaching practice, and urges the establishment of a course of action both at the personal practice and professional levels. By describing herself and sharing her experience she engages with her readers and with other English language teachers that might have a similar experience.

Intro_2016

I have been an English teacher for over 30 years. I have seen the lack of resources and strategies in regard to dyslexia as well as little understanding from my colleagues, parents and students themselves. Being dyslexic myself and having a son with dyslexia led me to consider this topic as my research and find out some of the current trend in education and language . . .

In the last example, Intro_2013, the writer identified himself as an English teacher in middle-school education who, despite his experience and efforts in the classroom, found a problem related to the teaching-learning process. He finds that his teenager students do not engage either with the material or his classes. The student's response to what he considers a "traditional pedagogical practice" motivates him to carry out their research using an alternative methodology.

Intro_2013

For more than eight years, I have been a teacher who has based my teaching in tasks performed in the classroom or were prepared in advanced by students. I have also been the teacher who explained the topic to students and helped them to answer the exercises and activities in the book and workbook. . . . However, I saw my classes were not encouraging the students to learn a foreign language. Additionally, the use of a textbook in every class was boring for the students and we both did not see the results that we expected.

What these examples illustrate, in addition to revealing the identity of the writers and their personal experience, is the problem facing the teaching of English in various educational contexts. This problematic instigates an interest in teachers to solve them through research. It is due to their experience in the field of research that they gain a legitimate space to create a space for their research.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to characterize master thesis writing as a critical and social space in which students commonly struggle to become members of a professional community (Lea & Street, 1998). While in the process of writing the thesis, issues of identity, epistemology, and power relations are imminent. However, it becomes difficult to recognize them as inherent to the writing process. This paper sheds light on some of the writing conventions in the area of ELT.

Findings suggest that thesis writers rely on their experience as a rhetorical strategy to build empathy with the reader by means of anecdotes or personal stories. This means that they include story genres to represent their experiential knowledge, gaining legitimacy "from being an insider" in the field of research (Hood, 2012). From an epistemological standpoint, it is the writer's knowledge which is valued when it comes to thesis writing and research. However, there seems to be some constraints to develop other epistemologies from the ELT field such as genres, registers, and types of texts that move beyond writing as a technical skill or language as a set of structural issues. The dominant pattern found in theses' introductions corresponds to genres in which writers introduce, only superficially, the object of study supported by rough descriptions of studies—mostly lists of key studies—as well as bare definitions. Although it is recognized that the experience is relevant in a field such as teaching, it is also crucial to explore other forms to create meaning and move towards "a more detailed account of research design" (Hood, 2012, p. 57).

From a discourse semantics perspective, the combination of the three metafunctions for analyzing the representation of the experience portrays the identity of the thesis writers. Once again, writers rely on their experience to identify themselves as members of a community in the field of ELT. Being aware of the problems encountered in the educational system in general, and in ELT in particular, gives them a sense of belongingness which allows them to negotiate the validity of their research. However, this is not enough to meet the academic, social and institutional conventions of thesis writing (Lea & Street, 1998). Even though the thesis writing process occurs within a social context, the patterns identified in the introductory chapters tend to still reproduce fixed categories such as the ones found in the traditional model of the thesis (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007).

This study of master thesis writing brought to the surface the regulatory principles that underlie writing in higher education in a context where English is used as a second language. This implies looking at academic practices in higher education as events shaped by the configuration of the social space in which they occur and by power relations.

The interrelationship of the forms of written discourse in the area of ELT as well as the interpersonal strategies to position research in this field allows an understanding of the resources thesis writers employ to write academically. Making explicit the aspects that constitute writing as a social practice opens the possibility for thesis writers to explore other ways to build knowledge and legitimate research to become members of a disciplinary community.

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Fostering EFL Preservice Teachers' Academic Writing Skills Through Reflective Learning

Escritura académica de profesores de inglés en formación mediante el aprendizaje reflexivo

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This article focuses on the impact reflective learning has on a group of EFL preservice teachers' academic writing skills through formative feedback and self-assessment at a university in Bogotá (Colombia). The goal was to determine how the participants' academic writing skills were developed when writing essays for international examinations, and how their reflections upon feedback and their self-assessment process impacted their learning. This study followed a qualitative approach and an action-research design to foster students' academic writing skills as part of their professional development. The data-collection instruments were essays and teacher's feedback, students' journals, and rubrics. The results evidenced learners' writing skills improvement while implementing reflecting learning, which led to self-regulation and metacognition.

Keywords: academic writing, feedback, learning, self-assessment, thinking

Este artículo describe el impacto del aprendizaje reflexivo en el desarrollo de habilidades escritas de un grupo de profesores en formación, mediante la retroalimentación formativa y la autoevaluación en una universidad en Bogotá (Colombia). Se buscó desarrollar las habilidades escriturales de los estudiantes por medio de ensayos para exámenes internacionales y determinar cómo sus reflexiones sobre la retroalimentación y autoevaluación impactaron su aprendizaje. Se siguió un enfoque cualitativo con un diseño de investigación-acción, promoviendo la escritura académica como parte de su desarrollo profesional. Se analizaron ensayos y las respectivas retroalimentaciones docentes, diarios de estudiantes y rúbricas. Los resultados muestran el avance de las habilidades escritas mediante la reflexión, generando autorregulación y metacognición.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje, autoevaluación, escritura académica, pensamiento, retroalimentación

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Introduction

Reflection in English as a foreign language (EFL) in classrooms around the world has taken a relevant role among students and teachers, since it enables the analysis of actions taken during the teaching and learning processes (Manouchehri, 2002; Schön, 1983; Sockman & Sharma, 2008). Reflection entails a deep critical analysis and the questioning of all that surrounds us by taking a closer look into our reality (Schmitt, 1973); then, learners have the opportunity to start identifying their own strengths and weaknesses before any situation they face in life, in this case learning a foreign language. Therefore, EFL learners who continuously reflect upon their performance seem to achieve better academic results.

Likewise, self-assessment enhances students' reflection on their weak and strong points (Rodríguez Ochoa, 2007); it affects learners' performance since it fosters the decision-making ability to face problems and suggests ways to solve them (Caicedo Pereira et al., 2018). Moreover, formative feedback activates students' reflection regarding their learning goals (Alvarez et al., 2014); when used properly, it directly relates to the parameters of assessment and to its timely, customized, and encouraging approach (Hatziapostolou & Paraskakis, 2010).

Accordingly, we examine the reflective process carried out by a group of EFL preservice teachers regarding their academic writing and the effect that self-assessment and formative indirect feedback has on the construction of their texts. Consequently, our research question is: What is the impact of reflective learning on a group of preservice teachers' academic writing skills through formative feedback and self-assessment processes?

Statement of the Problem

This study derived from a needs-analysis performed with sixth semester students (of the BA in bilingual education program of a private university in Bogotá, Colombia) who were training to write academic essays for an international exam. At the beginning of the semester, the teacher did a series of observations that led to identifying students' lack of skills at the moment of writing essays. She also found that students' writing practice in their English classes was limited exclusively to narrative texts, which made it difficult for them to meet the academic standards for writing sections on international tests. The lack of practice and training in this area unveiled a lack of proper argumentation, weak cohesion and coherence, improper paragraph formats, Spanish-like structures, and inaccurate conclusions, among other aspects.

In order to target these issues, the teacher collected students' initial reflections about their academic writing needs, which allowed us to have a clearer insight in terms of the students' perceptions regarding their writing processes. Such insights included the need for a more critical role by deeply analyzing the challenges the students faced during the steps of the pedagogical implementation and their own performance through formative feedback and self-assessment.

We used students' reflective journals, teachers' feedback, and students' self-assessment regarding the process of writing an academic text. We encouraged students to work on reflective learning as they wrote journals after each of the stages they developed, and to include thoughts about their planning, learning, and self-regulated actions to foster metacognition through monitoring and control (Nelson & Narens, as cited in Dunlosky et al., 2016).

We considered the relevance of learners' constant self-assessment since it helps teachers and students identify to what extent they have achieved their learning goals. Furthermore, it helps teachers evaluate their own practices to support the learners' process (Palomba & Banta, 2001). Likewise, formative feedback plays a meaningful role as it provides students with the opportunity to analyze their performance and put this analysis into work when improving their skills.

Literature Review

In order to carry out this study, we reviewed literature concerning the main constructs that supported our pedagogical implementation. In this sense, we focused on reflective learning, academic writing skills, indirect and formative feedback, self-assessment, and metacognition, which are described in the following paragraphs.

Reflective Learning

Reflective learning is defined by Rickards et al. (2008) as the "intentional use of reflection on performance and experience as a means to learning" (p. 33). Accordingly, there are three stages to effectively implement reflective learning (Scanlon & Chernomas, 1997, as cited in Thorpe, 2004). First, there is *awareness*, which refers to the acknowledgement of the discomfort, lack of information, situation, or event that fosters students' inquiry during the learning process; second, the given phenomenon that is the center of the reflection requires a *critical analysis*, which at the same time needs skills such as self-awareness, description, synthesis, and evaluation for it to be properly developed; and finally, a *new perspective*, which emerges after the phenomenon has been critically analyzed. In short, these stages allow both teachers and students to include systematic and meaningful reflective practices inside the teaching and learning processes.

Because the purpose of reflection as a pedagogical tool is to establish connections among cognitive and experience-related elements (Jordi, 2011), reflective learning offers teachers and students two relevant tools that encourage proper reflective practices. First, Xie et al. (2008) establish that journaling offers the space for students to externalize their reasoning and reflections on experiences they consider relevant for their learning process. Second, Moon (2013) states that collaborative work facilitates reflection since it offers an external perspective towards the analyzed situation. Once reflection is part of both students' and educators' practice, it lays out possible solutions to learning and teaching issues, leading to the transformation and integration of new understanding within the classrooms (Rogers, 2001).

Academic Writing Skills

Learning to write academically is one of the many issues EFL and English as a second language learners face. This field conveys specific challenges given the rigor that this practice poses, along with the fact that foreign language learners are faced with linguistic characteristics distant from the linguistic traits their first language has. In this sense, we will refer to particular skills we consider relevant for our students' process, since they enable them to find their own voice and increase their English proficiency not only when writing, but throughout all the skills and the literacy-driven processes.

In order to address academic writing tasks effectively, we focus on style and correctness. Sword (2012) proposes *style* as the writers' capacity to tell a compelling story while keeping the reader's attention with information that is both engaging and scientifically supported. Developing style depends on how writers approach the language and the different linguistic components they are able to successfully implement in their texts. Most of these components are part of the structural and lexical skills, which combined give the text a sense of "correctness" or the ability to involve grammar, punctuation, spelling, and referencing to structure proper texts (Bailey, 2015; Elander et al., 2006). Accuracy is also necessary when writing any sort of text (Ivanič, 2004).

The previous skills will enable EFL learners to develop their academic literacy while understanding its components (Warren, 2003). In effect, being academically literate implies learning "the specialized practices of academic reading, writing, and speaking that characterize college-level communication" (Curry, 2004, p. 51).

Indirect and Formative Feedback

Feedback is a way to assess how well pupils' performance was (Harmer, 2007). It can be classified as direct, with a correct version provided to students, or

indirect, when errors are indicated, but not corrected by teachers (Westmacott, 2017). Hendrickson (1980) used indirect correction—coded and uncoded—by indicating the location and types of errors when he assumed learners could correct them on their own. Research has shown that indirect error feedback is more beneficial since it increases students' engagement and attention to problems and forms found in their written production (Ferris, 2003), and it helps learners achieve more accuracy than those who received direct corrections (Chandler, 2003). Westmacott (2017) found that motivated learners who valued metacognitive knowledge of grammar favored indirect coded feedback as they became active actors in their writing process by strengthening their grammar knowledge and developing autonomous learning patterns.

Moreover, the main aim of formative feedback is to transform thinking and behavior to increase students' knowledge and understanding of some content area or general skill (Shute, 2008), based on specific standards (Bollag, 2006; Leahy et al., 2005). According to Narciss and Huth (2004), effective formative feedback should take into account the instructional context and the learners' features; when designed systematically, factors that must be considered are the instruction (objectives, tasks, and errors), the learners' information (goals, prior knowledge, skills and abilities, and motivation), and finally, the feedback itself (content, function, and presentation). The usefulness of this type of feedback relies on the fact that it should be needed, timely, feasible, and desired. Likewise, it must attempt to revise different aspects, such as learners' outcomes, the process involved, and the level of improvement (Shute, 2008).

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment implies pupils reflecting on the quality of their work so that they can judge whether they have achieved their goals and revise their performance accordingly. This is possible through the elaboration of drafts that can be revised and improved. The main goal of this kind of assessment is to boost learning by giving timely feedback on pupils' comprehension and performance (Andrade & Cizek, 2010).

Self-assessment involves three steps: The first one is articulating expectations for the task or performance; this is done by teachers and students separately or together when checking examples of an assignment or creating a rubric. The second stage is the critique of work based on expectations, so learners draft and monitor their progress by comparing their performance to the expectations. The last step implies revising; thus, students use the feedback from their self-assessments to guide a revision. This is fundamental because students self-assess thoughtfully if they know that their work drives them to improve (Andrade & Cizek, 2010).

Metacognition

Metacognition refers to "knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena" (Flavel, 1979, as cited in Dunlosky & Metcalfe, 2009, p. 32), whereas scholars such as Martinez (2006) have referred to it as "thinking about thinking." As a cognitive process, it is composed of several components and skills, which we will briefly address from two different perspectives: from the main metacognitive categories and from a metacognitive framework standpoint.

Regarding metacognitive categories, Martinez (2006) establishes three: metamemory and metacomprehension, problem solving, and critical thinking. Metamemory refers to how well you recall your knowledge, whether you remember a fact or not, while metacomprehension refers to the reflective process you go through regarding your knowledge, whether you know or understand something or not. As for problem solving, it is understood as the pursuit of a goal when the path to it is uncertain: being able to understand a phenomenon, identifying the necessary procedures to address it, and developing and implementing different strategies to overcome the given situation. This category in itself requires other activities such as generating and

weighing possibilities, exploring subsets of options, and evaluating the results. Finally, critical thinking is defined as "evaluating ideas for their quality, especially judging whether they make sense or not" (Martínez, 2006, p. 697).

From a metacognitive framework point of view, authors such as Nelson and Narens (as cited in Dunlosky et al., 2016), and Serra and Metcalfe (as cited in Negretti, 2012) established three perspectives from which metacognition is developed: awareness, monitoring, and control. In the first instance, Dunlosky and Metcalfe, and Serra and Metcalfe (as cited in Negretti, 2012), establish *awareness*, in terms of metacognitive processes, referring to three main aspects:

> (1) declarative knowledge, or awareness of what strategies and concepts are important in relation to a specific task, (2) procedural knowledge, or awareness of how to apply concepts and strategies (how to perform the task), and (3) conditional knowledge, or awareness of when and why to apply certain knowledge and strategies (p. 145).

Monitoring, on the other hand, refers to all the activities we do when we are evaluating our own learning. In this regard, judgements on the things one learns and how well or easily one learns them are paramount in order to feel confident, which will lead the process towards self-regulating actions taken after the monitoring stage, known as *control*. Moreover, Monitoring poses a great challenge for learners' metacognitive processes, since it is the first sense of "feeling-of-knowing" (Hart, as cited in Perfect & Schwartz, 2002) they have. This "feeling" entails learning to judge whether one is learning or not, and what actually helps one do so.

Method

Research Design

This research follows a qualitative approach, which allows one to explore a phenomenon by interpreting the participants' behaviors, values, and beliefs, among others, inside their context; thus, enabling different ways of "seeing the world" (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Bryman, 2012; Packer, 2011). Likewise, we followed an action-research design because it addresses and attempts to solve a real-life problem (Creswell, 2012).

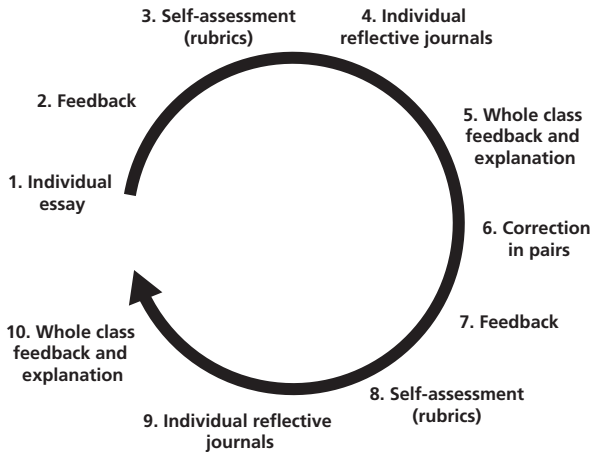
Setting and Participants

Our research took place in a private university in Bogotá. The participants were 15 EFL preservice teachers of a bachelor program who were studying the 6th level of English. They had to be prepared to take English standardized tests and so, they needed to develop academic writing skills to compose an opinion essay.

Pedagogical Implementation

This study took place during an academic semester in which students had to work on all their EFL skills, therefore, fostering writing skills for taking a standardized test was part of it. The semester was divided into three terms, so we replicated the pedagogical implementation cycle (see Figure 1) the same number of times.

Figure 1. Cycle of Pedagogical Implementation to Foster Students' Academic Writing



First, students wrote a draft of their opinion essays, then we provided them with indirect feedback and set some class time to discuss their performance. Then, the students received a rubric (from Educational Testing Service, 2019) corresponding to the standardized test for them to self-assess their documents. Afterwards, we asked students to write a reflective journal entry and guided them with some questions that pointed to their performance, learning, flaws, and actions to be taken. Once they finished, the teacher read the reflections and prepared a session of feedback and explanation for the whole class, addressing the points they had marked as relevant to be clarified. Thereupon, the students worked in pairs to correct the essays each member had written at the beginning of the cycle. Once more, they received indirect feedback in class and assessed their performance based on the rubrics given. Then they wrote another individual reflective journal entry which provided the teacher with topics to work on during a second whole class feedback and explanation session. This cycle was repeated three times and provided several insights regarding the learners' academic writing skills.

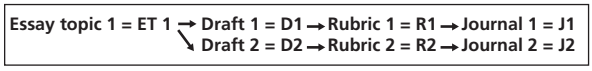
Data Collection Instruments

In order to collect data, we used mainly non-observational data collection techniques, particularly students' essays, which included the teacher's indirect feedback, a rubric suggested for independent writing tasks (Educational Testing Service, 2019) that students used to self-assess their productions, and their reflective journals. Eventually, such instruments allowed us to have a closer insight in terms of students' academic writing in our classes.

Through the teachers' feedback on essays, we could see the characteristics of students' manuscripts, the strengths and weaknesses the students exhibited in terms of style, accuracy, and correctness as well as how their writing skills were being shaped. The rubric they used for self-assessment revealed to what extent they considered they had reached their learning goals comparing them to the standards required. Students' reflection journals allowed us to have a clearer idea in terms of what they perceived about their performance, their main goal, the feedback they had received, the discussions they carried out among peers, the difficulties they had faced, and the changes they considered necessary as well as the possible strategies they wanted to apply for improvement.

In order to systematize the data, we used the following codification: The participants were codified assigning the letter S and a number from 1 to 15 and the three cycles are represented as C and the corresponding number (see Figure 2). As students worked on a topic essay per term, every paper was coded as ET and numbers 1, 2, and 3. Besides, the students wrote two versions of every essay; so these drafts were coded with letter D and numbers 1 and 2. Participants' rubrics and journals were coded as R1 and R2 and J1 and J2 since they worked on a rubric and journal per draft.

Figure 2. Codification of Data Collected



Data Analysis and Discussion

The data collected were analyzed through the methodological triangulation of sources (Bryman, 2012). The analysis followed the processes of the grounded theory approach, which follows an inductive process through a systematic analysis of data in order to characterize what is happening in a specific context and generate theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). After examining the information gathered, we started to categorize the data according to the research question. Subsequently, two categories and four subcategories emerged based on the research inquiry (see Table 1).

Table 1. Question, Categories, and Subcategories

Research Question	Categories	Subcategories
What is the impact reflective learning has on a group of preservice teachers' academic writing skills through formative feedback and self-assessment processes?	Linguistic Resources	• Language Mechanics • Essay Particularities
	Metacognitive Processes in Academic Writing	• Metacognitive Awareness • Monitoring

Linguistic Resources

The implementation of the pedagogical cycle in this study required students' essay drafting to foster their academic writing. There were two drafts per each of the three cycles that were carried out. Once students submitted their drafts, the teacher provided indirect feedback by using proofreading marks (see Appendix) that were established and socialized at the beginning of the semester. Based on the correction of these texts and the systematization of proofreading marks from the final drafts, it was possible to identify the types of mistakes that were frequent in terms of language mechanics and essay particularities.

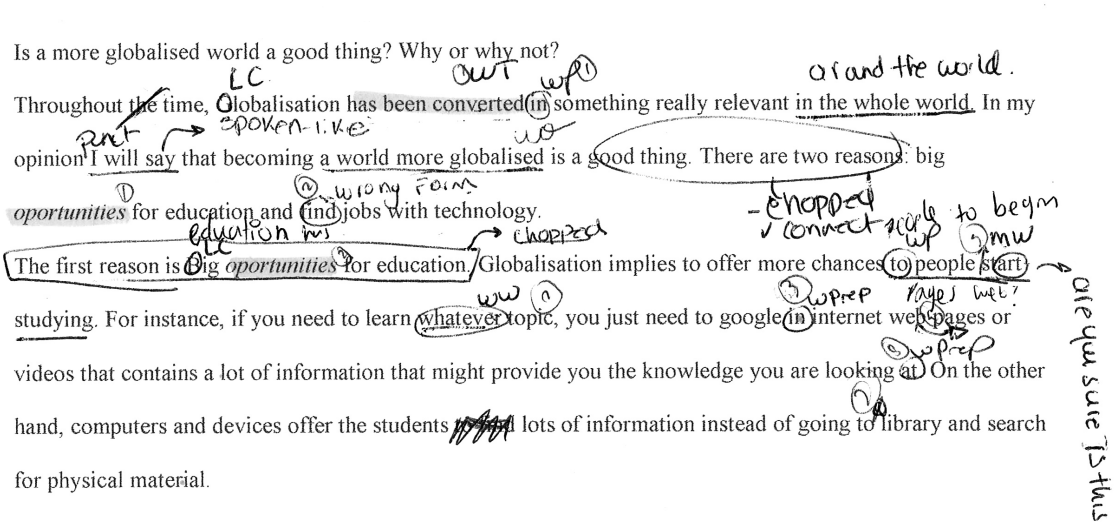
Language Mechanics

The term language mechanics refers to elements that help a text reach a level of organization and style according to academic standards. It includes aspects such as spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, among others, which, if used properly, characterize skillful writers by showing better control over the language (Crossley & McNamara, 2016). For this study, it was important to identify to what extent these elements, from the students' written drafts, reached the standards required for an academic text, specifically, an opinion essay. In this regard, we aimed at supporting students' grammatical development by means of teacher's feedback.

In order to describe the process of improvement that students evidenced regarding this aspect, we focused on the teacher's indirect written feedback provided for the final drafts of every cycle, which allowed us to identify mistakes and report them with the use of proofreading marks. As found by Kang and Han (2015), written corrective feedback tends to have a positive impact on grammar accuracy. Therefore, by providing formative and indirect feedback, we found some changes along the learning process. Additionally, the different learners' reflections regarding elements of language mechanics demonstrated their awareness concerning the types of mistakes they made, which confirmed the weaknesses we had identified.

At the beginning of the process, several elements related to language mechanics mistakes were evidenced. Regarding the production from the first cycle of the implementation (a draft and final paper) through indirect written feedback, we noticed a high frequency of mistakes in terms of punctuation, wrong word, spelling, Spanish-like forms and wordiness, and a not so frequent display of mistakes related to verb forms and missing word (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Sample of Students' Initial Drafts and Assessment (ET 1, S9, D1, C1)



The rubrics students used to assess their papers and our systematization of the text proofreading marks also showed students' awareness regarding these elements. After counting the different kinds of mistakes students made, we identified many of them as being related to word choice and structures. Sixty percent of the students marked their papers as 2 out of 5, a score that corresponds to a clear difficulty to choose words and forms and a large collection of mistakes regarding elements of language mechanics. Likewise, students' journals included reflections upon their fears concerning this type of written tasks and the mistakes they considered were affecting their texts the most.

Excerpt 1.

I feel a little bit nervous because I don't have the security to write. (S5, J1, C1)[1]

During the second cycle, the students' productions unveiled a radical improvement in most of these aspects, demonstrating a very low frequency of mistakes related to spelling and Spanish-like forms and wordiness, followed by a relatively low frequency of flaws regarding verb form and missing word. However, there was a very high occurrence of mistakes related to wrong words and punctuation, which was confirmed by the students' reflections in which they identified the necessity to work on punctuation and vocabulary, mainly academic, and look for synonyms; their self-assessment also changed as their marks improved. The lowest score was 3 out of 5, which was the one two groups chose to assess their papers. Four groups marked their paper as 4 out of 5, and a group decided they had reached all the standards and self-evaluated as 5.

Excerpt 2.

Vocabulary, because sometimes I made a translation of the sentences. And the English is different to Spanish language. (S1, J2, C2)

Excerpt 3.

I need to learn more words and adjectives and adverbs mainly of degree. (S4, J1, C2)

Excerpt 4.

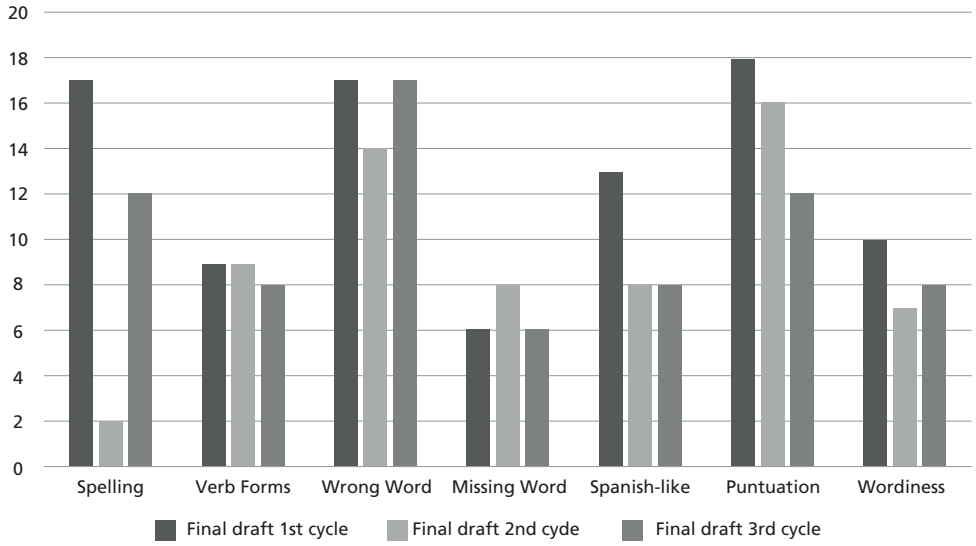
I need to work grammar connectors, punctuation, synonyms. (S6, J2, C2)

1 The excerpts were transcribed verbatim.

However, for the final cycle, elements of language mechanics evidenced another change. Some aspects that in the second cycle had improved, suffered an involution. The students' texts presented problems, mainly, in terms of wrong word choice, followed by punctuation, spelling, verbal forms, wordiness, Spanish-like constructions, and missing words. Something to highlight is that the students' reflections were not focused on elements of language mechanics, although a few of them mentioned their necessity to work on grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary; it seemed that they were more focused on aspects concerning the academic text structure. Likewise, their self-assessment process resulted in lower scores, as four groups graded their papers as 4 out of 5, two as 3 out of 5 and a group got 2 as the lowest score. Thus, this final report evidenced that students had lost focus on linguistic resources; although they seemed to consider the relevance of accurate texts, their efforts were not enough to meet the standards in these aspects.

Nevertheless, comparing the results from the first and the last cycle (see Figure 4), it was possible to identify an improvement in most of the aspects related to language mechanics, as the number of mistakes decreased, except for the use of wrong words, which constituted an important aspect to keep working on.

Figure 4. Number of Mistakes in the Final Drafts of Each Cycle



Overall, language mechanics represented a relevant aspect at the moment of writing academically. Through the implementation of this research, we could see an improvement comparing the final drafts of the first and the last stage. The learners' academic writing evidenced a much higher text quality in terms of spelling, Spanish-like structures, and punctuation, followed by a moderate improvement in verb forms, missing words, and wordiness. Conversely, the use of wrong words did not present a clear reduction, which shows that learners need to continue working on vocabulary. This was supported not only by the statistics, but also in the reflections the students wrote in their journals.

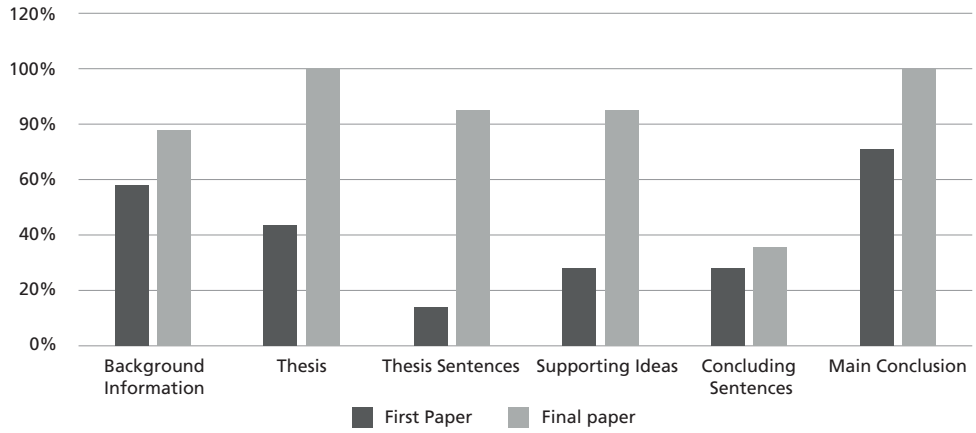
Essay Particularities

The students had to write a personal experience essay in accordance with the independent task of an international exam with particular characteristics regarding topic development, organization, and clarity. In relation to topic development, raters will be looking for an introduction that clearly expresses whether the author agrees or not with the statement provided, which is the topic that must be developed in the essay, and explanations of key points through examples and details. The raters will assess the essay organization and clarity based on the structure developed; thus, responses should include an introduction, body paragraphs that introduce clear key points, a conclusion and transitions that contribute to the unity, progression and coherence of texts (Practice test pack for the TOEFL test [HarperCollins UK, 2014]). For this study, we focused on the main structural aspects that would help students to write this kind of academic compositions; so we checked that every essay included background information; a thesis statement; body paragraphs made up of topic sentences, supporting ideas, and concluding sentences; and a main conclusion at the end of the essay.

At the beginning of the semester, the above mentioned aspects were in need of improvement. In the first essay students wrote, only 14% of them included topic sentences in the body paragraphs and only 28% wrote supporting ideas and paragraph conclusions. Seventy-two percent of the participants failed to include thesis statements and 47% omitted proper background information in the introductions. However, 71% of the students were able to conclude the essay despite the missing elements mentioned above. We understood these first challenges as the beginning of an ongoing process, since writing practice is a procedure that involves continual and constructive feedback on written work (Bitchener, 2008).

At the end of the academic semester, there was a significant change in the learners' written production based on their performance in the last essay submission (see Figure 5). All the participants managed to include thesis statements and main conclusions. Additionally, the most remarkable improvement was evidenced in 85% of the students, who consistently wrote topic sentences and the corresponding supporting ideas in their papers. Background writing also improved since 78% of the essays had these sentences to catch the reader's attention. Nevertheless, participants kept omitting concluding sentences, so 65% of them failed to wrap up the ideas of body paragraphs. The students' performance confirms that providing feedback may help students recognize and avoid errors when they submit corrected versions of their compositions based on the comments they received (Ashwell, 2000). Likewise, we could observe how self-assessment resulted in observable improvements in the quality of essays (Fung & Mei, 2015).

Figure 5. Percentage of Essay Particularities in the Final Versions of the First and Third Cycles



These results unveil how the sequence we proposed with different steps of feedback, reflection, self-assessment, and multiple drafting had an impact on the students' performance and contributed to their awareness of the essay structure for an international exam. Although most of the essay particularities were enhanced through this cycle, writing is quite a demanding process that requires more time in order for the writer to accomplish the standards required for this type of text.

Metacognitive Processes in Academic Writing

When students have the possibility to learn reflectively, they understand the importance of developing strategies and learning processes that allow them to achieve their learning goals properly. In this case, the data showed our students' different metacognitive features as they started to improve their academic writing. Such traits relate specifically to the initial awareness they began to display regarding the actions needed to enhance their writing skills and the monitoring actions they started to implement.

Metacognitive Awareness

During the observations of our students' writing processes, we could notice they showed "awareness," concerned with their weaknesses and, consequently, proposing possible strategies to improve them. In this stage, students' reflection showed the fact that they had indeed identified some aspects to improve their academic writing, thus evidencing their *declarative knowledge* (Dunlosky & Metcalfe, and Serra & Metcalfe as cited in Negretti, 2012). In this regard, some of their comments are:

Excerpt 5.

I feel afraid because I have spelling problems and also, I have to think a lot in order to understand something coherent. (S7, J1, C1)

Excerpt 6.

I need to find more resources to support my future essays. Besides, I need to increase my *vocabulary*. (S11, J2, C1)

As evidenced in the excerpts above, students had the opportunity to reflect upon their process, particularly during the first stage once they received the teacher's feedback and were asked to edit their manuscripts. Some of the aspects most students felt they needed to work on were related to vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. Indeed, their reflections about the areas they felt they needed to improve upon represent their declarative knowledge, since these reflections are related to their understanding of writing academically.

Therefore, once students started to identify the aspects they needed to work on, thanks to the self-editing stage they went through, they started to come up with possible actions and strategies that they could put into practice (Negretti, 2012). This process is closely related to the concept of *procedural knowledge*, in which learners are expected to identify strategies and procedures that will allow them to achieve their cognitive goals. As such, our students expressed their procedural knowledge by proposing the following strategies:

Excerpt 7.

I need to write more about educative things. I have to practice on my writing and punctuation. (S4, J1, C1)

Excerpt 8.

Correct the mistakes in this essay to understand things that I didn't know before. (S2, J2, C2)

Excerpt 9.

I will give my essay to other person, in that way he or she is able to give her or him feedback and I will have a second opinion. (S10, J1, C2)

Excerpt 10.

I want to practice and write more frequently. Also, I need to review the teacher's presentation. (S11, J2, C2)

Excerpt 11.

I am going to read some academic essays. (S5, J1, C3)

Excerpt 12.

Self-correction, after having pointed out the mistakes, it's a great way of learning how to write properly. (S12, J2, C3)

As can be observed, most of the strategies proposed by the participants were directly related to self-editing (Excerpts 14 and 18), peer editing (Excerpt 15), practice (Excerpts 13 and 16), and modelling (Excerpt 17). From Murray and Moore's (2006) and Murray's (2013) perspectives, drafting and revising the draft (actions considered under the category of self-editing) are key strategies when it comes to having a fresh, more elaborated perspective about what is being written, which constitutes the first feedback we receive. Once this self-editing process is done, writers can move on to the next stage, which is asking for external feedback or peer editing; this enables dialogue and creation of academic community (Murray, 2013). As for practice and modelling, students themselves considered that writing more often and reading other academic texts enabled them to understand grammar structures better in order to reproduce them in their own texts. As such, practices such as the previously mentioned evidence the close relationship between modelling and reflective learning (Loughran, 2002).

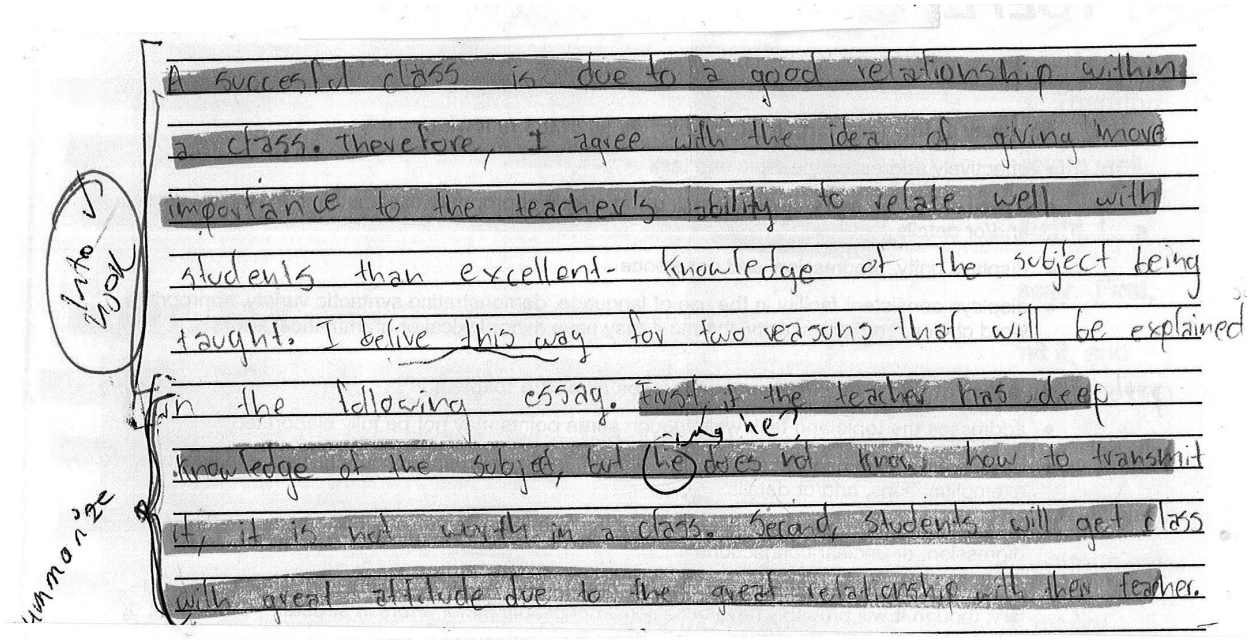
Consequently, thanks to the reflective learning activities carried out by the students, their *awareness* regarding their writing process was observed. As such, being able to identify the aspects they considered needed improvement encouraged them to propose actions and strategies to face said areas in need.

Monitoring

Once students' metacognitive awareness was fostered through reflective learning, we had the opportunity to identify the strategies they considered were necessary to improve their academic writing. Through this, it was important to foster said strategies and assess whether they were working or not. This process is called "monitoring," which Nelson and Narens (as cited in Rhodes, 2019) relate to assessing and evaluating one's learning.

In Figure 6, we can observe the process through which students managed to assess or monitor their writing process.

Figure 6. Students' Extract With Their Teacher's Correction (Essay 3, S11, Draft 1, Cycle 2)



First, students developed individual initial drafts of their essays, and then they received indirect written feedback from the teacher. In Figure 6 we can observe mechanics and content areas that the students addressed for improvement. This information constituted the source for them to self-assess their performance.

Since students were polishing their academic writing skills in order to present international exams, we used a specific rubric in order to self-assess their papers (from Educational Testing Service, 2019). This tool enabled both teacher and students to have clear criteria regarding the writing process. Once students carried out their self-evaluation, they reflected on four aspects: the planning of the essay, the new learning they had reached after the feedback received, their reactions towards feedback, and the actions that would be taken in order to improve their writing skills, which represented the strategies they manage to propose. As the classes moved on and we established the strategies students offered, learners started to monitor their self-editing and peer-editing actions, which were the most common strategies that they proposed during their awareness stage.

After that, the teacher offered the learners feedback and general explanations regarding the writing process. Eventually, after revising and editing in pairs, we could observe the improvement of their writing performance:

Excerpt 13.

> A class is successful when you have a good relationship with students. Therefore, I agree with the idea of giving importance to the teachers' ability to relate well to the students more than the knowledge of the subject that is being taught. I believe this for two reasons that will be explained in the following essay. First, knowledge has no value if the teacher does not know how to transmit it, and second, students will enjoy the class much more if they have a great relationship with their teacher.

Thus, once they received the teacher's new feedback, and analyzed the level of their performance, a new process of self-assessment took place, which consequently helped them increase the score obtained in the previous version of their text. Therefore, students' reflections during the process led them to implement monitoring strategies as part of their metacognitive strategies. When they applied the actions they saw as necessary in order to improve their academic writing skills, they were able to carry out a more in-depth editing process. All in all, through metacognitive awareness and monitoring, students had the opportunity to take control of their own learning process. In this sense, learning and understanding the areas they needed to work on, and establishing strategies they considered relevant for their improvement, empowered them to enhance their writing skills.

Conclusions

This study focused on the impact of reflective learning on a group of EFL preservice teachers' academic writing skills through formative feedback and self-assessment. We could identify two main areas in which the impact was visible: linguistic resources and metacognition.

Regarding linguistic resources, we could identify that this implementation favored the learners' writing skills by means of indirect, formative, written feedback, multiple drafting, working in pairs, and reflecting upon their performance. First, the learners identified their language mechanics weaknesses; this provided opportunities to review grammatical aspects, punctuation rules, and assertive vocabulary, among other relevant items of working on any writing task. At the end of this implementation, the learners wrote more accurate texts, which evidenced a more conscious use of language mechanics and, in turn, helped them develop editing skills. Second, they were able to identify the particularities that build up an academic text such as an essay. Being aware of the essay structure allowed the learners to incorporate gradually all aspects they did not include at the beginning of the implementation. Their understanding of most of the essay components nurtured the quality of their essays in order to meet the requirements for international exams.

Nonetheless, there was an unexpected phenomenon during the implementation. Aspects that seemed to have improved after the second cycle tended to appear again during the last one, although we could still appreciate clear improvement between the first and the final papers. Thus, we could notice that when students centered more on the structure of the papers, they lost focus on the language mechanics. Likewise, we acknowledged that there was an evident gradual incorporation of the essay structure, which, supported by the students' reflections, let us conclude that they were more concerned about the structure of an international exam that was new for them.

As for metacognitive features, we had the opportunity to evidence two outstanding characteristics. On the one hand, we identified students' awareness when it comes to the needs and gaps they presented in regard to their writing skills; which included actions such as peer and self-editing, practice, and modelling. On the other hand, there were monitoring procedures carried out by both the teacher and the participants in order to assess students' actions that let them improve their manuscripts; the procedures that students commonly used were peer and self-editing. On this basis, reflections made by our students allowed us to observe and evidence the process students went through and, consequently, the improvements they portrayed in their papers.

Overall, improvement of linguistic resources and development of metacognitive features constituted the main impact of this pedagogical implementation. However, time seems to be an issue as it is necessary to devote more lessons to give continuity to this process and be able to achieve better results.

Limitations and Pedagogical Implications

There were some limitations we could identify. Firstly, time was an issue since the target group had six academic hours a week; it would be necessary to devote more lessons with a higher frequency to give continuity to this process and achieve better results since, as mentioned by Karim and Nassaji (2019), the effect of feedback should be studied over a long period of time. Secondly, students seemed to be very focused on the structure of a standardized essay as they were going to finish their cycle of English levels proposed by the curriculum and also as their future classes implied the use of this type of text. Therefore, whenever they received feedback, they centered their attention on essay particularities, and overlooked language mechanics aspects. This affected the expected results on the final versions as feedback does not guarantee learners' final decision-making; this is one of the aspects that may interplay when correcting their written production. Likewise, we agree with Karim and Nassaji since we consider language accuracy is one of the many aspects that learners must focus on to become successful writers; they also need to communicate and present ideas appropriately according to academic standards. Thus, one direction for further research is to analyze which factors may affect preservice teachers' effective response to feedback.

Regarding implications, we highlight the necessity to write academic texts as a learning goal along the curriculum and feedback as a potential strategy for preservice teachers to develop writing skills. This may progressively help students master this type of text and its features while developing their editing skills, gaining academic vocabulary, expressions, and structures and developing metacognitive awareness.

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Appendix: Proofreading Marks

λ	Missing word
IC	Insert connector
CL	Set in capital letter
LC	Set in lower case
SP	Spelling
WW	Wrong word
WT	Wrong tense
WP	Wrong preposition
PUNC	Punctuation
?	Unclear idea

https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v23n1.85019

The Impact of Assessment Training on EFL Writing Classroom Assessment: Voices of Mexican University Teachers

El impacto de la capacitación en evaluación de la escritura en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera: voces de profesores mexicanos universitarios

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The extent to which writing assessment training (WAT) impacts writing scores has been widely explored in L2 testing contexts. However, little is known of the benefits of WAT to classroom assessment of writing. This paper analyzes the impact of two WAT sessions on the classroom assessment of writing of eleven EFL Mexican university teachers. Twenty-two interview transcripts suggested an impact in three main areas: classroom teaching of writing, classroom assessment of writing, and teacher self-awareness. The category of teacher self-awareness displayed the most impact. The paper proposes a categorization of impact on writing assessment.

Keywords: EFL writing assessment, language assessment literacy, writing assessment training

El impacto de la capacitación en evaluación de la escritura sobre los puntajes que los estudiantes obtienen en dicha habilidad se ha explorado ampliamente en contextos de exámenes a gran escala en L2. Sin embargo, se sabe poco de los beneficios de dicha capacitación en el aula. Este artículo analiza el impacto de dos sesiones de capacitación en la evaluación de la escritura en el salón de once profesores universitarios mexicanos de inglés como lengua extranjera. Veintidós transcripciones de entrevistas sugirieron impacto en tres áreas principales: enseñanza de la escritura en el aula, evaluación de la escritura en el aula y autoconciencia del profesor. La categoría de autoconciencia del profesor mostró el mayor impacto. El artículo propone una categorización del impacto en la evaluación de la escritura.

Palabras clave: alfabetización en evaluación de idiomas, capacitación en evaluación de escritura, evaluación de escritura en inglés como lengua extranjera

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Introduction

In many English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, the process of language assessment is part of an instructor's daily job (Lam, 2014; López-Mendoza & Bernal-Arandia, 2009), including the assessment of writing. Teachers' language assessment literacy (LAL), then, becomes of vital importance to ensure the quality of the process. Assessment training, a common LAL tool, has benefited from extensive research of its impact on rater scoring. However, little is known of how training may benefit the classroom assessment of writing (CAW). This paper analyzes the impact that two sessions of writing assessment training (WAT) had on the assessment practices of eleven Mexican EFL university teachers.

Literature Review

The assessment of EFL students' writing is crucial for its development. It is through assessment, in its different modalities, that a text may be improved (Crusan, 2010). It is a reflective process for which teachers need to know how to create fair assessments that provide information about their students' writing ability (Crusan et al., 2016, p. 43). Assessment literate teachers are aware of the potential consequences of inaccurate assessment (Stiggins, 1999) to the quality of texts and the development of writing skills. Teachers may also need to be aware of their involvement in a process that is influenced by contextual factors such as economy, social bonds, and the cultural practices of the institution (Chen et al., 2013; Yan et al., 2017). Managing the interaction with these factors in benefit of CAW becomes a necessary ability of those assessing students. Therefore, conducting writing assessment requires stakeholders to be assessment literate (Crusan, 2010, Crusan et al., 2016; Fulcher, 2012; Taylor, 2009; Weigle, 2007), that is, to have assessment knowledge to be capable of choosing how and when to use this knowledge (Coombe et al., 2012; Malone, 2013).

LAL has gained importance due to three factors: the worldwide use of large-scale test results (Inbar-Lourie, 2008), the role of tests in the globalization of languages, and the need for teachers to implement assessment (Fulcher, 2012). It is a social practice (Inbar-Lourie, 2008) in which stakeholders' sociocultural perspectives (Scarino, 2013) are embedded in their interpretations and preconceptions of students' language performance. LAL goes beyond the knowledge of assessment, its practice in the classroom, and the involvement of social and contextual factors. It may also involve teachers' reflection processes of their assessment practices in the classroom as a means to reconceptualize their assessment knowledge and practice. Xu and Brown (2016), for instance, proposed the Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice (TALiP) pyramid which had the purpose of portraying the interrelationship among theoretical knowledge of assessment, sociocultural perspectives, and the development of preservice and in-service teachers. They argued that the ultimate level of LAL is "Teacher Assessor (re)construction" since it is through professors' constant metacognitive activity combined with classroom experience that may lead to the improvement of assessment processes (p. 162).

Depending on stakeholders' roles and contextual factors, researchers have pointed out the need to expand the concept of LAL by grouping the degree of knowledge and skills required into three different levels (Taylor, 2013): (a) core LAL (researchers, test developers), (b) intermediary (language teachers, course instructors), and (c) peripheral levels (policy makers) which are constantly related to stakeholders' sociocultural values (Baker & Riches, 2018). These levels may face difficulties that hinder the development of LAL and writing assessment literacy (WAL) including stakeholder's lack of time, perceived anxiousness, fear, and a lack of WAL opportunities (Falvey & Cheng, 1995 [as cited in Coombe et al., 2012]; González & Vega-López, 2018; Lam, 2014; López-Mendoza & Bernal-Arandia, 2009).

Language Assessment Perceptions

Crusan et al. (2016) identified L2 tertiary teachers' (N = 702) perspectives of writing assessment with a 54-item electronic survey. Most of the respondents (80%) had received

WAT throughout their postgraduate courses or as part of their teaching certification courses while others reported no previous assessment training experience (n = 130). Teachers had contradicting views of the nature of assessment and negative perceptions of training: 66% considered writing assessment always inaccurate, 60% considered it a subjective process while 80% considered rater training did not encourage them to improve their assessment.

Teachers have different views of assessment training courses and their contribution to assessment practice (González & Vega-López, 2018; Jeong, 2013; Koh et al., 2017; Lam, 2014; Malone, 2013; Nier et al., 2013). For instance, Nier et al. (2013) analyzed the perceptions of eighty EFL teachers to an online assessment course concluding that most of them considered it useful for their future assessment practice but more samples were needed to further understand the process of assessment. Similarly, in Mexico, González and Vega-López (2018) found that elementary school teachers held positive views of an online productive skill assessment course, but more time was needed to analyze it contents.

Teachers also have diverse perceptions of LAL needs (Fulcher, 2012; Lam, 2014; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014; Volante & Fazio, 2007). Vogt and Tsagari (2014) found that 42.4% of the surveyed teachers in primary, secondary, and tertiary levels in Europe claimed to have not received assessment training. Most of the teachers preferred receiving training to improve assessment of productive, receptive, and integrated skills as well as statistical analysis for language assessment. Training has become a widely used strategy to enhance LAL. However, knowledge of its impact varies.

Assessment Training Impact on Writing Assessment

Weigle (1994, 1998), Shohamy et al. (1992), and Elder et al. (2005, 2007) focused on the effects that rater training had on assessors and the scores provided in L2 assessment contexts. Elder et al. (2005) found that after eight experienced raters participated in an online training course, scored diagnostic writing papers, and received group and individual feedback of their scoring performance, they viewed training as useful. This allowed raters to become aware of their own rating behavior and more consistent in their scoring; therefore, suggesting that feedback may have an impact on assessment procedures.

Much of the research has focused on the teachers' assessment knowledge, their experiences in assessment training, their LAL needs, their views of assessment, and the viewed impact of online assessment courses. Additionally, raters' views of assessment and the impact that training has on their rating in large scale tests has been widely explored. Research has yet to understand the relationship among LAL, classroom assessment, and Latin American assessors in foreign language contexts. Exploring the level of impact that training, as a mode of LAL, may produce in EFL instructors' CAW, may contribute to closing this gap. Considering that studies which focus on language assessment training have been conducted in Asia (Koh et al., 2017), North America (Malone, 2013, Nier et al., 2013; Weigle, 1998, 2007), Europe (Fulcher, 2012; Vogt & Tasagari, 2014), and Australia (Knoch, 2011), the Latin American context has remained underexplored. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the impact that WAT had on teachers' CAW in the Mexican university EFL setting by answering the research question, to what extent does WAT impact EFL teachers' reported classroom assessment of students' writing skills?

Method

The study intended to provide the researcher's interpretation of a phenomenon in a particular research context at a specific period of time (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2010), without seeking generalization. Thus, a qualitative, interpretative-constructivist perspective (Creswell, 2015; Johnson et al., 2007) was adopted.

Research Context

The eleven EFL university teachers were in service at one of three public universities (Institution A, B, and C) or a language institute (Institution D) in the north-eastern

region of Mexico. Teachers among institutions A, B, and C assess their students following distinct procedures and criteria, without considering writing. At Institute D, teachers are required to assess the four language skills. Teachers are provided with the writing prompts and the analytic rubric to assess writing. Therefore, three of the participants (Institution D) assessed writing regularly at their institutions.

Participants

Following a convenience sampling method (Dörnyei, 2007), eleven teachers (TPs) were recruited: seven women (22–52 years) and four men (24–45 years old). The least experienced was Olivia with one year whereas the most experienced was Maria with more than 20 years of experience (Table 1). Two men and three women TPs had a BA (applied linguistics, English language, or human resources) combined with a teaching certification (ICELT); two female participants and one male participant had an MA (applied linguistics, TESOL, bilingual education) and one male teacher was an applied linguistics undergraduate student. In an interest to maintain the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms were used to refer to each TP.

Table 1. Background Characteristics of Participating Teachers

TP	Gen	Age	Months TE	Academic background	Institution of work	Teach/ Assess Writing?	Use rubrics?	Assessment training	Rubric use training
Martin	M	28	84	BA Applied linguistics TKT/ICELT	PU	Always	Always	Yes	Yes
Elena	F	26	96	BA Administration	PU	Often	Often	Yes	Yes
Julio	M	41	84	BA Human resources TKT/ ICELT	LI	Often	Always	Yes	Yes
Olivia	F	24	4	BA International affairs	PU	Often	Rarely	No	No
Alberto	M	40	108	MA Bilingual education	PU	Sometimes	Never	No	No
Karina	F	26	48	MA Applied linguistics	PU	Sometimes	Always	Yes	No
Jessica	F	22	48	BA Applied linguistics TKT/ICELT	LI	Always	Always	Yes	Yes
Maria	F	52	240	MA TESOL	PU	Often	Sometimes	No	Yes
Antonia	F	35	144	BA English language TKT/ ICELT	PU	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Yes	Yes
Silvia	F	44	120	BA English language TKT/ ICELT	PU	Often	Sometimes	No	No
Octavio	M	23	24	BA Applied linguistics Student	LI	Always	Often	Yes	Yes

Note. LI= Language institute; PU = Public university; TE = Teaching experience.

TPs had in common the desire to improve their assessment practice, the type of students they worked with, and they were all required by their language institutions to assess language skills. Teachers who had these characteristics and agreed to participate were considered. Four participants had never experienced assessment training while the rest had minimal experience with training.

Data Collection Instruments

Semistructured Interviews

Two semistructured interviews were conducted with the intention of identifying possible changes in instructors' CAW. Interview protocols were followed (Creswell, 2013) while conducting the 22 interviews.

Interview 1 (see Appendix A) focused on TPs' assessment prior to WAT. It included 13 questions in Spanish or English providing interviewees with a comfortable environment in their natural language (Cohen et al., 2011). Both languages were used to avoid transcript translation diminish data objectivity (Pavlenko, 2007). TPs were given the option of choosing the language of their preference.

Interview 2 (see Appendix B) explored the changes that training had encouraged. Additionally, it intended to obtain data to compare with the information obtained from Interview 1. Interview 2 was also available in Spanish or English for participants to choose.

Writing Assessment Training (WAT)

Two sessions of WAT were provided to TPs by the researcher, one prior training (WAT1) and the second (WAT2) from six to eight months after session one. WAT1 focused on the analysis of the nature of EFL writing, its assessment and writing assessment practice using holistic and analytic rubrics. WAT2 gave priority to the importance of using a rubric as a classroom tool for assessment and to provide formative feedback to students to enhance "assessing for learning" (Stiggins, 1999). It included opportunities for teachers to reflect on the role of assessment in their classrooms, and their current assessment processes to analyze their improvement. The contents of sessions were adapted by the researcher from the *CEFR Manual for Language Examinations* (Council of Europe, 2009a, 2009b), the *ALTE Manual for Language Test Development and Examining* (Council of Europe, 2011) and the principles suggested by Bachman and Palmer (2010).

Data Collection Procedures

Stage 1. The 11 participants signed an informed consent. The researcher individually contacted teachers via email, telephone, or social media to schedule each interview and the first WAT. Then, the pretraining interview was conducted and audiotaped with participants' consent.

Stage 2. WAT1 was led by the researcher. For approximately two hours and a half, participants interacted and provided their previous experiences assessing writing as well as their views of writing, and the importance of its assessment in their classrooms. WAT1 was provided at one of the participating institutions.

Stage 3. WAT2 was delivered by the researcher. During three and half hours teachers were encouraged to share their reflections of the changes they noticed in their assessment of writing since they experienced WAT1. Participants were encouraged to participate freely and to share experiences in a group-led discussion. Then, in accordance with the researcher, participants were scheduled to participate in the post-training interview.

Stage 4. Interview 2 was conducted two to three months' post WAT2 session with the purpose of providing teacher time to reflect on information discussed and to implement possible changes in their assessment processes. As in Interview 1, consent for its recording was obtained from participants.

Data Analysis

Interview transcript analysis followed a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Theory was generated with the researcher's interpretations of the voice of the participant to understand their individual actions (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 274), and the underlying reasoning grounded in participants' rationale for their actions and practice (Taber, 2000). Data analysis relied on themes and categories as they emerged in data.

Emerging themes were identified in data and grouped in main themes then clustered into subthemes. Finally, categories were signaled with the purpose of noting relationships among variables and the context in which participants were immersed. Each category was coded (Creswell, 2015). Emerging themes, subthemes, and categories were compared among participants to find similarities and differences. Finally, these were compared within the pre-training and post-training data to obtain the impact of WAT.

Certain researcher bias should be considered since the main researcher of the study conducted the two WAT sessions, the two semistructured interviews, and was responsible for data analysis. To diminish this, the results were shared with an expert researcher in the field of applied linguistics. This external researcher reviewed the data and came up with her own analysis. Finally, results of both analyses were discussed and agreed upon.

Results

Data suggested that assessment training had an impact (Table 2) on (a) the teaching of writing in the EFL classroom, (b) the teachers' regular classroom assessment procedures, and (c) their self-awareness as an EFL teacher or as a classroom assessor.

Table 2. Impact of Assessment Training

Main theme	Subtheme	Teacher participant
Impact on classroom teaching	Writing activities	Silvia, Antonia, Olivia, Maria
	Feedback techniques	Silvia, Alberto, Antonia, Maria
Impact on classroom assessment	Assessment procedures	Martin, Karina, Octavio
	Scoring tools	Martin, Karina, Elena, Octavio, Olivia
Impact on teacher self-awareness	The nature of writing	Olivia, Maria
	The teaching writing	Silvia, Antonia, Octavio, Olivia, Maria
	Assessment procedures	Martin, Silvia, Alberto, Karina, Maria
	Writer stance	Silvia, Alberto, Antonia, Olivia
	Student stance	Olivia, Maria
No impact was experienced		Julio, Jessica

The Teaching of Writing in the EFL Classroom

Two subthemes emerged within this main theme: (a) Writing Activities and (b) Feedback Techniques.

Writing Activities

Silvia reported she continued giving importance to the assessment of other skills mainly because of time issues and EFL program demands. After training she reflected on the importance that writing has for language students and their need of it in their future professional lives. During Interview 2, she explained that she now includes more writing activities in her lessons and provides more feedback to students' texts as pointed out in the following excerpt:

> I implemented more writing exercises and I am using a correction code to provide students the feedback. I used to use a code, but I only used two or three symbols and did not really give extended feedback...I am trying to focus more and use it more. (Silvia)

Maria reported receiving the most impact after experiencing assessment training. During Interview 2, she reported to have more interest in writing and its treatment in her classroom. She now saw its importance in students' language development resulting in her attempt to have her students write at least to a minimum level in the classroom or for homework. She explained: "There is more interest from me in the sense not to leave it out...I started to put a little more emphasis on writing by writing at least a little or for homework based on my students' needs."

It may be argued from this evidence that three categories emerged from this subtheme that reflect teachers' changes in their classroom post training: (a) Implementation of writing techniques, (b) Increase of writing activities such as the case of Silvia, and (c) Focus of activities on students' needs carried out by Maria as portrayed in the previous interview excerpt.

Feedback Techniques

Three categories were identified from teachers' feedback activities after training: (a) Implementation of varied feedback techniques, (b) Increase of feedback provision, and (c) Improvement of feedback provision. For instance, Alberto explained his feedback had changed post-training. He was more careful and precise in the comments he provided to his students. He became aware of the importance of feedback in students' development of skills and in their assessment. He pointed out:

> I only read the text and provided comments...I believe that in the new methods, to assess students' feedback is very important because if I tell the student you failed, but I don't say in what he failed or how he can improve, then assessment would be useless, we would only be giving a score. (Interview 2)

Maria, in addition to increasing the number of writing activities done in the classroom, modified her feedback focus by paying attention to the genre and the structure of the text: "I started to give more feedback in the sense of how they were basic level obviously and had much errors in their writing and how I needed to give more suggestions in their writing and use of grammatical structures."

Maria paid more attention to the type of feedback she gave to her students specifically on language accuracy.

Classroom Assessment of Writing

Two subthemes were identified in this second emerging main theme: (a) classroom procedures to assess writing and (b) PTs' use of scoring tools to assess writing.

Classroom Procedures to Assess Writing

Martin suggested he had (a) reoriented his assessment purpose; Karina reported she had (b), increased her provision of assessment feedback while Octavio explained (c), an increase of the use of assessment techniques.

Martin reported that he modified his leniency in his assessment of students' texts in addition to his use of holistic rubrics to manage his time. He used to expect more from his students than they could actually produce by stating:

> At some point, I had been too strict with my students, and sometimes I would look at them and then interpret the text without looking at their writing...especially when I am expecting something from them I was perhaps demanding a higher proficiency.…The sessions helped me notice that. (Interview 2)

Karina reported that prior to WAT she would directly provide the corrections to the text and score it according to her personal judgment without feedback. She pointed out that post WAT she had been able to implement change to her regular procedure by explaining to students prior to assessment the scoring tool used. She explained that,

> at first it was merely my judgment: I read it, corrected it. I would not let them do so but now...I looked for a tool that fits their level and gave it to them before I applied the writing task...I actually read their work again and never gave them feedback. I corrected them, crossed it out, and did not give them the opportunity to reflect on what they thought they were doing. (Interview 2)

Octavio explained, during Interview 2, that he did not consider encouraging students' self-assessment of writing. Post-training, he had managed to encourage it with the help of a self-correction code. He considered that this implementation had resulted in an increase in students' awareness of the importance of self-assessment. He pointed out:

> With that group, I was able to notice that, before, students did not have a clue of how to evaluate their own work and they relied completely on the teacher. After the training, I was able to implement techniques of how to evaluate each other, and they were able to understand the use of a different evaluation...they began paying more attention to things they did not know and to their self and teacher evaluation.

After Octavio's implementation, his students had learned to pay more attention to their work while also being interested in figuring out the meaning of the symbols of the correction code.

Use of Scoring Tools

From this second subtheme of the emerging theme Classroom Assessment Procedures, four categories emerged: (a) innovation of current scoring tool (exemplified with Martin), (b) implementation of scoring tool (portrayed by Karina), (c) adaptation of current scoring tool (pointed out by Elena) and (d) a combination of scoring tools (reported by Octavio).

Martin reported to have changed his scoring tool post WAT. He had always used an analytical scoring tool with all his students regardless of their interests, abilities, or needs. He now considers their proficiency (the lower the proficiency the more general the scoring tool) and his purpose when assessing students' written work. Therefore, this participant shifted to a holistic approach to assessment to provide a more global score to students' work and for managing his time more wisely.

Karina explained that, prior to training, she used an analytic scoring tool that she later found did not suit the capabilities of her students. She described how she adapted a rubric to suit her students' proficiency and her own assessment purposes in the classroom. She also sought to implement a correction code as a tool to encourage students' reflection and self-assessment of their texts:

> I looked for a rubric to fit their level and gave it to them before I applied the writing task. I also gave them a code and now I don't correct their work; I use the codes so they can self-evaluate their work. They improve their text and then I give them the score...now I am asking them the original with their corrections and the final version

> of their text. It has had an impact because they ask me things like "what does this code mean?" (Interview 2)

During Interview 2, Elena explained she did not change her assessment methods, but she considered WAT had allowed her to adapt a different tool to her classroom needs. She considered that this cannot be done in every class because writing assessment, assessment tools, and assessment purposes depend on the institutional EFL program's goals and students' proficiency.

In relation to analytic and holistic scoring tools, Octavio combined the use of both types of rubrics not just to assess students' written work but also as a tool to provide feedback. This change in conceptualization of rubric and its use allowed this participant to improve his assessment procedures in his classroom, which resulted in students' understanding of the task and a smoother assessment of writing skills. Finally, he added that WAT had also allowed him to feel more confident in his assessment procedures and to have an objective explanation to a specific grade given to students' texts, therefore setting aside his personal views.

Teacher Self-Awareness

Five subthemes were identified that corresponded to this main theme: (a) The Nature of Writing, (b) Teaching of Writing, (c) Assessment Practices, (d) Writer Stance, and (e) Students' Stances.

The Nature of Writing

Data revealed two categories in regard to teachers' reflection in this subtheme: (a) importance of writing for a language student (Maria, Antonia) and (b) the social role of learning to write (Octavio). Maria experienced a change in her view of writing and its importance in students' language development. She commented that she tried to help her students change their view of writing as a difficult and unachievable skill by changing her own view. She pointed out in Interview 2:

> And yet I have now started having them see an easy way of writing and...if I change my mentality that is something I need to do in the classroom, I need to give time to [writing] and find a way to do it and give it a little time for feedback.

Antonia added that WAT had allowed her to recall the importance of writing for students' future professional life. Octavio explained he had reflected on how writing is an activity that is best learnt as a social activity: "I was able to see how writing works better when shared with someone."

Teaching of Writing

This subtheme aimed to explain teachers' reflections about the process of writing instruction. It reflected emerging categories such as (a) improvement of teaching skills, (b) future inclusion of writing, (c) future inclusion of feedback, and (d) future inclusion of process writing. These categories were reported by Silvia, Antonia, Octavio, Olivia, and Maria.

Silvia was now aware that assessment could be standardized with the use of an assessment tool. But she needed to give more importance first to its teaching then move on to its assessment. She found her lack of organizational skills affected her lack of change in the classroom. Antonia explained that her assessment process in the classroom was not changed but she was still seeking to increase the assessment of writing in the classroom. She added that she increased her writing activities in the classroom even though it required large amounts of time.

Writing Assessment Procedures

Data suggested that WAT allowed teachers to reflect on the procedures they followed to assess their students' work. TPS reported to have analyzed how to: (a) update their assessment techniques (Julio), (b) update their assessment procedure (Martin and Elena), (c) begin planning future assessment (Karina and Alberto), (d)

make teaching/assessment purposes agree (Maria), and (e) consider students' needs (Antonia). Alberto explained he had noticed the need to implement tools to assess his students' writing. He specified he did not change his CAW post assessment training. However, the sessions allowed him to reflect on his present assessment procedure. Karina explained that training had helped her reflect on her classroom procedures, how she conducted them, and therefore plan how she could improve her assessment to make it an easier task for her and more reflective for her students. She explained:

> I even had someone ask me: "Why did I get this score?" and I answered: "Check the scoring scale and comments I gave you. Check what you got and analyze it and if you still have questions come and tell me." I plan to continue... like this because it is easier for me even if I have a lot of students. (Interview 2)

Julio continued assessing students' written work with their portfolio work and a monthly exam that included a writing component. However, he reflected on how his actual assessment methods could be improved, on how assessment tools were being combined, and how he considered the use of the portfolio could allow students' development and reflection, as he states in the following excerpt:

> I'm thinking a little bit more on changing the way we evaluate students; I consider of course the portfolio…and umm in the exam for example, you have four exams…you fail one exam, you cannot, you can do nothing about the grade, you cannot say "ok if you do it next time better I will give you a better grade"…it is not possible, the grade is there, and it is not possible. With portfolio work you are having products, and you are making them better, it is a better way to evaluate because you are learning from your mistakes for example. (Interview 2)

Olivia explained she felt more confident and secure of scores provided when students, parents, or the administration required further explanations. She manifested she had found a way of combining the institutional requirements with her own assessment beliefs.

Writer Stance

This fourth subtheme describes participants' conceptualization of themselves as writers and how it changed post WAT. TPs analyzed and reflected on their performance as writers emphasizing their (a) weaknesses as a writer (Silvia and Antonia), (b) improvement of teacher writing to improve student writing (Antonia), and (c) strengths as a writer (Alberto and Olivia). In this sense, Silvia reflected on the need for her to write to therefore transmit to students the skills needed to develop a text. She became aware of her weaknesses and her needs as a novice writer and explained:

> I've become more conscious that it is a skill we need to teach and evaluate. But, as an English teacher, writing is a skill I am deficient [in], I'm not good at writing, so to be able to teach you need to know how to do it. (Interview 2)

Antonia explained that, after the sessions, she had been able to analyze herself and conclude that she had weaknesses that needed to be improved upon, and if improved upon, there would be a possibility of providing more quality feedback and writing assessment in the classroom. Silvia and Antonia, during Interview 2, stated that their reflection on their writing weaknesses led them to visualize their needs of further training and began planning to seek for other courses or workshops to attend.

Student Stance

This fifth subtheme identified was TPs' views from the perspective of a student writer. TPs reported to have reflected on themselves as writers who are constantly being evaluated in their programs of study and in their working environment. Participants Olivia and Maria

were impacted in their (a) stance as a student in their understanding of assessment knowledge and became aware of (b) their performance as a student while being a BA or master's student. For instance, Olivia explained that WAT had helped her understand the considerations when producing a text and when being assessed by her BA professors. Secondly, it allowed her to better understand the use of scoring tools, and/or to adapt them to her and her students' needs. Olivia explained she had changed her perspective as a student and as a teacher about assessment. Before taking the WAT, she did not consider what her students were being taught in the classroom, but instead only focused on the quality of a product. She pointed out:

> But also, I advanced personally; as a teacher and student I've realized that you cannot isolate writing, then I found a way to balance…I cannot evaluate only what you are giving me, so I mean that I'm giving you input that I have to take into account...so I think my professors did not only evaluate what I wrote...but what I understood of what they taught. (Interview 2)

With this excerpt, it may be inferred that, as a student, Olivia felt more at ease with her professors' assessment, and as an in-service teacher, she grew as a professional by gaining a deeper understanding of the use of scoring tools. Corresponding to this view, Maria explained that, as an MA student, she had a difficult time understanding her professors' assessment procedures by explaining: "It seemed my professors' were against me, but after the training, I remembered some of their explanations as to why I had gotten a specific grade...now I get what they tried to explain." It may be argued that this TP gained a deeper understanding of her writing performance and her professors' assessment.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study analyzed the extent to which WAT impacted EFL teachers' reported CAW. Nine of the eleven TPS described changes in their regular assessment procedures (Table 2). Those that reported so (Martin, Karina, Octavio, and Olivia) explained that minor changes conducted included a redefinition of assessment purposes, student participation in assessment process (Leung & Mohan, 2004), and an improvement of the assessment process. Time was found a constraint: TPS needed more time to process information and implement assessment change.

WAT was found to strongly impact TPS metacognitive skills, reflecting on themselves as writers, as teachers, and assessors who take an active part in their institution's assessment procedures. Change was found in the self-awareness of the nature of writing, the importance of teaching writing, the importance of writing assessment, and teachers' stances as a writer and as an EFL teacher (Koh et al., 2017; Lam, 2014; Scarino, 2013). Data suggested that while experiencing WAT with a group of peers that faced the same contextual difficulties, TPS became aware of the importance of the socialization of assessment (Koh et al., 2017; Lam, 2014; Scarino, 2013, 2017), encouraged the understanding of their own knowledge of assessment, and made way for the understanding of new knowledge (Scarino, 2013, 2017) thus triggering their self-awareness skills.

WAT and Impact on Teachers' Assessment Behaviors and Perceptions

Results of this study emphasized that the impact of WAT may be minor in teachers' classroom assessment (Koh et al., 2017), but beneficial for other aspects of teachers' LAL such as their conceptualizations and interpretations of assessment, as suggested by Scarino (2013, 2017). This finding may suggest that training impacted positively participants' awareness of the importance of assessment rather than on the improvement of assessment procedures. Positive impact on classroom assessment as an effect of training may be hard to obtain and is rarely measured (Jin &

Jie, 2017). However, the analysis of this impact may enlighten the understanding of the benefits of WAT. These may have important implications for the EFL teacher. For instance, training as a tool leading to the socialization of assessment procedures among relevant stakeholders may help improve teachers' confidence in their knowledge and therefore lead to improved classroom assessment. Since time is an issue that impacts the assessment process, it is crucial for teachers to consider writing assessment as an ongoing process that seeks improvement constantly with the support of decision makers to improve the CAW. Finally, TPS' perceptions may suggest that training may also be beneficial when accounted for as an ongoing process instead of a one-time opportunity.

This study may correspond to the study led by Koh et al. (2017) in which the implementation of follow-up measures, such as permanent training or reflective sessions, supported by educational institution authorities, may provide teachers with the opportunities to improve their practice. According to Alberto and Antonia, if training were more constant, their assessment in the classroom may change.

Results of this paper may support Crusan et al.'s (2016) results where participants (80%) considered rater training did not encourage them to improve their assessment. In this study, nine of eleven TPS confirmed that innovation in their assessment post WAT did not occur, confirming that impact on assessment is quite complex.

WAT and Impact on Teachers' Future Academic Development

Results suggested that WAT may trigger future training sessions. Silvia, Antonia, and Maria described their intention of seeking other writing assessment courses. Experiencing WAT triggered their reflection regarding their strengths and weaknesses as teachers and as assessors. Therefore, it can be argued that training may be an initial step that may trigger further assessment literacy and/or professional development.

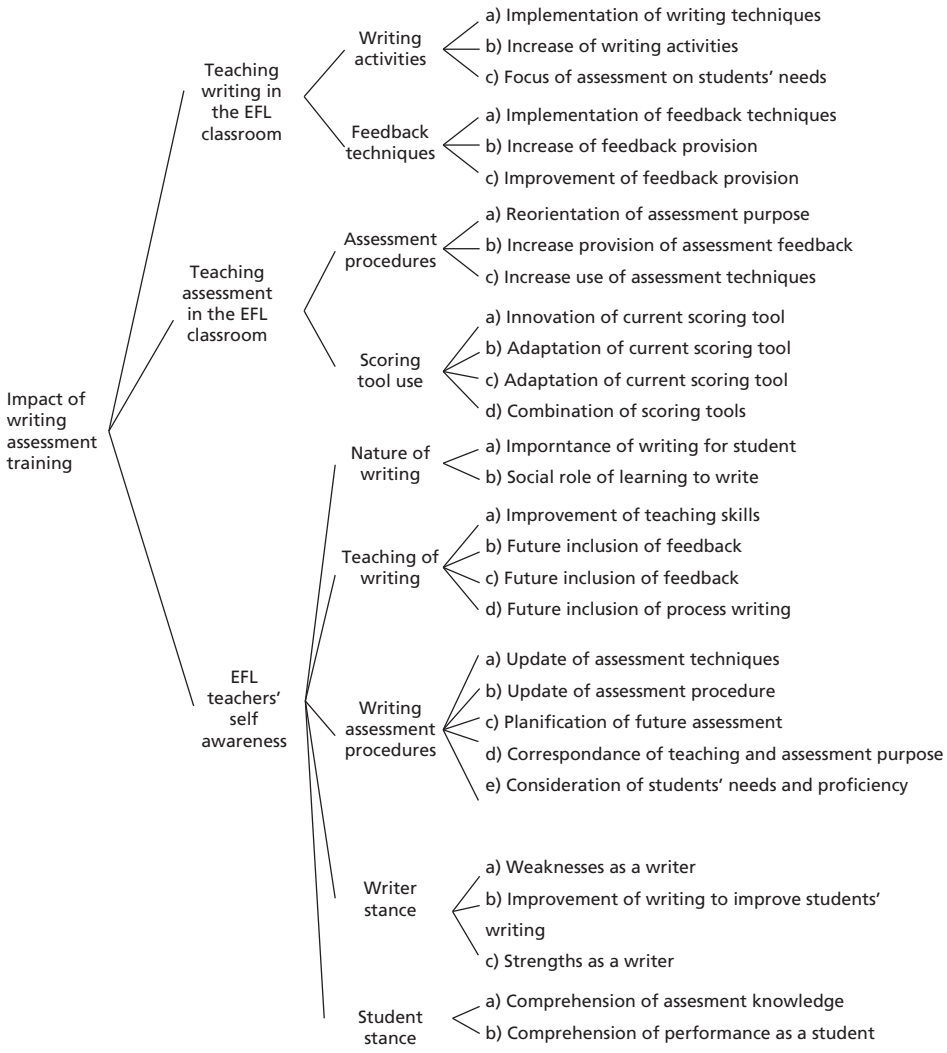
The Writing Assessment Training Impact Categorization

Data led to the initial construction of the writing assessment training impact categorization (WATIC; Figure 1), which categorizes WAT impact in this specific Mexican EFL context. It acknowledges the importance of contextual factors (Crusan, 2010; Yan et al., 2017) such as institutional policies or the nature of the EFL program being taught.

The WATIC is a multi-level assessment impact construct compiled from the themes, subthemes, and categories that emerged from the data. The first level includes the three major areas of impact: Writing in the EFL Classroom, Classroom Assessment of EFL Writing, and Teacher Self-Awareness (Level 1). Each subtheme represents the actions that TPS reported and that represented, in the TPS' perception and my own, the effect of training in their writing assessment practice. Each subtheme portrays from two to five categories (Level 3).

The WATIC may exemplify the conceptual framework of the TALiP proposed by Xu and Brown (2016), specifically at the top level of the construct "assessor identity (re)construction" during which teachers reconstruct their identity and stances as assessor teachers. This may be portrayed in the third level of the WATIC where teacher self-awareness is projected as the level that enhanced teacher metacognition.

Figure 1. Writing Assessment Training Impact Categorization (WATIC)



Limitations

The construction of the WATIC included the qualitative views of 11 active EFL teachers. Although qualitative insight may not pursue the generalization of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2007), data from more participants could provide a wider perspective of TPS experiences allowing for categories to be added or deleted. Additionally, the construction of the WATIC is an initial attempt to portray impact, so further research could be conducted for its validation. Validating the specific categories that attempt to describe the effects of WAT are crucial since this would allow the exploration of different assessment contexts to obtain a more objective categorization.

An important limitation of the study was that the researcher was the trainer and the interviewer of the study. Thus, data could be influenced by the TPS' desire of performing how they believe the researcher expects them to (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 53). To diminish this, future research could consider the triangulation of data with different qualitative instruments such as assessment observation and document analysis.

Implications

TPs' perceptions may portray the difficulty of reaching positive impact on classroom assessment as a result of WAT. They suggest that teacher self-reflection is a complex process that takes time, thus EFL teachers would benefit from multiple sessions that can encourage the reflection of assessment procedures. Additionally, the WATIC may guide teachers in the identification of their assessment strengths and the decision making to improve their weaknesses. The WATIC may raise awareness among teacher trainers, language managers, and heads of educational/language institutions of the staff needs for LAL. It may also aid the identification of the potential benefits of providing teachers with WAT that could lead to training sessions that are cost and time feasible.

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About the Author

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Appendix A: Outline of Teacher Interview 1

Teaching and assessment of writing.

1. Do you consider writing an important skill to develop in a language student? Why?
2. Do you teach writing in your classroom? How regularly? Do you consider it as a part of students' bimonthly or semesterly assessment and evaluation? Why or why not?
3. Is writing considered an important part of the language program of the school you work at? Why or why not?

Participants' use of rubrics.

4. Do you consider that using rubrics in the assessment of EFL writing is important? Why?
5. Do you use rubrics to give a score to your students? What type of rubric? Why?
6. Which rubric do you prefer to use: holistic or analytic? Why?
7. Do you consider that the rubric provided improved your scoring of the writing samples?

The training session.

8. Do you consider that training is necessary to score writing? Why?
9. Do you consider the training provided may improve your future assessment? Why?
10. Do you consider it necessary to take training to assess students' written work? Why? Why not?
11. What aspects do you consider can be improved of the training session?

Participants' experience scoring the sample papers.

12. How did you feel while scoring the papers before taking the training session? What difficulties did you have? Did training help you solve these issues?
13. Do you consider that your scoring of the 10 written samples improved after taking the training? Why or why not? How did it help?

Appendix B: Outline of Teacher Interview 2 (Post-Training Sessions)

1. Do you continue assessing writing in your EFL classroom?
2. If so, how do you do it?
3. What changes, if applicable, have you implemented in your assessment of writing after the training session? Why or why not?
4. What changes do you intend to implement in your future lessons? Why?
5. Do you now use rubrics to assess your students' writing? Which? Why?
6. Do you use rubrics to give feedback to your students' writing? Why?
7. Has your use of rubrics changed after taking the assessment training? Why or why not?
8. How has the training session helped you in your writing assessment practice? Why or why not?
9. What changes would you make in the training sessions?
10. How do you feel about writing after taking the training sessions?
11. How do you feel about writing assessment after taking the training session?
12. Do you have any additional comments?

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Enacting Agency and Valuing Rural Identity by Exploring Local Communities in the English Class

Promoción de la agencia y valoración de la identidad rural mediante la exploración de la comunidad en la clase de inglés

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This article reports on an action research study about the exploration of local communities to enact agency and value rural identity. Thirty-three students from a rural public school in Colombia participated in the study. Our aim was to examine ways in which students enacted agency as a result of participating in local community inquiry to realize the predominant value of their identity as farmers. Data were gathered through a focus group, interviews, students' artifacts, and teacher journals. Results showed that when communities are linked with classroom practices and foreign language learning, English becomes a vehicle to explore their places, who they are as members of the community, and how to promote decision making to help others.

Keywords: agency, community teacher, rural identity, situated pedagogies

Este artículo es un estudio de investigación-acción sobre la exploración de comunidades locales para promover agencia y valorar la identidad rural. En el estudio, participaron 33 estudiantes de una escuela pública rural en Colombia. Nuestro objetivo fue examinar la forma en que los estudiantes promovieron la agencia como resultado de explorar su comunidad para valorar la identidad rural. Los datos se recopilaron mediante un grupo focal, entrevistas, artefactos de los estudiantes y el diario del maestro. Los resultados muestran que, al vincular la comunidad con el aula y el aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera, el inglés se convierte en un vehículo para explorar sus lugares, quiénes son como miembros de una comunidad y tomar decisiones para ayudar a otros.

Palabras clave: agencia, docente comunitario, identidad rural, pedagogías situadas

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Introduction

Foreign language teaching has become a challenge for both urban and rural schools in Colombia because national foreign language policies and requirements are rigidly uniform in the entire country. There is no consideration of geographical or cultural identities, which are quite distinct from one another. Rural schools are at a particular disadvantage as they must meet the requirements without sufficient human, pedagogical, or technological resources (Cruz-Arcila, 2017).

In the midst of these conditions, language teachers can utilize pedagogies that connect places and communities with their classroom practices. These pedagogies seek to consider the individuals and their capacity to position themselves within the realities in which they live, and to involve teachers in an exploration of the richness of their surroundings as possible sources for their pedagogical constructions. Teachers can draw on community-based pedagogies (CBP) which are grounded in critical pedagogies that transform their daily realities into possible pedagogical sources for teaching and learning. Critical pedagogy has been central for teachers who want to promote changes in students and their communities (Hernández-Varona & Gutiérrez-Álvarez, 2020). According to Wink (2009), "critical pedagogy is a process that enables teachers and learners to join together in asking fundamental questions about knowledge, justice, and equity in their own classroom, school, family, and community" (p. 71). In this sense, teachers and students can become agents of change as they undergo a process of discovering possibilities that can be explored in the classroom and make decisions to transform the many alternatives presented to them into tangible actions that work to their advantage. The notion of agency is also in line with critical pedagogies in the sense that individuals are able to evaluate their realities and make decisions to initiate transformations in understanding who they are, in other words, their identity. As Duff (2012) states, agency refers to the capability to make decisions, self-regulate, and strive for a common goal leading to personal or social transformation.

This article responds to one of the research questions that led to our study: How do students enact agency as a result of exploring their rural communities and their rural identity? In this respect, this report illustrates the way in which learners enacted agency after exploring their communities and viewing themselves as uniquely situated as farmers from a rural area. From that perspective, they were able to make local connections with global environmental concerns and social situations experienced every day in their hometowns. English was used as a means of instruction and communication to carry out class discussions and project activities. CBP became also a source to enact agency and raise students' awareness of their rural identity. Besides, we present a brief theoretical revision of the main concepts that support this study, describe the context in which it was carried out, and the results of experiencing CBP with this group of learners.

Theoretical Framework

The concepts that support this study are related to critical pedagogy, CBP, and agency in that they conceive learning as situated and call teachers to focus on all the resources a particular place can have, as well as the features rural identity can offer teachers to make curricular decisions and unveil new sources of knowledge.

Critical Pedagogy

In this study, learning is understood as situated and particular; that is why critical pedagogy recognizes that learners exist in a cultural context and in a particular place, hence its importance for our study. Freire (as cited in Grunewald, 2003) states that people are rooted in temporal-spatial conditions that make them reflect on their "situationality" to the extent that they have to

act upon it. In other words, it is not possible to belong and move in a place without reading it and becoming aware of its realities and being moved into action on behalf of that space in which people exist.

Mahmoudi et al. (2014) argue that in critical pedagogy schools are regarded "as places for social change and evolution. They should not only foster critical thinking in students, but also teach them how to change their surroundings" (p. 86). For McLaren (1998), teachers, parents, students, governments, and school communities play a significant role in the learning process. For this process to be effective, they need to be aligned in order to reach the same goals, to achieve equity and justice in education. In this respect, McKernan (2013) claims that critical pedagogy "is a movement involving relationships of teaching and learning so that students gain a critical self-consciousness and social awareness and take appropriate action against oppressive forces" (p. 425). Such an approach should enable students and teachers to enact agency through investigating and understanding their contexts and identifying possibilities for change, which will require decision-making and action.

Community-Based Pedagogies

CBP principles are rooted in foundations of critical pedagogy and give shape to a form of pedagogy in which teachers and learners can nurture learning that occurs locally, and which conceives of the environmental space as a primary resource for pedagogical decisions. As Grunewald (2003) states, "place-based pedagogies are needed so that the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit" (p. 3). From this perspective, learners are able to envision their own realities and to act accordingly in a critical and agentive way.

Demarest (as cited in Clavijo-Olarte & Ramírez-Galindo, 2019) urges teachers to design the curriculum based on local inquiry and to explore places as texts to promote local research. Teachers are called on to discover all the resources local places can offer for their classes, to construct content that is relevant and close to students' communities, and to challenge students to explore their living environments through inquiry to develop ideas that might contribute to their local settings.

Of course, this is not an overnight change, "it is a forward motion that teachers become engaged in as they explore their communities with their students and discover the amazing and sweet opportunities for learning and living in community" (Demarest as cited in Crosby & Brockmeier, 2017, p. 78). CBP represents a challenge for teachers with respect to evoking reflection on the relationship between the type of education they want and the places they inhabit and are leaving for new generations (Clavijo-Olarte & Ramírez-Galindo, 2019). Sharkey and Clavijo-Olarte (2012) understand CBP as "curriculum and practices that reflect knowledge and appreciation of the communities in which schools are located and which students and families inhabit" (pp. 130–131). Whether in the city or the countryside, teachers need to develop a deep understanding of their communities, make connections between the school, its people and places. In other words, these teachers are "educators who actively research the knowledge of the cultures represented among the children, families, and communities in which they serve . . . as a means of making meaningful connections for and with children and their families" (Murrell, 2001, p. 51).

Agency

Location-based learning enhances agency in the sense that students can enact engagement, social responsibility and community cohesion. They became empowered and developed a sense of achievement (Crosby & Brockmeire, 2017). For van Lier (2010) "agency refers to the ways in which, and the extents to

which, the person (self, identities, and all) is compelled to, motivated to, allowed to, and coerced to, act" (p. 10). This means agency comes from a desire or will to make something happen to a certain degree. In like manner, Duff (2012) refers to agency as "people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals, leading potentially to personal or social transformation" (p. 417). Coincidently, Muramatsu (2013) declares that "a sense of agency enables individuals to make choices with regard to how they relate themselves with the social world, to take ownership in the pursuit of the enterprises in their lives, and to create opportunities for self-transformation" (p. 62). This position suggests that agency is the power to make decisions that lead to accomplishments and social or individual transformation. Similarly, for Carson (2012) agency "may be understood as an individual (or collective) capacity for self-awareness and self-determination: decision-making, ability to enact or resist change, and take responsibility for actions" (p. 48). In this respect, CBP opens the door to explore communities and to involve students in a process of reading and understanding their local surroundings, identifying events they feel connected to and proposing concrete actions that involve decision-making processes that benefit the community in which they live.

In relation to foreign language teaching, Cruz-Arcila (2018) argues that the teacher's role is to create connections between language and culture as a way to establish links with the values of the community. Bonilla and Cruz-Arcila (2014) discovered that students who lived in rural areas were more focused on farming with its emphasis on physical labor than on learning a foreign language. Consequently, the main goal of a teacher is to find ways to connect students' realities with their classrooms. From this perspective, teachers become mediators between language, culture, and identity. They need to be aware of the students' rural identities and find ways to connect them with classroom practices while using knowledge of students' communities as pedagogical resources.

Identity

Burke and Stets (2009) define identity as "the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (p. 3). It means that the individuals' representation of their identity depends on their occupation, their beliefs, and even their roles in society. In this respect, local identity is established by the social contexts people are immersed in (Lin, 2009). Local identity entails several factors from culture and customs which end up constructing beliefs, traditions, and cultural practices from communities that are shaped by context realities (Flórez-González, 2018). Considering the concepts discussed, it can be inferred that local rural identity is tied to the activities that farmers and laborers do, their beliefs, their ways of doing their jobs, their understanding of the world, customs, cultural practices, and behaviors.

In Colombia, rural identities are connected to the previous concept where the identity of a farmer comes from the person who lives in rurality, works on a farm and holds responsibilities related to physical work on the land. In this respect, Llambí-Insua and Pérez-Correa (2007) declare rurality as places with low population density, the predominance of agricultural work, and cultural features different from those that characterize the population of the large cities.

The question here is, how to connect rural identity with language teaching? In this respect, Bonilla and Cruz-Arcila (2014), in their research about English language teaching in rural areas, bring important insights to the roles of teachers as builders of identity, where the language becomes "an end or action in itself that contributes to constructing and interpreting social and cultural reality" (Pennycook, 2010 as cited in Cruz-Arcila, 2018, p. 70). Their research illustrates

that when teachers acknowledge students' rural reality, they are able to make decisions that value and respect local knowledge.

The Study

This is a qualitative study rooted in an action research design that relies on a community inquiry project in which students' surroundings were used as pedagogical sources. Action research is related to the ideas of "reflective practice and the teacher as researcher. It involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching contexts" (Burns, 2010, p. 2). In this respect, Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) argue that action research has three characteristics: First, it is carried out by the practitioner rather than outside researchers; second, it is collaborative; and third, it is focused on change and improvement. Smith et al. (2009) state that action research takes place when teachers carry out their own implementation in their own classrooms, evaluating the process and the results in order to bring about changes. Cano-Flores and García-López (2010) affirm that "action research is a form of knowledge construction conditioned by the necessary reflective exchange around theory and practice and by the continuous analysis of the educational reality" (p. 62).

Context and Participants

This study was carried out at a public school located in a small village about an hour and a half from Ibagué, a medium-sized Colombian city located in the center of the country. This is a coeducational school[1] that has 196 students. Thirty-three students from ninth grade volunteered to participate in the study. They were actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the project developed throughout the study.

Data Collection Process

CBP that worked as the pedagogical framework of this study also provided insights and forms of data collection. To begin the study, data were collected by the implementation of a needs analysis that allowed the teachers to identify students' preferences, concerns, and suggestions in relation to their English class. After analyzing this information, the teachers and students selected the topics of interest. After that, the students were asked to do a photographic mapping of their communities, identifying possible issues or themes to explore throughout the project. The teachers then planned the project connecting the information provided by the students and the syllabus of the school (see the class planner in Appendix A). After three weeks of planning, the project was carried out during the second and third period of the school's academic year (approximately four months). The students, guided by their teachers, explored their communities and carried out different activities focused on their identity as farmers and the realities they experience in their surroundings, as is evident in the class plan. Throughout the project implementation, there was a continuous process of reflection guided by the teachers and based on students' performance. Dialogues and interviews served as tools to collect reactions from students and the original plan was modified in response to suggestions from students.

Data were collected by means of students' artifacts that reflected the products students achieved throughout the project and their initiatives to benefit their communities (see Appendix B); a journal by teachers which contained reflections and insights after the different sessions with students; and narratives in which students wrote about their lives, activities, and customs as farmers, as well as perspectives about their communities (see Appendix B). Two additional instruments were the focus group[2] that was carried out at the end of the process to hear the

1 The name of the school is kept confidential to protect the participants' identities.

2 The focus group and the class questionnaire were carried out in Spanish.

voices of students in relation to the project, and a class questionnaire, where students had the opportunity to give their opinions about the project and the classes (see Appendix C). Questions for these two last instruments were piloted with some students. Two action research cycles were developed during the study, each cycle including phases of exploring, identifying, planning, implementing, evaluating, and reflecting (Burns, 1999).

Data Analysis

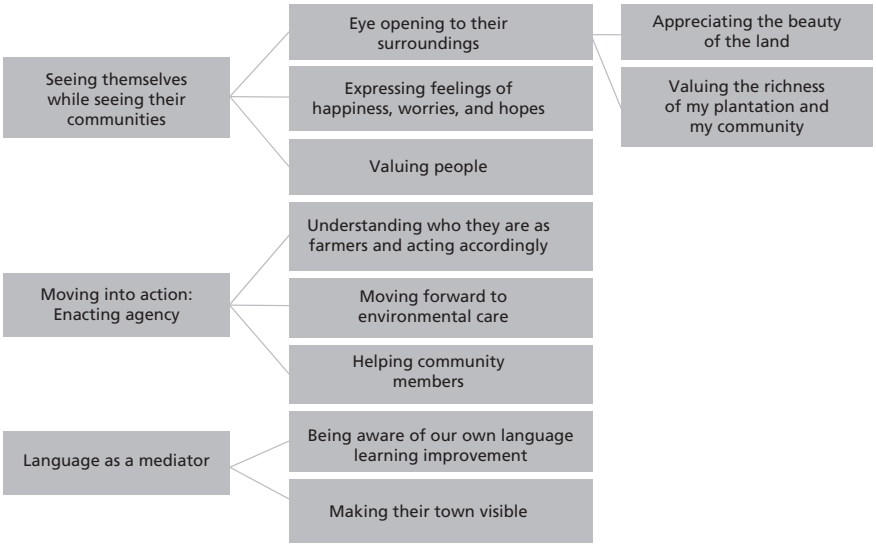
Data were analyzed and validated using triangulation and member checking. Member checking is a technique primarily used in qualitative research. According to Barbour (2001), Byrne (2001), and Doyle (2007), it is a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve a work's accuracy, credibility, and validity (as cited in Harper & Cole, 2012). Lincoln and Guba (1986) refer to member checking as:

> The process of continuous, informal testing of information by solidifying reactions of respondents to the investigator's reconstruction of what he or she has been told or otherwise found out and to the constructions offered by other respondents or sources, and a terminal, formal testing of the final care report with a representative sample of stakeholders. (p. 77)

We first contacted students via WhatsApp and shared with them the findings and conclusions of the study through a PowerPoint presentation. They read and shared their reactions, which assisted us in verifying whether what we had said was accurate. The students then signed a letter in which they confirmed the credibility of the information gathered and presented in the study.

Data were analyzed under the principles of grounded theory. As Charmaz (2006) states, "grounded theory provides guidelines on how to identify categories, how to make links between categories, and how to establish relationships between them" (p. 10). First, the information collected through all the instruments was read several times in order to identify repetitive patterns and themes. Then, from these themes, preliminary categories were defined. After reviewing these categories, and in light of the research question, we defined the final categories and integrated them into concepts that sought to answer the stated research question (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Categories and Subcategories of the Study



Although three categories emerged from the analysis, for the purpose of this article we will only focus on the second category: Moving Into Action: Enacting Agency, which entails three subcategories as described in the Findings section.

Findings

Understanding Who They Are as Farmers and Acting Accordingly

In the upcoming descriptions from student narratives, their deep love and appreciation for being farmers is evident:

> I feel happy being a farmer because it has a unique nature. We get up with love to live the day, and we can see our crops grow each day. I liked all the activities that we did with the teacher and we could get to know all the different parts of the village. (Student 12, Narrative 1)

There are two aspects worth analyzing in this excerpt. First, there was delight in being a rural worker, where phrases such as "I feel happy being a farmer" displayed contentment with the uniqueness of the land. Second, the exploration allowed students to get to know the surroundings more intimately. The comment speaks to the advantages of being part of a rural area. The following excerpts illustrate the participants' reasons for living in the countryside.

> I feel very happy to live here because of my family, for the things we can learn from the countryside, and also for the great work that the farmers do to cultivate the land. Also, I feel very proud of the food we grow because we care about the environment and the people in the village help each other. (Student 7, Narrative 1)
>
> My life in the countryside is beautiful because I have all my family here, I can share things and spend time with them, and see them constantly. There are various crops including sugar, plantains, avocados, yucca, corn, coffee, etc. (Student 21, Narrative 1)

These excerpts revealed the particular splendor of having a family in a rural area, which united and allowed them to be more connected with their family members. The land was also a reason of pride in which the abundance of crops and food is a blessing. Also, the expression "for the great work that the farmers do" stands out as recognition for the activities their community does and the products they cultivate. Throughout the implementation of the project, students explored their identity as farmers and displayed love and pride for their land. The following excerpt shows a deep feeling for belonging to a rural area:

> After the activity I felt more proud of living in the countryside because I have the possibility to enjoy the tranquility of nature, to see beautiful landscapes, to live together with the environment and that my family is mostly farmers. (Student 19, Narrative 1)

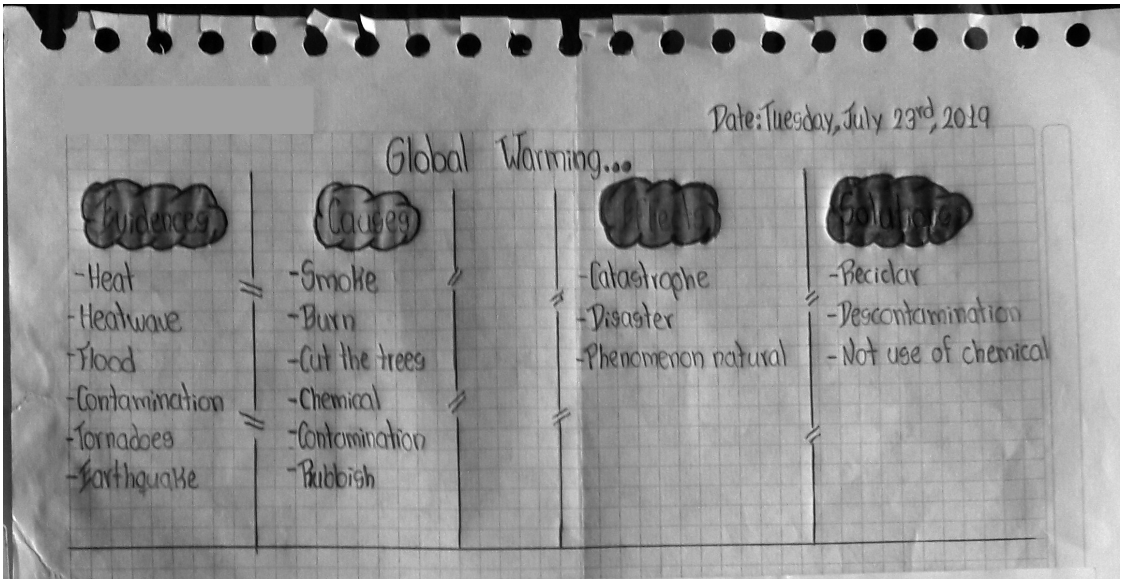
This comment demonstrates how learners view their surroundings as something worthwhile, a unique place and a land full of beauty. This appreciative feeling of being farmers and their love and pride for the land and its people moved students into action. Once they made connections and expressed their realities, those feelings of affection became the motivation that enacted change. Their connection to the land and people caused them to contribute and care for the main resource, the land.

Moving Forward to Environmental Care

After observing the community, students were swayed to be aware of their surroundings. This subcategory relates the way students explored their locations, which allowed them to recognize the environmental issues that affected them, therefore triggering the desire to enact changes. When global warming was discussed in class as part of the project implementation, students were concerned about their current environmental

situations. They reflected upon climate change as a threat to the places where they and their families reside and work since they grow grains, fruits, and grasses for daily sustenance. They managed to communicate their points of view in different ways, especially through mind maps (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Student's Artifact 1: Mind Map on Global Warming



These mind maps reflect students' various understandings of global warming and show how they integrated their contextual identities and resources, as well as how they saw and interpreted topics that were presented in English classes. Students were impacted by the global warming topic and its effects on their way of living. As seen in Figure 2, the participants started to discover where the environmental problems came from, how they perceived the effects, and what solutions could be devised in order to take action. Participants made the connection between global and local knowledge and evidenced agency processes in the decisions they made. They raised awareness about local risks with fires and climate changes and then designed posters in English, inviting families from their community to take care of the river and pick up garbage. Consequently, students found that taking care of their environment was also their responsibility, as the following excerpts show:

> We could learn many things that I did not know before, for example global warming, and how we can help other people by planting trees. This experience was very thrilling because not only did we learn more about global warming, but also about the natural wealth of our village and its people. (Student 24, Narrative 1).

Students raised their awareness of the environment and the natural resources surrounding them. They reported learning something new on the topic of global warming and found in the target language a way to verbalize that learning. The expression "This experience was very thrilling," highlights the impression the implementation made on them, not just because of the

topic, as some students mentioned, but the realization that they were part of the problem and the solution.

Students made connections between the topics discussed in class related to climate change effects and the weather conditions they were facing in their village. They wrote very emotive messages after visiting and helping a family which had lost their avocado plantation. Seeing this family situation impacted learners strongly and moved them to a collective initiative. Both the students and the teacher planned a field trip to the property and helped the farmer and his family. This experience allowed learners to move from reflection and decision making to action. Visiting and helping a farmer was a way to connect what they discussed in class with the realities of what they saw in the real world. In the following excerpts, they expressed what they had learnt that had made an impression on them: "It impacted me because of the damage that fires can cause, and how these affected the mountains" (Student 3, Poster).

Students verbalized feelings and suggested alternatives in class using the target language. The vocabulary and language forms required for this purpose were worked on in class through language workshops as illustrated in the following quotes and the use of the modal verb "should": "I learnt that we should take care of the environment by growing trees," "I learnt that we should clean our villages and nature." In these passages, "should" is used to express a moral obligation with nature, where planting trees, cleaning the towns, and caring about the land is a task everyone should be a part of. The use of the pronoun "we" included themselves and others as part of the solution. It showed how pupils, after taking part in actions, adopted new ideas and behaviors through sharing their messages with others.

In the same way, this feeling is reaffirmed in the teacher's narrative about the students' impressions:

> It was meaningful for them to see why it is necessary to take care of the environment as it was really shocking for them to see the burnt mountains, because they had expressed worry about the environment; but with this visit they really could see the damage humans can cause to the land, and to the mountains where they and their families live and use what they need for living. (Teacher's journal)

The teacher discerned her students' feelings in the expression "meaningful for them," representing what could be observed, the significance of the experiences, and how the activity impacted the students in their heart and minds. The teacher realized that this activity was not just another class exercise, but rather something that connected students with their realities and led them to do something about the issues raised.

All through the process, families and the community changed their way of thinking and acting. After introducing global warming issues in class and connecting them to the fires that were damaging the villages, families designed a poster in English inviting members of the village to help take care of the environment.

> Take care of our water resources by saying no to the mining industry and hydroelectric plants, less fumigations with glyphosate. More healthy lives. (Message from Family 2, Student 23)
>
> Take care of the natural resources to avoid burning and deforestation. (Message from Family 3, Student 27)

Through these messages, families invited people to protect their primary natural resources such as water and the ecosystem to foster life, thus becoming aware of certain practices like fumigation, mining, deforestation, and the impact hydroelectric plants had on the land and crops. These families showed strong concerns about the land and nature, but at the same time suggested some ways to protect them. They showed growing awareness that every damaging effect to the environment around the world also altered their crop processes; produced shortages of water,

depletion of resources, and pollution; and affected their way of life.

Subsequently, during the inquiry, their own agency became a path for this community. Families and learners started to reshape environmental practices, as is evidenced in the following excerpts from the Focus Group:

> I see in my village...I have seen improvements because they see that the teacher gave us some commands it's due to maybe she sees something wrong…when I go there, I don't see the same…they have done it and applied it. (Student 2)
>
> In our village we felt proud, despite there were fires, after we did in the villages people stopped burning and started to recycle, there aren't much trash in the roads. (Student 5)

The perception of change is seen by the students in their families and communities, when a student described that she had noticed an improvement in her town, with the expression, "when I go there, I don't see the same...they have done it and applied it" which reflects actions that transformed certain habits. Likewise, another student expressed how proudly their people had stopped practices like burning and littering. Families' actions moved from promoting changes or making decisions to taking real actions in favor of the environment. Some students demonstrated their concerns about how taking care of the land helps to preserve their surroundings. Moreover, learners' awareness was not just for helping a community member but also for contributing to environmental issues and changes as this statement makes clear: "After all, we do not help just one person, we also help to take care of others by helping the environment" (Student 3, Focus Group). Another participant declared how agency was converted into action: "We could grow trees, we shared food, we took care of the countryside, we recycled, we picked up garbage there, and we brought it back to put it in the right place" (Student 6, Focus Group). This quote represents the recognition of action when students began to apply the knowledge learnt in the classroom. The way they carried garbage from the farm they were visiting and the responsibility of bringing it back and putting it in the right places, showed a change in thinking, and in students' own sense of agency. Students learned to name and identify bad practices affecting the rivers and fields, like the improper disposal of cigarettes, and recounted how people stopped those negative actions to transform their village into a better place.

Students' experiences also began to favor not only the environment but also other members of the community. The following subcategory pictures how CBP motivated students to action in order to help one of their classmate's family who had suffered serious damage caused by the seasonal fires.

Helping Community Members

Students began to adopt community issues as theirs, taking action to meet the needs of the people, empathizing with their feelings and thereby strengthening their personal values. This understanding emerged during the classes when environmental issues around the world and country were being discussed. Participants started making connections about how their people were also victims of climate change, for example by witnessing how forest fires were affecting the region. The following excerpts from some students' artifacts reflect what learners understood from the visit to one of the farms in the region which was affected by the fires: "I learned it is very good to help people who need it, no matter where they come from or who they are" (Student 2, Poster); "I learned I should help my community and the people around me" (Student 14, Poster).

It seems that students were profoundly concerned, since they used expressions like "it is very good to help no matter who they are," and "I learned I should help my community." Students began to observe others' needs and decided to help, moving from feelings of sorrow to acts of solidarity. When one of their classmates told them how

a fire had burned their avocado plantation, they decided to devise strategies to provide support and proposed a visit to the farm in order to help clean the field and plant new trees. This was one of the students' most significant activities of the project. They experienced feelings of happiness because they were able to help others who were in need in their home villages: "In my case I felt happy to help someone, I feel proud because we could help, I was able to do something by helping, I helped someone who needed it" (Student 5, Focus Group). These excerpts also show the profound impact that helping someone from the community had on the students' lives. Agency was enacted by observing the community, identifying needs and situations, and taking actions to contribute meaningfully. The following excerpts, from the Focus Group, provide more illustrations about the deep feelings of happiness and enjoyment students experienced when helping a member of their community.

> That's true...we helped someone and he was happy because if we wouldn't have helped him, he would have to pay someone else, instead we helped him with love. . . We saw the farmer very happy. . .we motivated him. (Student 2)

After the students had helped the farmer, they discussed the visit and how the results of helping someone was full of a sense of gratification: First, it was an opportunity to express empathy with a member of the community who had lost their crops because of fire. Second, students observed the gratefulness of the farmer and perceived his positive reactions. They concluded it was worth the time and effort and they were pleased about the job they had done. Likewise, the teacher reiterated these feelings in the journal:

> One of the things that caught my attention was the love, thankfulness, and emotion students did the collage after the visit to the farmer . . . the visit to this farm helped learners to comprehend more deeply the importance of helping someone from the community . . . today we are helping the farmer and tomorrow it could be anyone of us, like today for you, tomorrow for me.

To sum up from the data analyzed above, we would argue that classrooms should be scenarios in which agency can be enacted through critical pedagogy. This decision requires teachers to open the doors to the exploration of students' communities in order to establish meaningful connections between language and students' needs and realities. We believe that teachers can enact students' agency by using their communities and their contexts as curricular sources in order to give meaning to language teaching, leading students to see themselves and others by analyzing situations or events they identify with. By doing so, students envisage themselves as members of a local community, acknowledge all the richness of their surroundings and the values they have as individuals. This may move them to see others, to see the conditions of the places where they live and respond by being informed about causes and effects and making decisions to improve their surroundings. In other words, enacting agency and engaging in actions that could contribute to the improvement of their setting. In this respect, individuals are a very important asset that communities can benefit from. When teachers connect agency and CBP, classrooms become places in which students' identity, contexts, families, and neighbors become visible, and their conditions become reasons for class discussions and reflections that result in achievable actions.

Discussion

The discussion chapter of this paper interprets the results of the study described earlier. It discusses the three subcategories: Understanding Who They Are as Farmers and Acting Accordingly, Moving Forward in Environmental Care, and Helping Community Members. Regarding the first subcategory, data revealed that through the exploration, students resignified their identity; when they saw themselves, in this case as farmers, and were able to make visible the richness and possibilities of their communities, they were

moved to reflection and decision making. Problems in their communities were understood as possibilities for change and improvement; in other words, agency was enacted. In this sense, it is worth recalling Duff's (2012) definition of agency explained above, as people's ability to make choices in order to achieve personal or social transformation. Students were able to take control of their practices and acted according to their appreciation for their lands. The preceding outcomes bring into focus the possibilities favored by agency for giving students a voice, a non-conventional voice (Kramsch & Lam, 1999) that is connected to personal purposes and that is not governed by subordination and powerlessness regarding the cultures of the target language. Rather, it offers "the opportunity for personal meanings, pleasure and power . . . Learners . . . construct their personal meanings at the boundaries between the native speaker's meanings and their own everyday life" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 238).

Agency is seen as a result of the exploration of the students' identity and language learning. Norton and Toohey (2011) define the concept of identity under a poststructuralist approach, which seeks to explore links between identity and learning a foreign language. They state that when students are provided with opportunities to explore their communities' issues, this serves as a catalyst for positioning themselves in imaginary communities where those problems could change, but instead of imagining them, they act in response to those issues in the communities and become aware of them. The perspectives on students' identity and communities described above demonstrate the multifaceted and multidimensional ways in which learners can be looked at. Thus, the inclusion of local communities may enable learners to see "how things are and have been but [also] how they could have been or how else they could be" (Kramsch, 1996, p. 3). The imaginative ingredient added to language learning is a critical aspect for understanding the research undertaken here since it is acknowledged that a community's culture is both real and imagined and is constantly mediated, interpreted, and recorded by language. Hence, as indicated by Kramsch (1996), language learning and teaching "[play] a crucial role not only in the construction of culture, but in the emergence of cultural change" (p. 3).

In like manner, the second category "Moving Forward in Environmental Care" and the third subcategory "Helping Community Members" are clear examples of how agency was enacted from the classrooms. Agency in the classroom is seen by van Lier (2010) as the way students make decisions, support others and themselves, and become conscious of the responsibility for one another's actions. In this respect, the exploration of the communities as rich spaces and sources for learning moved students to understand themselves as individuals and as social subjects aware of their own community realities and agents of change that can contribute to the welfare of the members of their community. This outcome underlines the variety of ways in which students can access new knowledge through joint problem spaces, inside and beyond the classroom, to reflect and construct meaning with their peers.

To sum up, the findings of this inquiry made the following evident: first, the possibility to make choices about environmental issues affecting the community; second, raising awareness about the effects of bad environmental practices on students' communities' rivers and land. Students' families and other members of the community were challenged to evaluate their practices and make decisions that ended up involving concrete actions. Third, exploring the community let students see their conditions and be moved to carry out concrete actions to benefit people in need, which evoked values such as empathy, solidarity, and partnership.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to examine students' agency while participating in the local community inquiry. Throughout the exploration, agency was enacted in the classroom as a process of self-awareness and decision-making. Students inquired about their community and were able to see issues that triggered not just the desire to promote changes but act in response to them. In this sense, students' agency was revealed in their actions that not only empowered their neighbors and surroundings but spread changes that would contribute to the welfare of the area as a whole.

Among other aspects, this study provides a valuable understanding of how language teaching and learning can be enriched in rural areas and how agency can be a result of exploring CBP. Usually, education in rural areas is associated with stigmas related to the lack of resources for teaching and the idea that students are not capable of taking on academic challenges, especially when it comes to learning other languages (Llambí-Insua & Pérez-Correa, 2007). Despite lacking resources for language learning, the participants of this study demonstrated they were able to use English to report and to communicate ideas related to their communities, practices, and problems (see Appendix B which illustrates students' writing). English was the means of instruction and discussion whereby students had plenty of opportunities to communicate their ideas. Language in this setting was more than an object of the study, it became a medium to read, understand, and react to their reality. In this sense, rural students saw English as part of their lives and made more sense of language learning.

In conclusion, when the classroom connects with students' realities, offers spaces for authentic reflection, and is closely related to their interests and daily life, the barriers of economics and distance fall away and learning increases in response to the interaction of new knowledge with the life, space, and people that are related to the students. These connections allowed students to learn about valuable resources that caused them not only to see themselves as farmers, but also their people and surroundings. They took actions that contributed to the welfare of the place where they lived, demonstrating commitment with this type of projects.

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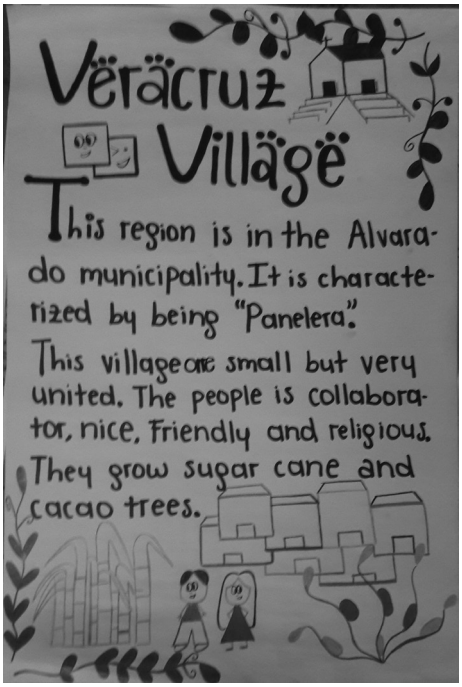
Appendix A: Class Planner Sample

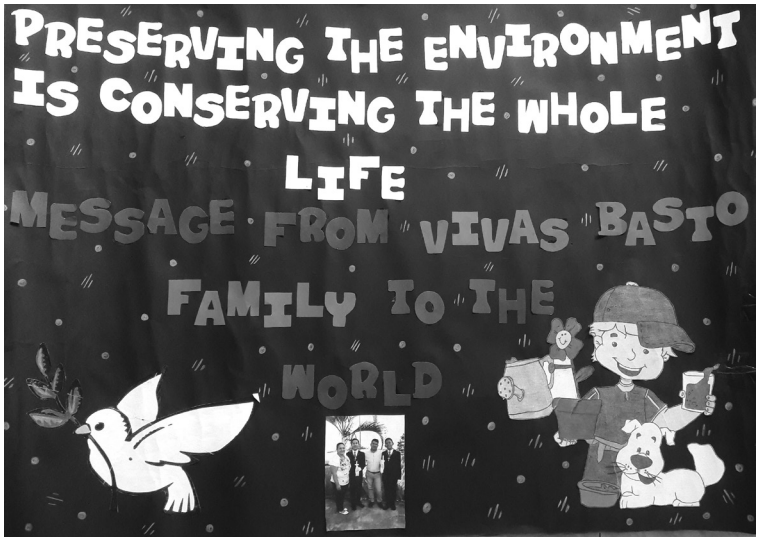
Weeks	Activities	Grammar and Vocabulary	Objectives	Curricular resources	Community resources	Products
7 and 8	Mapping our villages	Simple present, capital letter	To inquire about students' communities and surroundings	Students summarize information: reading about or listening to topics related to their school and academic surroundings	Students' photos and presentations	Village mapping and socialization
	Activity description Instructions about community mapping. Students bring the photos, organize them, and talk about their villages with the teacher. Then, the teacher models how to describe places. Finally, the students create a poster describing their villages.					

Weeks	Activities	Grammar and Vocabulary	Objectives	Curricular resources	Community resources	Products
12 and 13	Climate change	Sequence words, vocabulary about weather conditions	To foster awareness and critical thinking about the weather conditions that affect crops	Students exchange opinions on topics of personal, social, or academic interest in a natural and coherent manner, using familiar expressions	Students' interviews of farmers, crop processes	Mind maps Poster with family messages
	Activity description Discussion about climate change. Defining questions for the interviews. Analysis and reflection about the song. Students make a poster with a message from their families to people who promote climate change.					

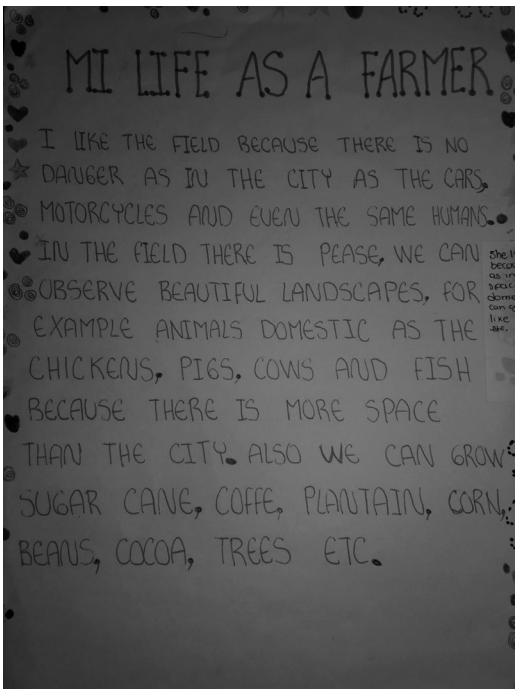
Appendix B: Students' Artifacts and Narratives

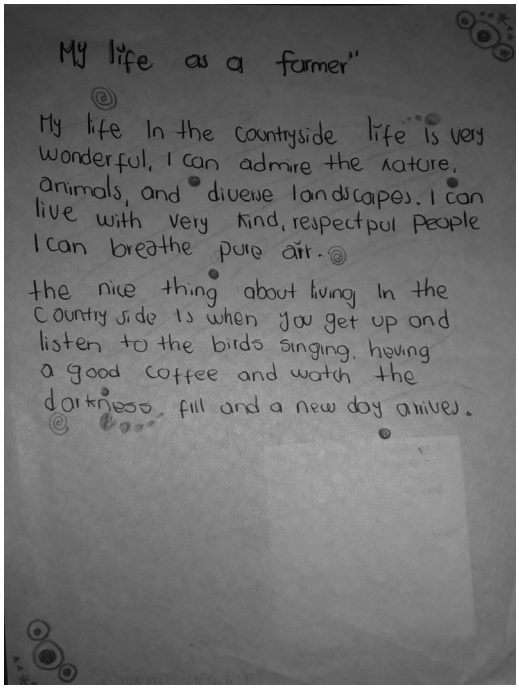
Posters





Narratives





Appendix C: Focus Group Questions and Class Questionnaire About the Project

Focus Group

1. What did you learn throughout the project?
2. How did you feel during the development of the project?
3. Do you feel that your level of English improved during the project? In what way?
4. How do you view your communities now? How do you see yourself within that community?

Questionnaire

1. What do you think about the project?
2. How would you like to continue working with the village project?
3. What other topics would you like to learn about in English class?

PROFILE

Issues from Novice Teacher Researchers

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Exploring EFL Teaching and Learning Processes in Two Undergraduate Mandatory Courses

Exploración de los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje en dos cursos de inglés obligatorios de pregrado

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This multiple case study explored the influence of English teachers' methodological practices over undergraduate students' learning processes in two English as a foreign language mandatory courses for different majors, at Universidad de Pamplona (Colombia). Data were gathered through non-participant observations, field notes, stimulated recall interviews, and semistructured interviews. Findings revealed that teacher-centeredness, the grammar-translation and audiolingual methods dominated the lessons; textbook-oriented classes with an emphasis on listening and writing characterized the courses; teacher and peer correction were encouraged; and classroom tasks and evaluation mostly focused on grammar and vocabulary. Although teachers had methodological practices, these influenced students' learning processes differently.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, learning, teaching, undergraduate students

Este estudio de caso múltiple exploró la influencia de las prácticas metodológicas de profesores de inglés sobre los procesos de aprendizaje de estudiantes universitarios de programas diferentes, en dos cursos obligatorios de inglés de la Universidad de Pamplona (Colombia). La información se recolectó por medio de observaciones no participantes, notas de campo, entrevistas de recuerdo estimulado y entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los resultados revelaron un predominio de las clases centradas en el profesor y orientadas por el libro, con énfasis en la comprensión oral y la producción escrita; el uso de los métodos de traducción gramatical y audio lingual; la corrección por parte del profesor y de pares; y tareas de clase y evaluaciones centradas en la gramática y el vocabulario. Dichas prácticas metodológicas influyeron de modos diferentes el proceso de aprendizaje de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje, enseñanza, estudiantes universitarios, inglés como lengua extranjera

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Introduction

English has become a significant language for use in professional, academic, social, and economic settings. In Colombia, for example, The Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, MEN) has implemented the National Bilingualism Program (Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo, PNB), to "improve [the country's] human capital and economic development by increasing participation in the largely English-speaking global economy" (British Council, 2015, p. 14). Therefore, the Colombian English language policy requires high standards of proficiency for university graduates.

Additionally, the MEN implemented standardized English proficiency tests as an exit requirement for undergraduate students to accomplish the B2 English level of the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001) before finishing their bachelors' degrees. Hence, to help students achieve such proficiency level, Universidad de Pamplona, for example, has implemented two more alternatives for those students who do not pursue a language degree: English free-access courses and English mandatory courses. The former includes five levels and lasts 12 weeks. The latter, which is the context of this study, is offered for the students doing careers in economics, philosophy, music, electronic engineering, and Bachelor of Arts in the Spanish language and communications programs. The English mandatory courses option consists of three or four levels—depending on the degree—with an intensity of 64 hours each course (Agreement 023, 2014). Thus, by successfully accomplishing any of these two alternatives, undergraduate students at this university will be exempted from taking the proficiency test required by the MEN because they will be granted the required B2 level when finishing their degrees.

Campo-Barrios (2017) studied the influence of non-linguistic factors in the English learning process only within the English free-access courses in this same university. Conversely, the present study focuses on the English as a foreign language (EFL) mandatory courses as an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the conditions and the effectiveness of these alternatives. Thus, we analyzed the teaching practices and learning processes following Wang's (2009) teaching perspectives: instructional approaches, language pedagogy, use of textbooks, student modality, error correction, and classroom tasks. Additionally, we included a seventh factor: evaluation.

This study aimed at answering the following questions:

1. What type of methodological practices do teachers adopt when teaching English in mandatory universities' courses?
2. How do teachers' methodological practices influence their students' English learning processes?

The purpose was to explore the English language teaching practices along with their influence over the learning processes experienced by two groups of mixed undergraduate students from the programs mentioned above.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, we will define the six aspects of Wang's (2009) teaching perspectives and an additional factor: evaluation.

Wang's Teaching Perspectives

In order to answer the research questions, we analyzed the participating teachers' methodologies and followed Wang's (2009) teaching perspectives:

- *Instructional approaches* are "the way in which students are taught and are organized" (Wang, 2009, p. 36). Wang differentiates between two basic types of instructional approach: teacher-centered and student-centered. She relates teacher-centeredness to teachers who play the role of transmitter of knowledge and controller of activities. In the former, teachers are seen as providers of information in the

classroom; in the latter, they design, organize, and manage every single classroom activity. Conversely, in student-centeredness the role of the teacher is "to facilitate learning, and to foster responsibility and autonomy among learners" (p. 56) for them to participate in the classes. In our study, we explored how each of these variants influenced students' learning process.

- *Language pedagogy* "refers to how a language is taught" (Wang, 2009, p. 40). Wang links this term with approaches that are "theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practicing principles in language teaching" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 16) and methods, "an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, pp. 15–l6). We identified which methods or approaches informed our participating teachers' language pedagogy.
- *Use of textbooks*, according to Wang (2009), these "guide[s] teachers' lectures to impart knowledge systematically and logically" (p. 46) to make the teaching and learning processes fully effective. Subsequently, the present study focused on identifying whether and how textbooks guided teachers' methodological practices within the EFL mandatory courses.
- *Student's modality*, that is defined by Richards and Schmidt (2002, as cited in Wang, 2009) as "the mode or manner in which language is used" (p. 489), through the four language skills. We identified whether listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills were used together or separately.
- *Error correction*, understood as "feedback in response to learners' errors in second language acquisition" (Wang, 2009, p. 47). Debreli and Onuk (2016) propose three different error correction approaches: peer correction, self-correction, and teacher correction. We wanted to identify which of the three was more prevalent in the settings under study.
- *Classroom tasks*, which are "basic unit[s] of classroom activity-interaction, purposely designed to control and regulate the teaching of meaning, focused so as to achieve a particular goal and outcome" (Wang, 2009, p. 593). As a result, we analyzed the contribution of classroom tasks to the learning of EFL within the mandatory courses.

Additionally, we also focused on evaluation, defined as a way to quantify students' learning processes through tools such as tests or exams wherein assessment involves a reflective element to help identify the effectiveness of such learning process (Álvarez, 2003, as cited in Rodríguez-Ferreira, 2009).

Literature Review

In this section, we briefly review some studies focused on EFL teaching and learning processes in university settings.

Teachers' Methodological Practices in EFL Education at Universities

There are several studies that deal with teaching methodologies and practices in the EFL arena including influential teaching factors and error correction approaches. In Colombia, recent studies have found that English language teaching at some universities is dominated by some methodologies focused mainly on grammar instruction (Jiménez et al., 2017; Pavas-Amado, 2017; Sánchez-Solarte et al., 2017). Perhaps one exception to such tendency was identified by Posada-Ortiz and Patiño-Garzón (2007), who studied the EFL teaching methodology at Universidad del Valle and found that it was based on cooperative learning and the communicative approach. Second, Bastidas (2017), who investigated methods and approaches in EFL teaching in Colombian history, found that, mostly, the

methodologies have been textbook-oriented. Similarly, in India and China, for instance, authors showed that textbooks are still being used as the main teaching material in EFL classrooms (Radić-Bojanić & Topalov, 2016; Wang, 2009).

Regarding teaching factors affecting students' English learning processes, in Asia, for example, Güneş (2011) and Nguyen et al. (2014) found that grammar-based instruction, uninteresting teaching styles, and insufficient time for practicing the target language hindered undergraduate students' learning processes. Additionally, Anwar (2017) and Quezada-Sarmiento et al. (2017; a study conducted in Ecuador) concluded that teachers' lack of training and overuse of the mother tongue obstructed the learning processes. Two resembling factors were corroborated in the Colombian context by Pavas-Amado (2017), who revealed that grammar-driven instruction and inexperienced teachers inhibited learners' English learning processes.

Tertiary Education Students' Learning Experiences in EFL Courses

In Colombia, undergraduate students have perceived the English language as an essential tool for their professional development, communicative real-life situations management, and knowing about other cultures (Bailey, 2017; Gómez-Paniagua, 2017).

Concerning students' perceptions of teachers' methodological practices, Sánchez-Solarte et al. (2017) and Jiménez et al. (2017) found that students perceive English language teaching methodologies as too focused on grammar subjects. Likewise, In Kourieos and Evripidou's (2013) and Ağçam and Babanoğlu's (2016) studies, findings revealed that Cypriot and Turkish students disapproved of grammar instruction or the use of textbooks in EFL teaching. In contrast, Fereidoni et al. (2018) contradicted the aforementioned outcomes, in view of Iranian students' preference for the grammar-translation method and coursebooks with grammar content. Furthermore, Chien (2014) revealed that the grammar-translation method and the communicative language teaching and collaborative learning approaches worked effectively for university students' enhancement of the four language skills and grammatical knowledge.

Considering research on students' attitudes and perceptions on error correction in European higher education contexts, Kavaliauskienė and Anusienė (2012) and Kourieos and Evripidou (2013) demonstrated that students preferred the teacher's immediate correction. In Chile, Westmacott (2017) found that students favored the teacher's indirect and coded feedback because it contributed to their cognition.

In terms of undergraduate students' preferences on classroom activities, Samperio-Sanchez (2017) indicated that Mexican students favored listening, grammar-based, and drilling activities. Conversely, Ağçam and Babanoğlu's (2016) study demonstrated Turkish students' inclination for speaking activities.

Method

Design

This study was guided under a constructivist research paradigm given that, according to Lather (1992) and Robottom and Hart (1993): "Participants are able to describe their vantage points of reality which allows the researcher to better understand the participants' actions" (as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 4). This study adopted a multiple case study "in which multiple cases are described and compared to provide insight into an issue" (Creswell, 2005, p. 439). The two groups in charge of each participating teacher represent the two cases under study.

Context and Participants

This research was conducted at Universidad de Pamplona, a public university in Colombia, during the first semester of 2019. We studied two third level EFL undergraduate mandatory courses. These courses

used the *World English 2* textbook, level B2, and had a duration of 64 hours. After having reviewed the timetables of three potential groups, we decided to study Group A and Group C due to their availability. Both groups had students from the music, electronic engineering, and economics degree programs as well as from the Bachelor of Arts in Spanish language and communications programs. In total, there were 58 students: 38 students in Group A and 20 students in Group C; however, following Creswell's (2012) simple random sampling, we selected 10 students from Group A and nine from Group C to be interviewed. This sampling technique allowed participants the same probability to represent the population under study. To protect the participants' identity, we provided them with pseudonyms, as follows: Margaret, the teacher from Group A, holds a BA in foreign language; her students were labelled with the letter A and a number (e.g., Participant A1). Frank, the teacher from Group C, holds a specialization degree in translation with an emphasis on English to Spanish; his students were labelled with the letter C and a number (e.g., Participant C1).

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected through four instruments:

- six non-participants observations in each classroom (Creswell, 2012);
- the corresponding field-notes to register relevant data from participants;
- semistructured interviews with each teacher and with the previously selected students; and
- two stimulated recall interviews (SRI-1 and SRI-2), which refer to the "'self-reporting technique' in which audio and/or video records of participant[s] . . . are used to stimulate recall of concurrently occurring internal thought processes (Marland et al., 1984, as cited in Wang, 2009, p. 97). We recorded two lessons from each teacher. While students and teachers were interviewed, we played back some segments to stimulate their reflections on particular learning and teaching actions.

Findings

Data were analyzed qualitatively following Hatch's (2002) interpretative analysis which "details a way to transform data that emphasizes interpretation" (p. 179). In doing so, we analyzed and interpreted the data gathered in light of two aspects: first, the research questions about the participating teachers' methodological practices and their influence on students' English learning processes; second, Wang's (2009) teaching perspectives along with evaluation.

Instructional Approaches

Regarding the way in which students were taught and organized (Wang, 2009), the teacher-centered approach dominated the teaching and learning processes in both groups since teachers played three main roles: transmitters of knowledge, controllers of activities, and monitors. In addition to these roles, one teacher also assumed the role of a manager (Archana & Usharani, 2016). The student-centered approach was slightly reflected through pair work, group work, and elicitation, that is, "any technique or procedure that is designed to get a person to actively produce speech or writing" (Richards & Schmidt, 2014, p. 191).

Teacher-Centered Approach

Teacher-centeredness was reflected in teachers' lecturing when they explained the grammar topics, gave instructions of the activities, and provided students with advice. Coupled with this, Frank behaved as a manager and Margaret dictated grammar concepts in Spanish and gave commands in order to maintain students' discipline during the explanation of the topics.

Transmitter of Knowledge Role. Margaret and Frank explained the grammar topics mostly in Spanish while standing in front of the class and using the board.

Participants, on their own, regarded their teachers as the prior source of knowledge, as Participant A2 stated: "I think that [the teacher] has lots of knowledge and masters the topics"[1]; and as the one responsible for correcting their errors and grammar mistakes (Interview).

Monitor Role. Both teachers tended to walk around the classroom during the development of activities to check students' progress and to assist them with any questions. According to Frank, for example, when he resorted to this role, he "allowed the students to gain some confidence." Additionally, he stated: "When I explain a topic, a lot of questions emerge and when I approach the students, they are able to ask questions they did not ask in front of the group." As a result, the students benefited from this role because, as Participant C7 explained: "The teacher shows interest in the learning processes," along with the development of the activities (SRI-1).

Controller of Activities Role. In this role, both teachers controlled the completion of activities by reading aloud the instructions and carefully explaining them in Spanish. Although Frank sometimes initiated the activities by revealing the first answers of the worksheets, both teachers concluded by revising students' work and, sometimes, collecting their worksheets. This role limited students to pronouncing isolated words and hindered their interaction during the activities.

Apart from the aforementioned shared major roles, Frank played the role of a manager. His students perceived him as rigorously organized and aligned with the stipulated time for the development of the lessons. Frank's students suggested that the lessons should have exhibited more flexible timing of activities and the topics explained more thoroughly.

Student-Centered Approach

Margaret commented that she continuously elicited students' understanding of a topic by asking questions about it in Spanish. Similarly, Frank explained that he implemented this technique to refresh students' knowledge about grammar rules and structures, in Spanish as well. Indeed, during the six observations, Frank constantly elicited the correct use of grammar rules from the students, while revising homework and introducing new topics. Furthermore, he also elicited the correct pronunciation of isolated words. In both groups, only 10% of the participants answered teachers' questions by providing isolated vocabulary and short phrases, mostly in Spanish.

Pair work and group work were also promoted during the development of classroom activities. Eighty percent of the participants from both groups agreed that this sort of arrangement allowed them to help and support each other since they perceived the third level course as complex, as Participant A5 stated: "Two heads are better than one" (SRI-2). However, 10% of Margaret's students regularly favored pair work and group work because, sometimes, not every member of the group was actively involved; only one or two students completed the activity. Participant A7 explained: "It depends on each person, if they cheat and let the others do everything or if they help" (SRI-2). Therefore, Participant A10 suggested: "[Pair work] is a good method but it should not be used all the time" (SRI-2). Therefore, according to students, individual work was also needed for showing their particular language abilities. Although Frank encouraged pair work when students had long worksheets to complete, he also asked them to work individually because, as he remarked, "during pair work, one student may work more than the other one, which is not equitable" (SRI-1).

Language Pedagogy

Language pedagogy was associated with use of the grammar-translation and the audiolingual methods.

Grammar-Translation Method

The way the two teachers used the grammar-translation method was reflected by deductive grammar,

1 Excerpts have been translated from Spanish.

use of the mother tongue, use of translation, and a focus on reading and writing skills. In both groups, teachers placed a major emphasis on grammar and vocabulary.

Margaret explained the grammar topics traditionally, in Spanish, while practicing eliciting with the students. Afterwards, she would ask them to complete class activities related to the grammar subject and vocabulary learnt in previous lessons. She carried out the explanations explicitly, focusing on the structure of sentences and the meaning of words using the board. Likewise, Frank introduced new grammar topics, explained structures of sentences, carried out activities based on grammar by delivering worksheets, and assigned homework. Participant C6 affirmed that: "As we are taught new grammar rules each class, [Frank] provides us with a sentence for us to compare and implement the grammar rules such as 'used to' or the passive voice" (Interview).

Both teachers used the mother tongue as a medium of instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) and communication when they explained a topic, asked and answered students' questions, dissipated learners' doubts, and corrected their mistakes. Additionally, Margaret dictated grammar concepts and gave commands and instructions in Spanish about the activities. Although Frank clarified instructions in Spanish as well, he tried to use the target language when greeting students at the beginning of the lessons and when giving short commands such as "sit down" or "silence." Both teachers explained that using the target language was a challenge due to students' low proficiency levels. This was corroborated in most of the observations since students from both groups seemed to be confused when the teachers uttered short statements in English during the development of the lessons.

Teachers also translated examples they gave during the explanations, as well as the ones provided by the textbook in its grammar boxes. Although they both asked students to translate isolated vocabulary from English to Spanish, Frank sometimes asked for the translation of short sentences from Spanish to English and assigned homework based on translation of complex texts taken from the textbook units.

Furthermore, as characteristic of the grammar-translation method, Margaret mostly focused on the reading and writing skills given that most of classroom activities were based on reading short texts and practicing students' writing through grammar and open-ended question exercises. Consequently, learners' oral participation was always limited to saying isolated words, grammar rules, and short phrases as answers to activities.

Participants from both groups perceived the use of the grammar-translation method differently. In Margaret's group, 60% of the participants considered grammar-focus classes as boring because of basic and repetitive topics. Conversely, 90% of Frank's participants perceived the teaching of grammar rules and linguistic structures as essential to learn EFL. Both teachers and a few of the participating students agreed that there was a benefit in using the mother tongue and translation in class, as Participant A8 stated, "the use of the mother tongue in class is necessary because I would understand nothing otherwise" (Interview). Nonetheless, 10% of the participants called for the alternation of the target language and the mother tongue in order for them to become familiar with the English language and enhance their pronunciation along with the listening and speaking skills. Participant A1 expressed his dislike in this situation by arguing that: "It is an error to give the lessons in Spanish because we are in the third level of English" (Interview). This evidence shows that participants did not favor the frequent use of Spanish and translation during the lessons.

Audiolingual Method

Frank used the audiolingual method as he focused a great percentage of his lessons on memorization and repetition of dialogues, isolated words, and short phrases (Celce-Murcia, 1979, as cited in Brown, 1994).

After grammar explanations, he always asked students to first listen attentively to the audios of native speakers provided by the textbook. Then, he asked them to repeat the dialogues or words mentally, and finally, to repeat them in unison, in pairs, and individually several times. During one interview, Frank explained that he implemented the above-mentioned sequence in each class due to two main reasons:

> To listen to [the students] in order to know whether they have worked [on pronunciation] at home or not [and] to provide the students with the pronunciation of new words…given that this was the vocabulary that would be addressed in the textbook unit. (SRI-1)

With reference to Frank's participants' perceptions about his use of the audiolingual method, 80% of them agreed with the frequency in which the teacher trained their pronunciation through drilling exercises. Participant C7 stated: "It is good because drilling generates learning" (SRI-2). However, this method was also perceived as monotonous and exhausting. "The teacher spends a lot of time in pronunciation of isolated words, and it is exhausting. We need more participation in class, through conversations, for example" (Participant C10, SRI-2). Bearing this in mind, this method also restricted learners' participation.

Use of Textbooks

The third level of EFL mandatory courses required the use of the textbook World English 2 that featured content from National Geographic and TED talks. The book is built upon the competency-based approach. It comprises 12 units that integrate the four skills as well as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and includes a workbook section at the end.

In both courses, the textbook guided teachers' methodological practices. While being interviewed, Margaret and Frank explained that they planned their lessons based on the contents and objectives provided by the textbook. They adapted classroom activities such as gap filling and matching and reading comprehension exercises based on the book.

In contrast to Margaret's strategy, Frank based the development of the classes entirely on the completion of the textbook units on several occasions. He first explained the topics by referring to the grammar boxes in the book and provided the students with vocabulary related to the units. Then he allowed his students to complete some exercises in the interactive textbook CD-ROM.

Considering the influence of the textbook on their learning processes, Margaret and Frank's students generally perceived this teaching resource as interesting and good. This was because the textbook contained exercises integrating the four language competences, provided students with broad vocabulary, and helped reinforce the topics learnt in class. However, 80% of the participants from both groups thought that the textbook was basic and had a low grammar focus. Frank spent most of the time using the textbook during his lessons, resulting in two students stating that it made the classes monotonous and annoying. Participant C6 suggested that: "It would be good to use teaching resources different from the textbook" (Interview). This suggestion was also given by Margaret's students since they considered the book as boring.

Students' Modality

Taking into account that students' modalities refer to how the language is used through the four language skills, teachers in both groups worked on them separately.

Writing Skills

In Margaret's group, writing was one of the skills she centered the class on. Generally, she first explained the grammar topic according to the textbook and then asked the students to complete written exercises to practice the topic. Participants agreed that she placed a major emphasis on students' writing skill during the development of the lessons. Participant A1 stated:

> Well, at the beginning of the course, [the teacher] had told us: "Well, we are going to work on listening, speaking, writing"...but...we have not seen anything of that, just writing. No audios, nothing like that...just photocopies or activities from the book. (Interview)

Margaret affirmed that she regularly asked students to write short paragraphs and to answer simple questions about diverse grammar topics and vocabulary prompted by the textbook. However, she usually asked students to write such paragraphs at home. She only worked on writing during class when asking students to develop grammar exercises in which they had to fill in blanks and, sometimes, answer reading comprehension questions.

For Margaret, practicing writing in this way may have had a positive influence on students given that she pointed out: "While I was revising some written productions, I got surprised because many of them were really good…and also because coherence was great and there [was neither] spelling nor word order mistakes" (Interview).

Listening Skills

Frank prioritized listening skills through the development of oral comprehension exercises based on gap filling and following the pre-, while, and after listening stages. It was customary for Frank to play audios in which native British people pronounced isolated vocabulary and short utterances, and video-journals with subtitles provided by the textbook. He preferred to work on the receptive skills (listening and reading) since they were "easier to control and maintain students concentrated while reading or listening." This was somehow reflected during observations as students were only exposed to listening attentively to the audios, followed by controlled oral activities in which Frank asked them to drill or pronounce certain words or dialogues. According to Participant C9, "focusing on the listening skill helped us improve our pronunciation, intonation, and vocalization of words." Therefore, 90% of Frank's participants favored a listening emphasis.

Reading Skills

Margaret and Frank implemented reading exercises provided by the textbook. Margaret, for example, asked students to mostly read and answer open-ended questions related to a text, in pairs or groups. Frank also taught this skill when asking students to read the texts that introduced each textbook unit, in order to translate them into Spanish as homework.

Speaking Skills

Although the speaking skill was not sufficiently taught in both groups, Margaret and Frank related its teaching with drilling, reading texts aloud, and asking students for responses or pronunciation. As Margaret's students expressed, they practiced the spoken English language when she asked them to read short utterances or answer grammar exercises aloud. As a result, they perceived these strategies only as an opportunity to pronounce words and sentences in isolation. Frank explained that the principal drawbacks when practicing the speaking skill were the number of students and time constraints that hindered the possibility to provide students with conversational practices. He explained that he would have emphasized this skill only if he had "monitored [speaking activities] with no more than four or five students and with a sufficient amount of time" (Interview).

All the participants from both groups equally called for the integration of the four skills and more practice of oral and writing skills inside the classroom. They suggested developing their speaking skills through discussions around different topics and interaction with their partners instead of focusing on grammar all the time. Participant A4 suggested "making a balance between the two [skills], as much as speaking as writing…and listening. The four [skills]. Taking into

account that pronunciation is not emphasized at all" (SRI-2). This evidences students' need for working on all the four language skills in an integrated way rather than separately.

Error Correction

The way the participating teachers corrected students' mistakes can be considered from three aspects: approach, timing (immediately or delayed), and manner (implicitly or explicitly).

Approach

Margaret and Frank implemented different error correction approaches according to those proposed by Debreli and Onuk (2016). Margaret claimed that she supported teacher-correction and did not encourage self-correction or peer-correction, due to students' low proficiency levels to correct their own mistakes. When learners read their answers from grammar and reading comprehension exercises, Margaret corrected their pronunciation mistakes by reading aloud the correct answers with the appropriate pronunciation to enable students to listen attentively to the accurate articulation of English words and phrases. Moreover, when students approached Margaret's desk to show their written answers from grammar exercises, she corrected the mistakes individually by giving them hints, providing examples, and explaining how to correct them. According to Participant A2:

> [Teacher-correction] seems good in the sense that she gives an example. Well, in my case I dissipate doubts as well. When I don't understand something, she gives me an example, and if I don't understand, I ask her again and she dissipates my doubts. I mean, no matter how many times I ask, she clarifies my doubts again. (Interview)

In this way, 80% of participants favored individual teacher-correction when they approached Margaret to check their answers.

On the other hand, Frank encouraged peer-correction and self-correction since he preferred to let students become aware of their own mistakes. He corrected students' pronunciation through the support of audios. He first listened attentively to students' performances, then asked the whole class to repeat the correct pronunciation. After replaying the audio, the students corrected themselves by listening to the native speakers. If students continued pronouncing incorrectly, he asked other students, in English, to give their opinion on their classmates' mistakes. For instance, on several occasions, Frank asked them: "what do you think, is it correct or incorrect?", and then wrote on the board the mispronounced word or phrase and asked students to pronounce it accurately. Peer-correction was highly favored by most students. They expressed their preference for this practice since they felt less intimidated and less exposed so they could correct their mistakes individually instead of in front of the whole group.

Timing (Immediate or Delayed)

There were a few circumstances in which students used the target language orally in class. Margaret rarely corrected students' speech mistakes. In contrast, Frank emphasized students' pronunciation. However, when interviewing Margaret, she highlighted that she corrected students' oral mistakes immediately when reading a text or answering questions aloud. According to Participant A9, the teacher barely corrected their oral mistakes. As he stated: "Just the other day, when she asked us to read what we had done, and then, I read it and she did not correct me" (SRI-2). This participant also argued that Margaret seldom corrected their speech or pronunciation because there were simply not enough opportunities to speak.

Conversely, since Frank focused on pronunciation, participants stated that there were several times in which the teacher corrected their pronunciation mistakes,

mostly, once they had finished their speech. This was differently perceived by his participants, as 80% of them favored immediate correction. For example, Participant C9 stated: "I prefer the teacher to correct my mistakes immediately because, in this way, I realize my mistake at the moment, and not at the end. Maybe, I can forget it" (Interview). Twenty percent of Frank's students preferred the teacher to correct their pronunciation mistakes after their speech. As explained by Participant C2: "I feel comfortable with the way in which the teacher corrects errors" (Interview).

Manner (Implicit or Explicit)

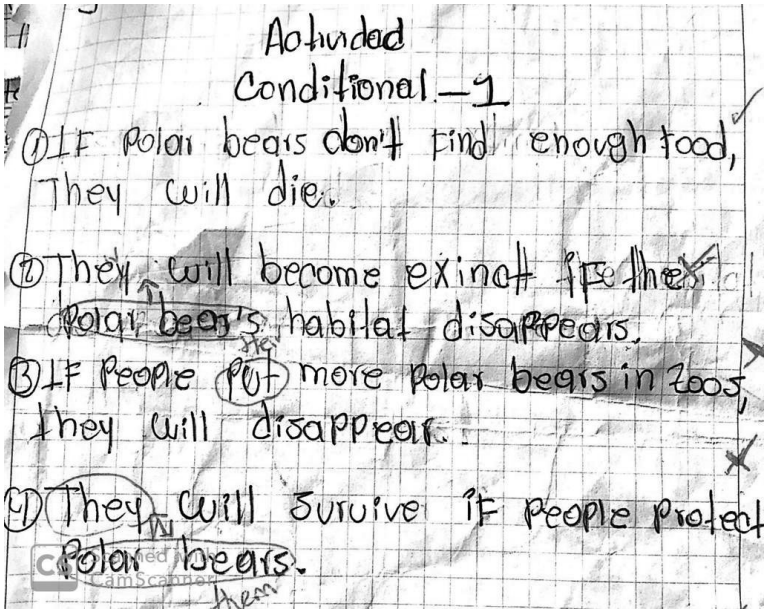
Although Margaret preferred explicit corrections, Frank favored implicit corrections. For example, Margaret directly explained the mistakes she spotted while students completed grammar and reading comprehension exercises. Moreover, in written productions, she corrected students' errors explicitly by underlining students' mistakes (see Figure 1) and specifying whether they were misspellings, misused words, or incorrect grammar.

Conversely, Frank pointed out students' mistakes implicitly. For instance, during students' speech, he encouraged implicit correction when he allowed them to realize their own mistakes. During the development of grammar exercises, he asked students to re-read and review their sentences for them to spot the grammar mistakes by themselves.

Classroom Tasks

In both groups, we identified that teachers favored grammar exercises similarly (e.g., gap filling, matching, and circling exercises). There were a few other tasks characteristically used by each teacher. Margaret affirmed that she asked students to complete gap filling exercises and identify the error in a list of incorrect sentences in order for them to understand the appropriate way of

Figure 1. Margaret's Explicit Correction of a Student's Text



using the grammar topics previously learnt. Additionally, her students confirmed having completed reading comprehension exercises such as "true or false" and open-ended questioning related to the texts; matching exercises, in which they had to connect some concepts with different nouns; and unscrambling exercises.

In addition, 90% of the participants perceived that although the textbook was the usual source for such exercises, they were good but repetitive. They stated that those exercises did not provide them with enough capabilities to be able to practice such knowledge later through speaking or listening activities. Margaret acknowledged having brought different activities to the class when those from the textbook seemed repetitive. During some classroom observations, for instance, she asked the students to answer open-ended questions based on flashcards with first conditional sentences and to complete a crossword based on identifying the correct vocabulary on a text about giving advice. She also asked students to perform a short oral presentation, in Spanish, in which they were asked to briefly explain the modal verbs "must" and "have to."

Margaret's students perceived the crossword, for example, as good, creative, and fun because it included reading comprehension and helped them to learn vocabulary. However, 90% of them argued that this activity was extremely complex because of non-contextualized words. They confirmed that the oral presentation allowed them to learn the topics better since they first had to look for the information by themselves and then present it to their classmates. Besides, it also enabled them to pronounce certain words when giving examples in English. However, during this activity, some students seemed nervous while waiting for the one who would be selected to explain the topic in front of the classmates.

Moreover, Frank's students agreed that classroom activities were based on translating texts, listening to audios about dialogues and repeating them. They also did gap filling, matching, and multiple-choice exercises, and sometimes, reading comprehension exercises such as "true or false" and open-ended questioning. They affirmed that the repetition of audios helped them remember and get used to the correct pronunciation of certain words and identify new vocabulary. However, they occasionally got confused when listening to native speakers' pronunciation since it was sometimes difficult to comprehend. Ninety percent of Frank's students perceived this activity as monotonous due to the amount of time Frank played the same audio. As Participant C7 stated: "He wastes a lot of time of the class on pronunciation…so he says that we have to save time by listening to an audio three times and then repeating it once again, which makes it monotonous" (SRI-2).

Evaluation

The participating teachers stated that the main emphasis of students' evaluation was on grammar and vocabulary. Although their evaluation practices were aligned with the university evaluation system (15% to tests and classroom activities and 20% to final exams for each school term), they evaluated their students differently. Frank usually evaluated the content from the textbook through listening comprehension. For example, students listened to a passage three times and then completed blanks by writing down missing words. Although this practice was regarded as very basic and easy, 70% of his students approved it. However, 30% of them perceived it as difficult because of the complex pronunciation of the speakers. For instance, Participant C8 argued: "It is unfair to evaluate listening when the teacher's pronunciation is way too different from the audios" (SRI-2). This demonstrated their dislike for this evaluative practice. In addition, Frank tried to integrate the four language competences in which listening was evaluated the same way as the tests mentioned before. The competences were: speaking, with a 25-question questionnaire that required students to translate and unscramble sentences orally; reading

comprehension, through true or false exercises; and writing, by means of gap filling exercises.

In contrast, Margaret centered students' evaluation solely on grammar exercises. However, Participant A1 stated that "at the beginning of the semester . . . she told [us] that she would evaluate the four [language] competences" (Interview). She also evaluated students' understanding of grammar through the various class activities (e.g., crosswords, open-ended questions, true or false questions related to a specific text, and gap-filling exercises).

Generally, participants from both groups earned better grades during class activities than the ones of the final exams.

Conclusion

With regard to teaching methodologies, as in Wang's (2009) research, the participating teachers of this study favored a teacher-centered approach. Although in Wang, the teacher centeredness was reflected only in two roles (transmitter of knowledge and controller of activities), in our study teachers played three main roles when teaching EFL.

Teachers were *transmitters of knowledge* and, as characteristic of grammar translation, both of them taught grammar deductively. They explicitly focused on the structure of sentences and translated them into Spanish due to the students' target language low proficiency. This panorama has not changed much since, according to some studies, English language teaching at some universities in Colombia is focused mainly on grammar instruction (Jiménez et al., 2017; Pavas-Amado, 2017; Sánchez-Solarte et al., 2017). Finally, it was also evidenced that they taught language skills separately placing major emphasis on writing and reading comprehension.

Teachers *monitored* their students' progress paying close attention to the way they completed class assignments while interacting in Spanish. They perceived the use of the mother tongue more beneficial and effective for giving instructions, answering questions, explaining grammar, and correcting mistakes.

Teachers *controlled* the way the students responded to classroom activities from the beginning to the completion of them. They frequently used the textbook as the main source of knowledge and upon which to base their class tasks. In a way, this echoed Bastidas's (2017) and Posada-Ortiz and Patiño-Garzón's (2007) studies in the sense that the teaching of English in Colombia has been textbook-oriented. The teachers mostly used textbooks to teach grammar structures and gap-filling exercises. Additionally, one of the teachers favored the audiolingual method as he provided students with several opportunities to practice listening and drilling activities.

Along with Wang's (2009) perspectives, this study examined the teachers' evaluative practices. It was clear that the approaches they followed strongly marked the way they evaluated. With respect to the grammar-translation method, it was common that students translated reading passages. Both teachers evaluated the skills in isolation and included grammar as a key component of the quizzes and final exams. Sometimes, students were even asked to orally translate isolated sentences from English to Spanish and vice versa. As characteristic of the audiolingual method, one of the teachers evaluated listening and speaking on the final exams.

With regard to learning processes, these were largely influenced by the teachers' practices, the use of the textbook, and the use of Spanish as a means of teaching. Although the participating teachers' practices offered the students low involvement in class activities, all the students succeeded at learning different language structures and new vocabulary. Although these courses aimed at acquiring a B2 English level, the participating teachers were aware of the difficulties most of the students faced due to their low language proficiency.

The students mostly played a passive role. However, sometimes pair and group work and elicitation exercises allowed them to actively participate in class.

Although the students generally considered the textbook as interesting and good, its frequent use was perceived as monotonous and boring. This makes sense as the teachers planned their lessons based on the contents and objectives of the book and adjusted classroom activities to it. As for the use of the mother tongue, most students agreed that the use of Spanish in class eased their understanding. This may contradict somehow Quezada-Sarmiento et al.'s (2017) study in which the use of the mother tongue constrained the learning processes.

Further Research and Limitations

We hope that these findings may foster further research on how English is taught to those who do not pursue a foreign language degree. Similarly, findings from this study support the need for more conclusive research that includes students' learning preferences.

We faced some limitations related to participants and time. For instance, a few of the students did not attend some interviews due to their schedules and occupations. Besides, considering the academic semester duration, we feel that the number of observations and interviews we did were a hindrance to describe in-depth the issue under study.

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Teachers' Assessment Approaches Regarding EFL Students' Speaking Skill

Enfoques de evaluación de los maestros con respecto a la habilidad oral de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera

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This paper reports an exploratory and descriptive qualitative study on speaking assessment approaches in a teacher education program at a Colombian university. The study aimed to explore how four in-service English language teachers approach the assessment of students' speaking skill. The data were gathered through classroom observations, interviews, and documentary analysis. Results revealed teachers' preference for summative assessment practices to determine students' progress regarding speaking. As a conclusion, teacher professional development in terms of language assessment may be seen as an alternative to develop significant assessment processes where students, teachers, and the institution can be benefited.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, speaking assessment, teacher education, university students

Este artículo informa acerca de un estudio cualitativo, exploratorio y descriptivo sobre enfoques evaluativos del habla en un programa de formación docente en una universidad colombiana. El estudio exploró cómo cuatro maestros de inglés abordan la evaluación de la habilidad del habla de los estudiantes. Los datos se recopilaron mediante observaciones, entrevistas y análisis documental. Los resultados revelaron la preferencia de los maestros por prácticas de evaluación sumativa para determinar el progreso de los estudiantes. Como conclusión, el desarrollo profesional de los docentes en términos de evaluación del lenguaje puede ser una alternativa para desarrollar procesos de evaluación significativos donde los estudiantes, los docentes y la institución puedan beneficiarse.

Palabras clave: estudiantes universitarios, evaluación oral, formación docente, inglés como lengua extranjera

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Introduction

Foreign language assessment has been a field of challenges and controversies along the decades for teachers and students. Generally, foreign language classes are ruled by summative assessment practices aimed to measure learners' mastery of discrete language points and linguistic accuracy, rather than assessing students' communicative competence (Shaaban, 2005). However, although summative speaking assessment continues provoking reluctant attitudes in students, teachers may hardly approach this process differently, which may eventually lead learners either to succeed, fail or give up on the learning process (Green, 2013).

Therefore, a change of mind in this regard would be welcome in the teaching practice. In this line, Green (2013) claims that when it comes to assessing students' speaking skill through the implementation of a test, teachers may highlight its importance to improve teaching and learning processes rather than as a yardstick that determines control. In light of this problematic situation, I sought to characterize the teachers' assessment approaches regarding the speaking skill in an English language teaching (ELT) program. Furthermore, the study by García and Artunduaga (2016) conducted in this context, together with my teacher experience, motivated me to explore teachers' speaking assessment approaches and analyze how these relate to their actual classroom speaking assessment practices.

This exploratory and descriptive qualitative study focuses on characterizing teachers' speaking assessment approaches and identifying the relationship between their stated assessment approaches and their actual classroom speaking assessment practices. I conducted the present qualitative study with four ELT program in-service teachers from a public university in Florencia (Colombia). English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers should bear in mind that some learners may encounter great difficulties when participating in activities and examinations that assess their oral production. These difficulties are mainly reflected in students' negative results, due to lack of time in classroom speaking practices (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) or even emotional factors experienced before, while, and immediately after students are involved in oral production activities (Cook, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

Speaking is an essential means for our daily communication and a primary instrument of interaction among human beings in a certain community (Coombe & Hubley, 2011; Lado, 1961; Mauranen, 2006). Bygate (2001) claims that speaking is reciprocal, it is to say that "interlocutors are normally all able to contribute simultaneously to the discourse, and to respond immediately to each other's contributions" (p. 14). Furthermore, in oral interaction people can participate in any spoken encounter by constructing meaning according to their intentions, their goals for communication, and the message the speaker wants to convey (Green, 2013); thus, this process makes speaking more unpredictable than writing as ideas are not usually premeditated and flow according to the rhythm of the conversation (Mauranen, 2006).

In consequence, assessing the speaking skill is a complex process that requires special considerations for educators (Burns, 2012). For instance, teachers need to identify a suitable instrument or strategy that allows them to properly assess learners either "live" or through recorded performances (Ginther, 2012). Moreover, speaking assessment processes have to be closely related to teachers' instruction to help them make decisions considering students' linguistic abilities and course goals in order to select appropriate speaking tasks (Fulcher, 2018; Ginther, 2012; Shaaban, 2005).

Summative Assessment of Speaking Skills

Some of the most common speaking assessment practices in foreign language learning are direct tests. They assess students' speaking skill in actual perfor-

mance, for example, interviews with semistructured or structured interaction (Ginther, 2012). Generally, testing practices are seen as summative assessment, which takes place at the end of a course cycle to determine and evaluate students' knowledge and the skills developed throughout that particular period (Lado, 1961).

Summative assessment practices need to be carefully considered in higher education contexts where grades are mainly influenced by test results. If these test outcomes do not fulfill the educational standards established in the institution, it may in some cases end in sanctions for schools, educators, and even learners (O'Neil, 1992). Tests may be designed to tackle particular needs regarding foreign language learning, such as spoken interaction, listening comprehension, and reading and writing. However, Carter and Nunan (2001) mention that regardless of the tests' scope, and their focal point (which is mostly viewed as numerical), there are elements needed for their administration. These elements include (a) validity, as tests should measure accurately what they were meant to measure; (b) reliability, as tests results need to be consistent between the sample of test-takers; and (c) practicality, as tests should by design allow adequate time and availability of the resources for their implementation, and facility for scoring and evaluation procedures (Brown, 2004; Coombe & Hubley, 2011; Lado, 1961).

Formative Assessment

An assessment variation as to testing methods may be the implementation of a more humanistic approach that stresses alternative and formative assessment practices (Ginther, 2012; Irons, 2007; O'Neil as cited in Shaaban, 2005). According to Huerta-Macias (as cited in Brown & Hudson, 1998), alternative assessment involves journals, logs, videotapes and audiotapes, self-evaluation, and any other task that encourages learners to show their potential in performance-based tasks (Shaaban, 2005). Moreover, Yorke (2003) states that formative assessment may be given in formal (high-stake) or informal (low-stake) practices. The former are planned and consider students' preparation and assessment criteria for their respective development. The latter comprise the development of any activity that takes place in class where students do not need to follow specific instructions for their execution.

Similarly, teachers in formative assessment go beyond giving a specific grade to the students (Irons, 2007), that is, grades "help them identify areas that require further explanation, more practice, and methodological changes" (Muñoz et al., 2012, p. 144), in order to overcome difficulties presented in students' learning process. In consequence, to inform learners about their difficulties or strengths in certain topics, feedback is essential (Green, 2013). This helps to improve and adapt teaching with the aim of meeting learning needs. Providing feedback to learners has to be specific, focused on the task developed, and imparted while it is still relevant (Black & William, 1998).

In short, Coombe and Hubley (2011) claim that whatever the assessment approach is, assessment practices may display the aimed course objectives which support the learning and teaching of the target language. Therefore, foreign language teachers should continuously analyze the effectiveness of their assessment procedures, especially in local contexts where tests are the only assessment method; thus, teachers become "gatekeepers for higher education opportunities for many high school or college graduates" (Herrera & Macías, 2015, p. 306).

Related Studies

This section briefly describes some recent studies on the effectiveness of teachers' approaches and strategies to assess students' speaking skills and how this assessment process shapes teachers' instruction.

The action research study conducted by De la Barra et al. (2018) aimed to identify the effects of integrated speaking assessment based on the content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach on 32 third-semester

students enrolled in the translation and English teaching training program at Universidad Chileno-Británica de Cultura. Data collection involved two rubrics used to assess students' speaking skill and one questionnaire to gather information about students' opinions concerning the assessment approach used. Findings showed that students took responsibility for their improvement in both language and course content based on teachers' feedback, which served as a guide to strengthen the speaking skill. This study highlights the importance for both teachers and students of familiarizing students with the speaking assessment instrument because this makes explicit beforehand the terms under which the students' speaking performance will be judged by teachers.

Moreover, Köroğlu (2019) implemented an action research study to explore the efficacy of the interventionist model of dynamic assessment (DA) in speaking instruction and assessment on student-teachers. This research entailed 29 participants registered in the English language teaching department of a public university in Turkey. The data gathering instruments were questionnaires and video recordings. In short, findings revealed that DA was meaningful for participants as they demonstrated a significant improvement in their self-confidence making them able to express their ideas clearly and smoothly in front of the teacher and peers. Consequently, the importance of this study underpins DA not only as a speaking assessment method, but also as a permanent source of formative feedback for learners. This is due to teacher mediation and scaffolding strategies that took place during students' speaking assessment. These two worked as a way of feedback for learners to explore their potential, identify their weaknesses, and take control of their own speaking improvement.

Additionally, Namaziandost and Ahmadi (2019) conducted an action research study to explore the incidences of holistic and analytic assessment approaches in 70 students' speaking skill from an English language teaching program at Islamic Azad University of Abadan in Iran. The data gathering instruments were analytical and holistic rubrics, teacher's notes, and audio recordings. The findings of this study revealed that the implementation of analytic and holistic approaches is suitable to get reliable scores from a student's performance as these facilitate the evaluator to identify gaps in terms of fluency, intonation, grammar, or vocabulary. In essence, the relevance of this study lies in that it advocates the use of holistic and analytic approaches towards students' speaking assessment. Likewise, by implementing these two approaches, teachers are capable of working on the students' weaknesses in relation to the mastery of the target language to empower their learning and the performance of their future speaking practices.

Finally, Liubashenko and Kavytska (2020) developed a case study to explore the contributions of assessing interactional competence in the development of the speaking skill among 44 students from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, and 36 students from Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute. The data gathering instruments entailed surveys, video recordings, and questionnaires. Findings evidenced a significant improvement in students' speaking skill thus promoting their interactional competence since they were capable of solving task-based problems presented by the instructors in their assessment. Moreover, learners worked in groups and co-constructed their knowledge, supporting each other in terms of problem-solving. Hence, it is important to acknowledge that instructors should take into account the development of students' interactional competence since it enables them to convey their points of view under speaking assessments rather than focusing on well-structured language utterances.

The related literature showed the benefits of strategies and approaches with different samples in terms of students' speaking skill assessment. Overall, the assessment alternatives explored in the aforementioned studies have a significant impact on participants' speaking skill. Furthermore, it could be argued that the success of the

different assessment strategies described in the previous studies mainly depended on one factor: teachers being consistent with the assessment practices they adopted. Thus, delving into a foreign language, teachers' stated and actual speaking assessment approaches carries great importance because, ultimately, this may be an indicator of students' speaking achievements.

The Problem

English language teachers at Universidad de la Amazonia feel the need to reflect upon their own teaching approaches so they can carry out meaningful processes in terms of students' learning and assessment. Four EFL teachers from this university participated in the study, and my intention was to raise awareness of their speaking assessment approaches as a first step towards improving assessment practices at the university as well as towards changing the oral classroom assessment perceptions of both teachers and students. The study was then informed by these two questions:

1. How do teachers approach the assessment of speaking in an English teacher education program?
2. What is the relationship between teachers' stated assessment approaches to the speaking skill and actual classroom assessment speaking practices?

Method

This is a qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive study (Glass & Hopkins, 1984; Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2007; Kumar, 2011) as it explored and described the speaking assessment approaches of the four participating teachers. Qualitative research works with the data of few participants given the depth of description, which mainly concerns their subjective opinions and experiences in their natural context (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Descriptive studies describe a situation or a problem of a sample with few known aspects and which need to be explored (Dörnyei, 2007; Kumar, 2011). Basically, descriptive studies also involve gathering data that describe participants' events and thinking, which are organized, tabulated, and depicted to have a better understanding of the issue (Glass & Hopkins, 1984). On the other hand, given its specific nature, one disadvantage of descriptive studies is that they do not provide an answer about how and why an issue takes place in participants; therefore, rather than examining consequences or associations, I focused on describing the characteristics towards the issue that is being explored in the four participants (Kumar, 2011).

Purposeful sampling method was implemented to select the participants for the present study. This has the aim of identifying information related to the issue of interest (Patton, 2002) through the selection of a sample considered to be knowledgeable regarding the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Bearing in mind the aforementioned, the four participants were individually contacted in their workplace and invited to participate in the study. They accepted the invitation on a voluntary basis and signed consent forms.

Context and Participants

The English teacher education program at Universidad de la Amazonia is the only undergraduate program in the Amazon region that trains EFL teachers. The program seeks for graduates to become qualified in the teaching and learning processes of the English language at regional and national levels.

The participants of this qualitative study comprised four ELT program professors whose teaching experience ranged from two to ten years. They were three men and one woman; one of them holds a master's degree and the other three hold bachelor's certificate degrees. All teachers, except for Teacher 4, were in charge of one English course. Due to ethical considerations, I have labelled participants with a number: Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3 and Teacher 4. Table 1 provides details about each participant.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Four English Teachers of the Study

Participant	Teaching experience (years)	Gender	Course
Teacher 1	10	Male	Advanced English I
Teacher 2	9	Female	Basic English I
Teacher 3	3	Male	Intermediate English II
Teacher 4	4	Male	Basic English II & Advanced English II

Data Collection and Analysis

Creswell (2002) expresses that gathering data involves identifying and selecting individuals for a study, obtaining their permission to study them, and collecting information by asking questions or observing their behaviors in their natural settings. Bearing this in mind, the instruments I used for gathering data were one semistructured individual interview (Harklau, 2011; Kumar, 2011) with teachers about their speaking assessment approaches (see Appendix); observations (Creswell, 2002; Kumar, 2011) of their actual speaking assessment practices; and documental analysis (Kumar, 2011) of their rubrics used to conduct these speaking assessments. The use of a voice recorder and a video camera strategically placed allowed me to capture every piece of information from the individual teachers' interviews and their speaking assessment practices respectively.

For data analysis, I implemented a grounded approach (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2015). Every piece of data gathered was examined to identify commonalities across teachers' stated approaches to assessing students' speaking skill, speaking assessment practices, and rubrics implemented. Thus, data were labeled and organized according to the instrument used: IR = interview recordings, OVR = observation/video recordings, and RT = rubrics.

For validity purposes, data were reduced and coded (Male, 2016) through a process of triangulation (Carter et al., 2014; Patton, 1999; Polit & Beck, 2012). Thus, the major categories that emerged from the data were: (a) The Balance Between the Humanistic and the Technical Dimensions of Speaking Assessment and (b) Depositioning Speaking Assessment as an Essential Element for Enhancing the Teaching and Learning Process.

Findings

This section elaborates on the findings that emerged from the interpretation of the data. Consequently, the first section includes findings related to the four teachers' stated approaches and practices in speaking assessment. The second section reports findings that provide the relationships of stated teachers' speaking assessment approaches and their actual speaking assessment practices.

The Balance Between the Humanistic and the Technical Dimensions of Speaking Assessment

Empowering the Teaching and Learning Process Through Speaking Assessment

This subcategory highlights three views among the participants towards speaking assessment. The data come from sample interview answers that display participants' commonalities. First, they commonly stated that speaking assessment is a permanent process developed along the course, where educators closely monitor students' learning.

> Speaking assessment...in fact is a process...it involves students learning and it is continuous. It has to be worked each week, each class. (Teacher 1, IR)
>
> If we assess students' speaking skill throughout the course, it enables us to identify the needs to tackle, what activities they prefer, and know how much the learner has improved. (Teacher 4, IR)

In this regard, the samples above confirm that speaking assessment and teaching are connected. As Teacher 4 describes, speaking assessment allows educators to identify learning gaps and thus, implement activities to successfully contribute to students' needs.

Similarly, these four teachers stated that feedback is an essential strategy to consolidate students' learning as it recognizes the aspects they need to overcome for future performances.

> Feedback in speaking assessment is always essential but no only provided as a score; let's say...individual comments are meaningful especially to motivate students who are beginning to learn a foreign language, they require feedback to notice the mistakes, or the things they have to enhance through the time. (Teacher 4, IR)
>
> Feedback is important in assessment, but spontaneous or unplanned activities do not need feedback on students' performance. When you know your students have prepared and have considered your instructions, feedback is essential then. (Teacher 3, IR)

Samples show the importance of feedback in speaking assessment. Teacher 4 states that this is not always presented in scores, but in the way of comments to encourage learners to improve their speaking performances. Conversely, Teacher 3 claims that providing feedback on students' speaking skill depends on the complexity of the activity conducted, that is, as long as it requires students' preparation, feedback is provided; otherwise, it is not.

The second stated view relies on the implementation of alternative speaking assessment practices aimed to foster students' participation and elicit authentic learners' interaction in different contexts.

> We sometimes use our WhatsApp group to talk about our day through voice notes. Also, we gather once a month in a restaurant to practice speaking by exchanging some ideas or ordering food in English…waiters don't understand most of the time, and I have to translate what they said. However, it helps me to notice how much my students have improved regarding their speaking skill and they don't even realize I'm assessing them. (Teacher 3, IR)
>
> Class participation, video recordings, and role plays foster engagement among learners. They are useful for assessing speaking. However, speaking tests are always essential as they comprise an important part in measuring the learning process of all students. Basically, tests show you what students have learnt, and it is a strategy all teachers implement in certain moments of the courses. (Teacher 4, IR)

These excerpts highlight the use of alternative practices to promote comfortable spaces of interaction among learners and freely exchange ideas without even noticing they are under assessment. Notwithstanding, despite Teacher 4 recognizing the importance of using alternative assessment, he also suggests that summative practices, such as direct tests, are mainly implemented by teachers as these provide an accurate view of the learners' speaking improvement.

Third, although there are mainly four assessment criteria considered by participants for conducting their speaking assessment practices such as pronunciation (Teachers 1, 2, and 4), accuracy (all), vocabulary (Teachers 2 and 4), and intelligibility (Teachers 2 and 3), a dichotomy is presented in regard to how these aspects are approached to assess students' speaking skill. While Teachers 2, 3, and 4 stated that they prioritize learners'

ability to exchange ideas in assessment practices, Teacher 1 stresses the accurate use of language under the light of these assessment criteria.

> For assessing speaking you can pay attention to [students'] pronunciation, their vocabulary, and how ideas are structured, but you cannot ignore their level and the context they come from when you request them to use a foreign language…therefore…it is important to be flexible as long as they are able to communicate their ideas. (Teacher 2, IR)
>
> The aim of communication must be to be understood... especially in our context where for no reasons sometimes we demand our students to adopt native idioms or expressions…therefore, I assess my students positively although they present mistakes in their speech because these mistakes do not hinder their understanding. (Teacher 3, IR)
>
> Students can answer questions and more, but it must be very complete, the intonation, the accent. I do not like flat accents or local accents, because if we are speaking a foreign language then the idea is that we use the accents of that language as such. So, I think that intonation, obviously pronunciation, and grammar are absolutely important. (Teacher 1, IR)

Although Teachers 2 and 3 did not use the specific name for intelligibility, these two participants approached the concept proposed by Munro and Derwing (2011) to support its importance in students' speaking assessment. These two teachers' answers evidence the idea that speaking assessment is more than just measuring learners' speaking skill. However, Teacher 1's view restricts flexibility in his assessment practice as this underpins nativeness principles, which do not acknowledge the variety of students' accents and language proficiency levels in the program.

Finally, participants stated that they incorporate assessment criteria through the implementation of rubrics to properly conduct and determine students' performance in their speaking assessment practices.

> I try to design a rubric…so that they can see it earlier, and students know…let's say…what I keep in mind to be assessed and thus report a fair score. (Teacher 4, IR)
>
> Rubrics are used to integrate the elements considered for their speaking assessment. This instrument allows me to inform learners what is their expected performance. (Teacher 2, IR)

These samples also indicate benefits of informing and providing students the rubrics with their respective evaluation criteria in advance, which allows them to recognize the elements that will be considered in their upcoming speaking performances.

Together, the sample data above suggest that these teachers' stated assessment approaches towards students' speaking skill were beneficial for strengthening the instruction and learning process. Furthermore, these views positioned speaking assessment not only as a way to measure learners' speaking skill but as a way to engage them through alternative assessment activities supported by feedback.

Relying on Summative Practices to Measure Students' Speaking Skill

This subcategory includes what teachers actually did for assessing learners' speaking skill in their courses. The data come from assessment practices observations and analysis of the instruments implemented during these activities. In this regard, summative assessment (Teachers 2, 3, and 4) and alternative assessment (Teacher 1) are the practices implemented among participants. Individual interviews, peer discussions, and peer interviews—which are also known as direct tests—were used for summative assessment; an individual recorded presentation was the alternative method (see Table 2).

Table 2. Actual Classroom Speaking Assessment Activities

	Activity	Course	Setting
Teacher 1	Individual recorded presentation	Advanced English I	Students' preference
Teacher 2	Peer interview	Basic English I	ELT program lab
Teacher 3	Peer discussion	Intermediate English II	Classroom
Teacher 4	Individual interview	Basic English II & Advanced English II	ELT program lab & teacher's office

Table 3. Actual Assessment Criteria Implemented by Participants

	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4
Content knowledge	✓		
Grammar accuracy	✓		✓
Word-sentence stress	✓		
Discourse management		✓	
Fluency		✓	✓
Vocabulary	✓	✓	
Voice: clarity, intonation, fluency	✓		
Interactive communication	✓		
Pronunciation		✓	✓
Background knowledge and argument			✓

Before the execution of both summative and alternative assessment practices, these four teachers informed students about the guidelines, characteristics, and the criteria considered for their assessment. Thus, learners had a clear understanding of what they had to do precisely on their examinations.

During summative methods, teachers elicited students' insights and interaction using transcribed questions and by exchanging information in moments in which they wanted to highlight ideas contributed.

> Teacher 2: That's wonderful…Would you try it again?
>
> Student: Yes…of course!...Yes.
>
> Teacher 2: Perfect…why?…Did you like that?…Was the experience nice?
>
> Student: Definitely, I felt I could make some friends easier than before. I felt secure. (OVR)

The sample above stresses the importance for the teacher to be part of the assessment activity development and thus allow students to feel uninhibited and motivated to expand their oral contributions.

Conversely, Teacher 1's alternative method did not entail any kind of teacher's interaction or exchanging of learners' information given the nature of the activity. Instead, this comprised a speech which sought to evidence learners' use of language to strategically address a free topic that triggered reflection and critical thinking.

Additionally, the use of analytic rubrics was integrated to assess students' speaking skill during these direct tests. Rubrics were composed by following assessment criteria which were given in advance to learners, their descriptors, and a corresponding scoring scale (see Table 3).

These assessment criteria looked particularly appropriate for the suitable integration of a larger scope of language features in students' performance. In this sense, teachers considered greater elements that required students to demonstrate the corresponding mastering of the course content, and their communication skill.

Moreover, during the conduction of these summative methods, feedback was generally provided at the end. Teachers relied on the notes taken regarding students' utterances during the development of the examinations, and this sought to highlight strengths in students' speaking performance:

> Teacher 4: In general, you provided interesting ideas… you had a nice use of vocabulary…and…the mistakes observed did not hinder your performance.
> Student: What kind of mistakes, teacher?...Pronunciation?
> Teacher 4: No…well…there were minor aspects regarding pronunciation to improve…but precisely…the use of *demonstratives* with the use of plural and singular nouns needs to be revised, OK?
> Student: OK. (OVR)

This sample shows that feedback was not only focused on pointing at the students' weaknesses, but it also had formative purposes as it highlighted learners' ability to convey meaning and provide ideas despite presenting some difficulties in their speech.

Similarly, feedback was only presented immediately during the development of Teacher 3's direct test when students repeatedly mispronounced a word or used an L1 word to support their answers:

> Student:…and so the scientit may…
> Teacher 3: SCIENTIST!
> Student:...the scientist may! (OVR)
> Student: How do you say *adictos*?
> Teacher: You mean...addicted?
> Student: Yes...addicted, OK. (OVR)

These samples also confirm that feedback was presented in Teacher 3's direct test as corrective to indicate the correct form of a word erroneously pronounced by the student. In the same way, Teacher 3 was willing to assist students when they asked for help during their performances, mainly to answer queries about unknown words.

It is important to mention that Teacher 1 did not incorporate any criteria or instrument to assess his students' speaking skill. He orally informed students that the aspects to be assessed in his alternative method were interestingly the ones he emphasized during his individual interview: *pronunciation* and *accuracy.* Furthermore, Teacher 1 only reported learners' scores to inform the overall performance obtained in his speaking assessment practice.

The last section of findings aims to answer Research Question 2: What is the relationship between teachers' stated assessment approaches to speaking skill and actual classroom assessment speaking practices? The main relationships and discrepancies are directly reflected in three aspects: actual type of assessment, speaking assessment criteria, and feedback.

Depositioning Speaking Assessment as an Essential Element for Enhancing the Teaching and Learning Process

Prevailing Measurement Over Engagement in Students' Speaking Assessment

This subcategory shows teachers' preference towards the use of summative practices over alternative practices for the development of students' speaking assessments. In this regard, data revealed that summative assessment (direct tests) is the approach by default present in the lessons of Teachers 2, 3, 4. Consequently, the execution of these practices reinforced participants' initial views about considering tests as an essential strategy to be used at certain moments in their courses, but at the same time, made them prone to forget that speaking assessment should be an in-depth process if it aims

to contribute positively to the teaching and learning needs of students.

On the other hand, Teacher 1's alternative assessment did emerge as an activity certainly aligned with a continuous speaking assessment process that benefited teaching and learning practices. This was because Teacher 1's practice did not resemble the regular teacher-student interaction and transcended the limitations of the summative assessment methods implemented by the other three participants.

Seeking Accuracy in Speaking Assessment

The second subcategory in this section displays the integration of technical assessment criteria for conducting students' speaking assessment. Consequently, findings reflected the incorporation of criteria for summative assessment activities that requested learners to have an appropriate speaking performance. The above indicates that Teachers 2, 3, and 4 not only expanded the range of linguistic elements for students' language use, but also contradicted their initial stated views about implementing flexible approaches primarily aimed at assessing learners' ability to deliver spoken messages rather than the accuracy of those messages.

Although the use of rubrics was extended for the conduction of summative assessment practices, Teacher 1 was the only participant who did not use any instrument to assess his students despite having stated the importance of its use to conduct valid assessment practices. This participant orally informed his learners about the elements to consider for his activity, and valued their individual performances in relation to the appropriate integration of these criteria (pronunciation-accuracy) in their presentations.

The Need for In-Depth Teacher Feedback on Students' Speaking Performance

The last subcategory highlights the need to incorporate feedback to positively impact learning and assessment practices. In this sense, data indicated that although the four participants positioned feedback as one of the essential elements to strengthen assessment and learning practices, it was only evidenced in the direct tests implemented by Teachers 2, 3, and 4.

Teacher 1 detached this process from his speaking assessment and did not provide his students with feedback that truly sought to contribute or generate a positive impact in relation to the students' current and future speaking practices. While the rest of the participants relied on formative feedback to highlight learners' strengths and to even make them aware of aspects for improving their speaking performance, Teacher 1 simply gave learners individual scores as an overall description of their performance.

In consequence, the data suggest that the relationship between teachers' stated approaches towards the speaking skill and their actual practices did not truly reflect seeking an empowerment for the teaching and learning process. The conduction of direct tests with rigorous assessment criteria, and limiting feedback to summative functions and detaching the use of assessment instruments, are certainly practices that depositioned speaking assessment as a core element in the language classroom to close the gap in regard to learners' needs and at the same time refine teaching.

Discussion

I will start the discussion by first pointing out that resorting to the implementation of tests as the main way to assess students' speaking may not be significant if teachers fail to acknowledge that, regardless of its summative principles, testing may serve learners for formative purposes (López & Bernal; Muñoz et al. as cited in Giraldo, 2019). Therefore, an alternative approach to speaking assessment practices should be implemented so that learners are encouraged to show their potential and confidence when delivering ideas, and not restrict their speaking assessment to summative practices (Huerta-Macias as cited in Brown & Hudson, 1998).

In second place, the integration of feedback in speaking assessment should highlight learners' speaking strengths rather than their weaknesses in order to foster their learning (Hattie as cited in Lynch & Maclean, 2003). This is aligned with Hatziapostolou and Paraskakis's (2010) findings where feedback had formative purposes to ensure that students are engaged in their assessment process, and thus promote their learning. Similarly, in relation to the results presented in Pineda (2014), the rubrics implemented by Teachers 2, 3, and 4 allowed them to record evidence of their students' speech and, at the same time, provided learners the opportunity to know what was expected of them during their performances because they were made aware of the assessment criteria beforehand (Chowdhury, 2019; De la Barra et al., 2018; Green, 2013).

On the other hand, the lack of the implementation of any instrument in Teacher 1's speaking assessment practice is a negative indicator for contributing to valid and meaningful assessment practices. As explained in Jonsson and Svingby (2007), the absence of an instrument for conducting speaking assessment practices limits teachers' ability to provide learners fair and consistent judgments about their performance. Similarly, Teacher 1's feedback in the way of reporting scores is aligned with Hardavella et al.'s (2017) findings in that the learners may not identify the aspects to improve or strengthen assuming that their mistakes might be presented as usual, hence constructing a false perception of their performance improvement.

Third, the strategies observed in Teacher 3's assessment activity, such willingness to help, and corrective feedback relate to those presented in Ebadi and Asakereh (2017), Namaziandost et al. (2017), and Tamayo and Cajas (2017) as these were positive for refining learners' discourse and for helping students become aware of the elements to improve without affecting the flow of their ideas (Gamlo, 2019). However, and similar to findings in Hernández-Méndez and Reyes-Cruz (2012), Teacher 3 looked at corrective feedback only as a technique to improve accuracy in students' speaking, particularly in pronunciation and morphosyntax. In consequence, Hernández-Méndez and Reyes-Cruz suggest that it is important to know more about corrective feedback effects and their role in interlanguage learners' development if this is only limited to accurately improve learners' pronunciation and ideas construction.

In the assessment process conducted by participants in this study, other valuable assessment practices such as peer-feedback, peer-assessment, or self-assessment were not mentioned or evidenced in the observations and interviews. These feedback and assessment practices can be also effective and contribute positively to the learning process, since they empower the student by making them an active participant in their process, and are not limited to the common teacher-student interaction where only the former provides tools for learning.

Conclusions

The present study explored four teachers' stated speaking assessment approaches and the relationship these had to their actual speaking assessment practices. The stated approaches included the view of speaking assessment as a continuous process that improves teaching and learning through the development of activities with assessment criteria to engage and foster students' communication. Additionally, the four teachers stated that they implemented feedback as an essential practice to highlight learners' speaking strengths and aspects to improve. Conversely, their speaking assessment practices mainly entailed summative methods which integrated assessment criteria using rubrics to measure students' speaking skill.

Surprisingly, during these summative practices feedback with formative purposes was evidenced to report and support students' speaking performance after and during their tests. Notwithstanding, in the only alternative assessment activity conducted to assess students' speaking skill, the lack of an assessment instrument and the use of summative feedback to report

students' speaking performance were aspects against the formative purposes that underpinned the principles of this practice.

In regard to the relationship among stated approaches and actual practices, findings yielded that the teachers' humanistic understanding of students' speaking assessment to benefit their learning and teaching process became highly limited by the integration of a summative approach. Results indicated that teachers seemed not to be aware of the dimensions of their implemented speaking assessment approaches, as they limited their scope to summative principles. The implementation of summative methods, the integration of technical assessment criteria, the use of summative feedback, and the lack of an instrument to properly conduct these practices detached students' speaking assessment as a beneficial factor for learning and teaching, and merely summarized their assessment under summative purposes.

Finally, how teachers actually conducted their speaking assessment practices advocates Herrera and Macías's (2015) call to provide training spaces for educators in terms of language assessment literacy (LAL) to support both their teaching and the learning process of students. In consequence, based on the findings in this study, LAL training may be an opportunity for participants to raise awareness about how instruction and learning are interrelated to develop assessment practices detached from summative principles, consolidate and implement assessment instruments, support students' guidance through feedback, and interpret assessment results to take decisions based on these (Herrera & Macías, 2015).

Limitations of the Study

One of the main limitations is regarding the exploration of the assessment principles (validity, reliability, practicality). There was not an examination of these elements in the speaking assessment activities and instruments implemented by each educator, and the criteria articulated for developing the respective students' speaking assessments. This study focused on the description of the stated teachers' assessment approaches, and the relationships between what they state they will do and what they actually conduct in practice. Therefore, further research may delve into this aspect.

Further Research

This study focused on teachers' assessment approaches regarding students' speaking skill. It would be advisable for further research to explore the following questions: How teachers' assessment approaches to speaking skill inform learners' performance? What are learners' perceptions towards teachers' assessment approaches to speaking? What implications for the institution can be derived from students' assessment results?

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Appendix: Semistructured Interview

1. How would you describe your students' speaking assessment process? Why?
2. How do you conduct your students' speaking assessment practices in your respective course or courses?
3. What activities do you implement to conduct your students' speaking assessment in your respective course or courses? Why?
4. Do you use any instrument or strategy to assess your students' speaking skill? If so, which are these?
5. What aspects do you focus on when assessing your students' speaking skill? If any, do you incorporate them in your speaking assessment instruments?
6. Do you actually provide feedback during or after the development of these speaking assessment practices? If so, how do you do this?

P R O F I L E

Issues Based on Reflections and Innovations

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A Practice-Based Approach to Foreign Language Teacher Preparation: A Cross-Continental Collaboration

Un enfoque basado en la práctica para la formación de profesores de lenguas extranjeras: una colaboración internacional

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The international trend towards a practice-based approach in teacher education has permeated foreign language teacher education and English language teaching. A practice-based approach is based on the understanding that teachers learn to teach a language by engaging in "actual" teaching rather than "talking" about teaching. We report on the implementation of a practice-based approach in two different contexts: an initial English teacher education program in Chile and an initial foreign language teacher education program in the United States. We provide practical recommendations and areas of caution for future enactments. The findings demonstrate that incorporating a practice-based approach into the university classroom offers a useful affordance for examining and illuminating the complexities of foreign language teaching practice across contexts.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, high-leverage practices, practice-based approach

La tendencia internacional hacia un enfoque basado en la práctica en la formación del profesorado también se refleja en la formación del profesorado de lenguas extranjeras. Un enfoque basado en la práctica se basa en la comprensión de que los maestros aprenden a enseñar un idioma mediante la enseñanza "real" en lugar de "hablar" sobre la enseñanza. En este trabajo informamos sobre la implementación de un enfoque basado en la práctica en dos contextos diferentes: un programa inicial de formación de docentes de inglés en Chile y un programa inicial de preparación de docentes de idiomas extranjeros en los Estados Unidos. Asimismo, proporcionamos recomendaciones prácticas y áreas de precaución para futuras promulgaciones. Los resultados demuestran que la incorporación de un enfoque basado en la práctica en el aula universitaria ofrece una capacidad útil para examinar e iluminar las complejidades de la práctica de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en todos los contextos.

Palabras clave: enfoque basado en la práctica, enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, prácticas generativas

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Introduction

A seminal article published by Ball and Cohen in 1999 began a shift in conceptions of teacher education toward greater incorporation of practice in the university classroom. They argued that teacher preparation must shift from predominating models in which educators describe the techniques and methodology of teaching, to a model that more effectively incorporates the practice of those techniques and methods. A primary motivation of this argument was to counter the tendency of teacher educators to teach in the ways in which they themselves were taught (Donato & Davin, 2018; Lortie, 1975). Instead, they contended that "much of what [teachers] would have to learn must be learned in and from practice rather than in preparing to practice" (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 10). Since this call, a developing line of research has focused on identifying a set of high leverage teaching practices (HLTPs) required by teachers, as well as the formulation of a practice-based learning cycle through which student teachers can rehearse such practices.

In this article, we report a collaborative self-study (Troyan & Peercy, 2018) that examined our own experiences and challenges in implementing a practice-based approach in our respective foreign language teacher preparation programs. When we first met in 2018, we each had begun to actively incorporate practice-based approaches as teacher educators. We soon realized that—despite the large physical distance between us (with Malba in Chile and Kristin in the United States) and the many contextual differences—we shared many experiences and challenges in the implementation of this approach. In this article, we present the stages of the learning cycle that transcended localized contexts to support teacher educators considering the implementation of a practice-based approach in foreign language teacher education. Through analysis of our own conversations and email exchanges, we discuss related recommendations for teacher education practice and areas of caution for each of the four major phases in the practice-based learning cycle. We draw on examples from both contexts to illustrate these recommendations and cautions and analyze data from one focus student as she moved through the four phases to illustrate how candidates might learn through this process.

Literature Review

HLTPs are teaching practices in which, "the proficient enactment by a teacher is likely to lead to comparatively large advances in student learning" (Hlas & Hlas, 2012, p. s78). To be considered an HLTP, "a practice must improve the achievement of all students, occur frequently in instruction, and be learnable by novice teachers" (Davin & Troyan, 2015, p. 125). Within a practice-based approach, instruction focuses on a limited number of HLTPs which are made accessible to preservice teachers, are revisited periodically, and can be practiced (Ball et al., 2009).

Researchers within the field of foreign and second language education have begun the work of identifying their own set of HLTPs. Troyan et al. (2013) began this work, discussing their implementation of a practice-based approach around three HLTPs: (1) using the target language comprehensively during instruction, (2) questioning for building and assessing student understanding, and (3) teaching grammar inductively in meaningful contexts and co-constructing understandings. Glisan and Donato (2017, p. 28) revised and built upon those practices, identifying six practices:

- facilitating target language comprehensibility
- building a classroom discourse community
- guiding learners to interpret and discuss authentic texts
- focusing on form in a dialogic context through PACE (Presentation, Attention, Co-construction, Extension)
- focusing on cultural products, practices, and perspectives in a dialogic context
- providing oral corrective feedback to improve learner performance

Many teacher-preparation programs internationally —including the two programs at the center of this research—have adopted their resulting orientation.

To facilitate student teachers' development of these HLTPs, a practice-based approach is often characterized by a four-phase cycle. The first phase is *demonstration* and deconstruction, in which the teacher educator shows student teachers a representation of the practice in context, such as a lesson video or transcript of a class. In this phase, student teachers and the teacher educator discuss how the components of the HLTP are portrayed in the representation. For example, they might discuss instances in the video in which the teacher used visuals and gestures to support students' understanding of the target language, which represents a key component of *facilitating target language comprehensibility*. The second phase is centered on *planning*. In this phase, student teachers typically plan a learning segment that highlights the HLTP. Ideally, the teacher educator provides student teachers with an instructional activity in which to situate the practice. For example, Glisan and Donato (2017) recommend that student teachers practice *facilitating target language comprehensibility* within the context of introducing six new thematically-related vocabulary words within a meaningful context, such as introducing a story or text. After planning a lesson segment, student teachers then come together for the third phase, *rehearsal and coaching*. In this phase, student teachers rehearse a portion of their lesson segment, either in small groups or as a whole class if time allows, with the teacher educator acting as a guiding coach. Coaching includes discursive moves such as giving directive feedback, highlighting moves made by the student teacher, inviting discussion, and playing the role of the student (TeachingWorks, 2018). After phase three, student teachers revise their plan and progress to the fourth phase, *implementation and reflection*. In this phase, student teachers video-record the enactment of their lesson segment in a more authentic context, typically a classroom field site. To prompt reflection, student teachers may, for instance, watch the video and deconstruct their own practice to identify ways in which they demonstrated (or should have demonstrated) the various components of the HLTP.

Method

Context and Participants

Although we both followed this four-phase practice-based learning cycle, we each worked in distinct contexts: Malba in an initial English language teacher education program in Chile and Kristin in an initial foreign language teacher education program in the United States. In the Chilean context, the student teachers at the center of this research ($n = 20$) were undertaking their second teaching practice experience—in tandem with a Methods course—and were in the seventh semester of their learning program. These student teachers were engaged in a nine-semester undergraduate program, with curriculum organized into theoretical courses (in the fields of English, applied linguistics, and education), four didactics courses, and three school-based teaching practice experiences. At schools, they undertook activities such as monitoring students' work, preparing learning materials, and teaching six classroom lessons. They worked in pairs throughout the semester, a structure which provided a consistent framework for the development of their work in both the Methods course and practicum.

In the U.S. context, student teachers ($n = 5$) in this research were graduate students seeking their initial teacher licensure in a 16-credit graduate certificate program. Given the escalating demand for teachers in the United States, student teachers were practicing full-time teachers, despite being unlicensed. However, it was a requirement of their employment that they were concurrently enrolled in the graduate certificate program to earn that license. The practice-based learning cycle described in this article took place during their second of three semesters, when student teachers were

enrolled in a three-credit foreign language methods course, a two-credit foreign language assessment course, and a one-credit lab. All courses were online, with the exception of the lab which was a hybrid format that included three three-hour face-to-face meetings during the semester. Student teachers engaged in the activities described in this article in the lab. All four phases of the practice-based learning cycle were embedded in online modules, with the exception of *Phase III: Rehearsal and Coaching*, which took place in the face-to-face meetings.

Our two contexts shared important similarities and critical differences. What was similar across the contexts was the implementation of the four-phased practice-based cycle and a focus on three of the HLTPs described by Glisan and Donato (2017). Coincidentally, we had chosen two of the same HLTPs, *facilitating target language comprehensibility* and *designing and conducting oral interpersonal communication tasks*. Critical contextual differences included the sociocultural context (Chile vs. the United States), target language employed (English vs. Spanish and Chinese), student level (preservice undergraduate students vs. in-service graduate students), and delivery method (face-to-face vs. a hybrid format).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were drawn from pedagogical tools (i.e., assignments, rubrics, teaching materials), student teachers' reflections and scripts, videos of rehearsal and implementation (only in the U.S. context), and our own oral and written communication. Because we were each using Glisan and Donato (2017) as a text, our approaches were similar and we had many of the same data sources (see Table 1).

Beyond student teacher data, our email communications and meeting notes served as data sources.

Data analysis occurred in two phases. For the first phase, we examined data first individually, and developed themes related to recommendations and challenges of the practice-based approach. We then met for a week for collaborative analysis and to compare themes. Our comparative analysis suggested potential productive actions and specific cautions that transcended each context, which we developed further with illustrative data from both settings. Thus, we categorized the findings into recommendations and cautions. For the second phase, we chose one focus student for whom we could track progress through the four-phased cycle. We selected Lucia (a pseudonym) from the U.S. context because we had video recordings of her rehearsal and implementation and because she was studying to be a Spanish teacher, which eliminated the need for translation. Lucia was an elementary school Spanish teacher in her first year of teaching. We analyzed the four data sources displayed in Table 1 for Lucia to track her learning through the practice-based cycle.

Table 1. Data Sources From Each Phase of Practice-Based Cycle

Phase	Data source
1. Demonstration and deconstruction	Reflection on experiences with the HLTP; Graphic organizer completed by student teachers to deconstruct practice based on model of practice
2. Planning	Lesson script created by student teachers for rehearsal
3. Rehearsal and coaching	Field notes; video recordings (U.S. context)
4. Implementation and reflection	Graphic organizer completed by student teachers to deconstruct practice based on their own implementation; Reflection on implementation; video recordings (U.S. context)

Findings

Phase I: Demonstration and Deconstruction

Recommendation 1. The first phase of the practice-based learning cycle consists of demonstrating and deconstructing the HLTP into instructional moves (Lampert et al., 2013). In this phase, after student teachers have read about the theoretical underpinnings and research base of the practice, the teacher educator guides students to deconstruct their practice and provide a representation of how the practice is enacted (Ghousseini & Sleep, 2011). When using video representations, it is critical that the teacher educator selects a video that clearly demonstrates the HLTP, so that the teaching moves are easily recognizable. For example, when the first HLTP (*facilitating target language comprehensibility*) was introduced in the Chilean program, student teachers viewed a 15-minute segment in which a former student teacher was starting a lesson on daily routine. The teacher taught in the target language and enacted most of the teaching moves suggested by Glisan and Donato (2017) for that practice, including using gestures, visuals, comprehension-checking questions and providing students with language support so that they could interact using the target language. The lesson demonstrated in the video was familiar for student teachers because it was about a topic which was mandatory in the Chilean national curriculum. The teacher educator facilitated an open discussion, using a checklist adapted from a pedagogical tool designed by Glisan and Donato, to allow student teachers to make sense of this HLTP and exchange their views on affordances and constraints of implementing this practice in their own school contexts.

Recommendation 2. An alternative to video representations of an HLTP is modelling, in which the teacher educator or other experienced teacher enacts a lesson as if they were in the field site, and as if student teachers were the intended students. Modelling should be done in a highly structured way so that student teachers are instructed to use tools (e.g., checklists, rubrics, questions) to help them identify and understand the teaching moves enacted in the modelled practice. For example, in the case of the second HLTP used in the Chilean context, *focus on form*, the teacher educator prepared a 15-minute lesson following the PACE model (Donato & Adair-Hauck, 2016) about giving recommendations using the subjunctive form. Instead of talking about the HLTP, the teacher educator taught this lesson as if this were an English class for intermediate students. Following the demonstration, student teachers identified examples of the various components of focus on form using a checklist (adapted from Glisan & Donato, 2017). They then discussed the affordances and constraints of the implementation of this practice in the student teachers' own school contexts.

A Caution. The demonstration and deconstruction phase required a significant amount of time to analyze the practice and decompose it into teaching moves. However, this does not mean that theory should be abandoned or disregarded in this phase. On the contrary, student teachers should reflect on the HLTP using sound theoretical support. In this sense, beliefs about target language use and teaching and learning a foreign language in class should be explicitly considered during class discussions. Student teachers should also be encouraged to reflect on their own experiences as language learners to connect these experiences with their beliefs and research (Donato & Davin, 2018). For example, in both contexts, student teachers were asked to respond to a range of questions about their own learning experiences, such as: "Consider a positive experience of foreign language learning. What did the teacher do? What did students do? What did the teacher do to encourage students to use the target language?" Subsequently, student teachers had to critically examine their reflections and the HLTP in light of its theoretical assumptions. In this sense, this first phase acted to mediate student teachers' understanding of theory through the deconstruction of practice (Peercy & Troyan, 2017).

The recommendations of using different representations of practice, such as videos, modelling, or analysis of scripts as part of the demonstration and deconstruction phase should be followed with caution and should be situated in the context of teaching. Although we both followed this learning cycle, each of us adapted tools and selected representations of practice according to our respective contexts including teachers' characteristics and contexts for teaching (Danielson et al., 2018).

Lucia's Experience

In Phase I, Lucia reflected on her past experiences with *facilitating target language comprehensibility* and completed a graphic organizer deconstructing a teacher's use of this practice. For the reflection, when asked about her experiences with this practice, she explained that English was her second language and that she felt that she "learned more when the teacher spoke only in the target language." She wrote:

> In my first class in college (completely in English) when I was forced to understand the main ideas and the lesson's purpose, that made me learn more. I can describe the experience as "bold" but I agree 100% with Chapter 1. We learn more when we focus on the comprehension and the teacher talks 100% in the target language.

However, when asked about her current teaching practices, she wrote that she needed "to improve in this aspect," explaining:

> I use the target language 50%, sometimes less than that because I teach little kids and when they don't understand I lose their attention. I think I should use more visual aids and the media (cartoons, short clips, songs) in the target language in order to get their attention for a longer period of time and maximize our time using the target language.

For her graphic organizer, which is not included here due to space limitations, Lucia accurately identified the subcomponents of the practice from the video demonstration.

Phase II: Planning

Recommendation 1. The second phase of the practice-based learning cycle is the planning phase in which student teachers create a plan for the lesson segment that they will rehearse in Phase III. In this phase, teacher educators should scaffold student teachers' planning by specifying the instructional activity in which to situate the practice. An instructional activity provides the context in which student teachers should demonstrate the HLTP (Lampert & Graziani, 2009). In our teacher education contexts, this meant specifying the type of lesson in which the practice should be embedded. For example, when preparing to practice *facilitating target language comprehensibility*, we asked student teachers to teach six new vocabulary words bound by a theme, within a meaningful and cultural context (Glisan & Donato, 2017, pp. 33–34). One student teacher, who was teaching rooms of the house, created a story about a person travelling to China and who was attempting to identify a desirable rental home. Defining the instructional activity for student teachers removed the burden from student teachers of selecting a context (Troyan et al., 2013). For instance, in the Chilean context, as another way to provide opportunities for practice, student teachers were encouraged to script and rehearse instructions for an interpersonal communicative task. These instructions needed to integrate a wide range of instructional moves that facilitated target language comprehensibility.

Recommendation 2. A second recommendation related to *Phase II: Planning* concerns the level of detail of the lesson plan that teacher educators should require. The plan that a student teacher submits for a practice-based course should be designed differently than the plan submitted for a more traditional methods course. For example, a more traditional lesson plan might include multiple portions of the lesson (i.e., *focus & review*, *teacher input*, *guided practice*) and provide a description of what will occur in each segment. When planning for lesson rehearsal, following the recommendations of

Glisan and Donato (2017), we determined that student teachers should carefully script a 10 to 15-minute segment of the lesson that they intended to rehearse. Such scripting included both what the teacher intended to say, as well as what he or she expected the students might say. While certainly not expected to read or stay faithful to the script, thinking through the lesson segment in this way encouraged student teachers to more carefully consider discourse possibilities. Moreover, it allowed them to more systematically analyze their scripts for the components of the HLTP before submission.

A Caution. A critical component of Phase II is that it requires student teachers to submit their lesson scripts in advance, in order to allow time for the teacher educator to provide feedback and for the student teachers to revise. For example, in one case when engaged with the HLTP of *designing and conducting oral interpersonal tasks*, a student teacher submitted a plan for her rehearsal that suggested she had not grasped the concept of interpersonal communication. Her lesson did not require students to listen to each other, a key component of interpersonal communication (i.e., two-way spontaneous communication in the target language). Had the teacher educator not reviewed the lesson script prior to the rehearsal, this student teacher's rehearsal would have been fruitless for both her and her classmates. Such advanced planning can be difficult because it requires student teachers to plan a lesson that will not be taught to their students for approximately two weeks. This is to permit sufficient time for the teacher educator to provide productive feedback, for the student teacher to make any necessary revisions, and for them to subsequently rehearse and revise the plan. The length of time between the rehearsal and the enactment in the K–12 setting influences not only the focus of the rehearsal (Kazemi et al., 2016), but also impacts on how much of the coaching the student teacher remembers from the rehearsal. However, the time required for the process of feedback and revision is too critical to be compromised.

Lucia's Script

After reflecting on her own experiences and deconstructing a model of the practice, Lucia had a week to plan and script her own lesson. Her lesson focused on teaching students sandwich vocabulary and how to order in a restaurant and was part of a larger unit on food. In addition to scripting what they planned to say as well as what they expected students might say, student teachers were also asked to include teacher actions in brackets. Excerpt 1 displays the initial portion of the Teacher Input section of Lucia's lesson.

Excerpt 1. Lucia's Rehearsal Script for Facilitating Target Language Comprehensibility

1	Maestro	En la clase de hoy vamos a hablar sobre comida especialmente cómo pedir que nos hagan un emparedado con los ingredientes que deseamos comer. Levanta la mano si te gustan los emparedados.
2	Sts	[Students raise hands]
3	Maestro	Levanta tu mano si te gusta ir a *Subway*.
4	Sts	[Students raise hands]
5	Maestro	¡Es muy importante aprender los nombres de los ingredientes que nos gustan, pues así podemos pedir que nos hagan un emparedado bien sabroso como para chuparse los dedos! Si no sabes pedir correctamente los ingredientes corres el riesgo de que te preparen un emparedado que no te guste y luego vas a estar hambriento y disgustado todo el día. ¿Qué necesitas saber para pedir que te preparen un emparedado en un establecimiento como *Subway*?

6	Maestro	[Waits for students to respond]
7	Maestro	¡¡Necesitamos saber sobre los ingredientes de un emparedado!! (El maestro deberá estar preparado para escribir en la pizarra los ingredientes de un emparedado)
8	Maestro	Ingredientes de un emparedado [escribir en la pizarra] a) Pan/Bread b) Vegetales/Vegetables c) Queso/Cheese d) Carne/Meat (Hacer que los alumnos repitan)

As Excerpt 1 illustrates, Lucia planned to begin her lesson by introducing the objective for the day. Her entire script was in the target language and she had incorporated opportunities for students to respond. However, she included few brackets describing her own actions and there was no mention of visuals or gestures.

Phase III: Rehearsal and Coaching

Recommendation 1. Lesson rehearsals are approximations of practice, which form critical learning activities in a practice-based approach as they act as dialogic mediating tools for student teachers' development (Troyan & Peercy, 2018). In this phase, student teachers enact their lesson segments with a special emphasis on the components of the HLTP and pause—or are asked to pause—their teaching to be coached by the teacher educator. A key recommendation for this phase is to maximize the opportunities for rehearsal. In our teaching contexts, each student teacher had the opportunity to enact their lessons or segments of lessons and receive coaching. However, in the U.S. setting, student teachers planned their lessons individually and rehearsed each HLTP in different rehearsal sessions. In the Chilean context, student teachers worked in pairs and planned lessons collaboratively, with one student teacher rehearsing a segment of the lesson and receiving direct coaching. Student teachers rotated to rehearse their lessons during the semester so that all were able to perform the role of the teacher and rehearse one HLTP during the semester. Another strategy that was used to enhance the opportunities for practice was having student teachers record themselves practicing segments of lessons in advance (i.e. starting the lesson, giving instructions, explaining vocabulary, conducting an interpersonal communication task). This strategy was used to scaffold the learning process and to contribute to the level of student teachers' confidence and self-efficacy. However, it is important to note that these videos did not replace the rehearsal sessions, but worked primarily as stepping stones.

Recommendation 2: Another key recommendation in *Phase III: Rehearsal and Coaching* is to carefully plan coaching moves, with careful attention to context, to provide opportunities for the interrogation of teachers' practice and its consequences. When coaching, the teacher educator guides student teachers through the enactment of teaching moves. This includes such elements as giving directive feedback, highlighting the importance of a teaching move enacted by the student teacher, asking a question for reflection, or modelling a specific move to be enacted by the student teacher (TeachingWorks, 2018).

In the Chilean context, student teachers planned minilessons (with a focus on *facilitating target language comprehensibility* and *building a discourse community*) in pairs and subsequently rehearsed their lessons in class. The teacher educator paused the lesson at critical moments of the rehearsal to coach student teachers by making suggestions such as "Use a synonym, point to the picture," or by asking questions such as "Why did you choose to

teach those words?," or "What do you think your students would do after you said that?" The teacher educator enacted a wide range of coaching moves which required a high level of self-confidence to know when to pause the lesson and which coaching move to use. Most student teachers were open to criticism and willing to interrogate their own practices. After the rehearsal sessions, student teachers wrote their reflections on the feedback and suggestions discussed in class and how they would consider them for their future implementations in school.

A Caution. In this phase, student teachers actively engaged in preparing the rehearsal session and enacting it. The rehearsals typically focused on one HLTP or a set of instructional practices. However, it was important that a set of norms was established before the rehearsal session so that everyone understood its intended structure, as well as assigned roles and functions (Kelley-Petersen et al., 2018). For instance, in the Chilean context, the first rehearsal session was a challenge. Student teachers were not sufficiently clear as to their roles and the structure of the session. So, when the teacher educator paused the lesson, the first student teacher reacted very defensively and did not integrate the feedback into his teaching.

In addition, in the case of some specific practices such as *designing and conducting oral interpersonal communication*, it can be difficult to effectively rehearse all aspects of the HLTP. For the rehearsal, other student teachers need to play the role of students and be able to engage in the interpersonal task. In this sense, student teachers need to share the target language at a similar level of proficiency. In contexts in which the Methods course is taught to teachers of different foreign languages, it is recommended that instead of rehearsing all aspects of HTLP, only a set of instructional moves such as *activating background knowledge* and *providing language support* be enacted. Teachers can still gain significant learning in planning the rehearsal of the interpersonal task and its instructions.

Lucia's Rehearsal

As Excerpt 2 illustrates, Lucia's rehearsal began slightly differently than she had planned. This was to be expected, because student teachers were told that they did not have to follow the script word-for-word, but that its purpose was more to carefully think through the lesson.

Excerpt 2. Lucia Rehearsal Transcription

1	Lucia	Pan emparedado. [Holds up picture of sandwich bread] ¿Levanta la mano si te gusta comer pan? Te gusta comer pan levanta la mano. ¿Levanta la mano si te gusta ir a *Subway*? Do you like *Subway*? Me gusta *Subway*. Entonces es importante cuando vamos a pedir comida saber los ingredientes. ¿Cómo se llaman? ¿Que queremos nuestro pan? Si no sabes los ingredientes vas a estar triste. Vas a llorar. I don't like it. Porque no sabes pedir que lo que lleva tu pan. Así que hoy vamos a aprender sobre la comida y como preparar un pan en *Subway*. ¿Que van a necesitar? Vamos a hacer una pequeña práctica. Ustedes tienen tres vegetales.
2	Teacher Educator (TE)	Let's pause right there. Let's see. [TE calls on student who does not speak Spanish] Do you know what we're doing so far?
3	Student 2 (S2)	She's telling some story.
4	TE	Okay. Do you know anything else?
5	S2	Talking about the bread.

6	TE	Okay. Yeah.
7	S2	For some reason, she wanted something that she could not have. So, she cried.
8	TE	Okay so far S2 thinks it's something about bread. Maybe it's a story. Maybe you are sad about something, so you cried. What are some ideas that would've made this intro part a little more comprehensible for S2? I love your visuals; those are so good. S2, did you get the part about *Subway*? No.
9	S2	No.
10	TE	So, you might have students say that they don't know what *Subway* is.
11	Lucia	Yeah. Okay.
12	TE	So, maybe if you have a picture of the shop.
13	S2	I heard her mention that but I did not link to that.
14	TE	Yeah. So you might say something like "Un restaurante que se llama *Subway* y allí se vende pan" or something like that right?
15	Lucia	Okay perfect.
16	TE	Perfect.
17	Lucia	A picture of a *Subway*?
18	TE	Exactly. I think that would help a lot.

As Excerpt 2 illustrates, Lucia, began her lesson in Turn 1 with a series of sentences interspersed with questions in Spanish, just as she had planned to do. However, unlike her script, she translated her phrases to English twice (Turn 1), despite the requirement that she use only the target language. In Turn 2, the teacher educator interrupted Lucia and called on a Chinese student teacher in the class to inquire about whether she had understood Lucia. Turns 3, 5, and 7 revealed that she had not. As a result, the teacher educator complimented Lucia's use of pictures (Turn 8), asked a question for reflection (Turn 8), provided directive feedback (Turn 12), and modeled a way to make her language more comprehensible (Turn 14).

Phase IV: Implementation and Reflection

Recommendation 1. One of the most critical recommendations related to *Phase IV: Implementation and Reflection* concerns the need for flexibility on the part of both the teacher educator and the student teacher. It is inevitable in schools that there will be unanticipated interruptions (such as an unexpected field trip or cancellation of school for a weather emergency) and student teachers will not necessarily be able to enact their lesson in the K–12 classroom on the day that they had planned. In some cases, we have had student teachers who were not able to enact the lesson that they had rehearsed at all. For example, one student teacher planned and rehearsed a lesson that illustrated the HLTP of *facilitating target language comprehensibility*. However, when she returned to her field site the following week, she learned that her clinical educator had already taught the content. In this case, the student teacher had to implement the HLTP in a lesson plan that she had not yet rehearsed. Strict due dates on lesson implementations and reflections can cause added stress to student teachers who are already overwhelmed with the demands of learning to teach.

Recommendation 2. As the length of many teacher education programs across the world decreases, the placement of student teachers in field sites for student teaching becomes even more critical. For example, in the U.S. context described in this study, the graduate certificate program required only 16 credits, three of which were dedicated to student teaching. As a result, the practices and beliefs of clinical educators (often referred to as cooperating teachers in the United States or *profesores mentores* in Chile) have a profound impact on student teachers' development (Delaney, 2012). To develop the ability to carry out these HLTPs, student teachers must be placed in classrooms where clinical educators model these practices on a daily basis. In both of our contexts, we have had experiences where student teachers were placed in classrooms in which the clinical educator did not agree with the focused practice of *facilitating target language comprehensibility* and wanted our student teachers to use more of the students' first language and did not allow student teachers to implement other instructional moves. Such placements undermine the practice-based learning cycle and put the student teacher in a stressful position that can inhibit their development as teachers.

A Caution. A critical component of Phase IV is for student teachers to video-record their enactment, which comes with its own set of inherent challenges. On the most practical level, video-recording has become much simpler with cell phones; however, student teachers must remember that most phones stop recording after 15 minutes. A more profound consideration deals with who is captured in the video. In order for students to appear in the video, student teachers must secure signed permission forms from students' parents. As a result, our student teachers often submit teaching videos that show only themselves teaching. It is often difficult to draw conclusions about the extent to which students were engaged, how many students were participating, and what exactly they were doing. In fact, a video of only the students might be more telling than a video of only the teacher.

Lucia's Implementation and Reflection

Building on Excerpts 1 and 2, Excerpt 3 illustrates Lucia's implementation of the portion of her lesson rehearsed in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 3. Lucia's Classroom Implementation

1	Lucia	Muy buenas tardes clase. Buenas tardes. ¿Cómo están?
2	Students	Excelente.
3	Lucia	Excelente. Muy bien. Hoy vamos a hablar de comida. [Lucia holds up a picture of a *Subway* restaurant].
4	Students	*Subway*!
5	Lucia	*Subway*. Yes! Vamos a hablar de *Subway*. ¿Qué es esto que está aquí? [Showing the newspaper of *Subway* to the class]
6	Students	*Subway*.
7	Lucia	Y eso es para pedir un pan emparedado. Raise your hand if you like *Subway*?
8	Student	Me!
9	Lucia	Raise your hand if you don't like *Subway*? Okay. Today we are going to learn how to ask for food in *Subway* in Spanish. Vamos a hablar de cómo pedir un emparedado en *Subway* pero primero tenemos que saber los ingredientes.

Excerpt 3 illustrates how Lucia translated one instance of coaching into her lesson implementation with students. Comparison of Excerpts 2 and 3

illustrates that Lucia more effectively focused learners' attention on the topic of the lesson by shortening her introduction and simplifying her language. While Turns 7 and 9 revealed Lucia's continued struggles with using solely the target language, Turns 3 and 5 revealed that she implemented the teacher educator's feedback by providing students with a visual to make her talk more comprehensible.

Following lesson implementation, the student teachers also self-assessed their implementation using the same deconstruction tool that was used in Phase 1. Table 2 displays Lucia's assessment of her own lesson with the highlighted elements corresponding to her perceived scores and justifications. This pedagogical tool allowed student teachers to examine their practices and find opportunities for improvement.

Table 2. Lucia's Self-Assessment

Criteria	Approaching expectations	Meets expectations	Exceeding expectations
Amount of target language used	Target language is used less than ¾ of class time.	Target language is used approximately ¾ of class time.	Target language is used more than ¾ of class time.
Justification of your score	The class is conducted in Spanish. Most of the instructions and vocabulary is presented in Spanish.		
Comprehensible language	Student teacher paraphrases but may not adjust rate of speech, tends not to define new words with examples, may resort to English at times, and uses familiar vocabulary.	Student teacher paraphrases and adjusts rate of speech, defines new words with examples, and uses familiar vocabulary and structures.	Student teacher paraphrases and adjusts rate of speech, defines new words with examples, re-enters new words frequently in input, signals new words with structures and tone of voice, and uses familiar vocabulary and structures.
Justification of your score with timestamps	(8 min 40 s) The teacher writes the vocabulary words on the board. (1 min 25 s–2 min 47 s) The teacher reinforces the vocabulary words while giving the students the ingredients for Activity 1. (The same happened for Activity 2, when she introduces the meats.)		
Contextual support	Students do not know the topic and objective of the lesson in advance. Little use of gestures, visuals, and/or objects to support comprehension	Students know the topic and objective of the lesson in advance. Teacher uses gestures, visuals, and/or objects to support comprehension.	Students know the topic and objective in advance. Teacher uses gesture, visuals, and objects in creative ways to support comprehension.

Justification of your score with timestamps	Students have been learning about food since the beginning of the unit, three classes ago. This activity has been an example of summative assessment for them.		
Lesson context	Context may not be meaningful or purposeful.	Lesson has a meaningful context.	Meaningful and cultural context drives the lesson.
Justification of your score	The lesson is meaningful because students are taught an activity that they can perform in a real-case scenario.		
Content-Specific Language	Student teacher does not give students adequate time to think and respond using content-specific language.	Student teacher gives students time to think and respond using content-specific language.	Student teacher gives time to think and respond using content-specific language and multiple modalities (writing, speaking, and performing the group task).
Justification of your score with timestamps	Students are required to speak, asking for the ingredients in their subway (*emparedado*)		
Comprehensible interactions	Students are passive as teacher presents new material.	Teacher involves some students in the presentation of new material.	Teacher engages all students in the presentation of new material.
Justification of your score	Through the video, you can hear students' participation. Students are super-excited to participate in this activity. They all are asking for a turn to create their sub.		
Clarify and extend thinking	Student teacher does not pose follow-up questions to clarify, probe, or extend thinking based on student responses.	Student teacher poses follow-up questions to clarify, probe, or extend thinking based on student responses.	Student teacher poses follow-up questions to clarify, probe, and extend thinking based on student responses without leading the student to one correct answer. Students are able to extend and justify their thinking.
Justification of your score and three examples	The teacher helps the students when they feel insecure about what ingredients to ask for. After the student's response the teacher reaffirms the answer.		

Discussion and Conclusion

Responding to international trends toward more practice-based approaches in language teacher education (Davin & Troyan, 2015; Pang, 2018), we both incorporated a practice-based learning cycle in which student teachers engaged in language teaching practice. Based on our individual experiences and dialogue about our contexts, supported by our reflections and the analysis of student teachers' outcomes, we believe that incorporating this approach into the university foreign language teacher education classroom offers a useful opportunity to examine and illuminate some of the complexities of foreign language teaching practice across contexts.

As demonstrated by our two experiences, student teachers need to engage in practice, enacting key instructional moves that are suitable for a situated context. However, this enactment needs to be accompanied by constant reflection about the implementation in real classrooms and its implications for students' learning. This reflective process allows student teachers to make connections with theoretical underpinnings more meaningful and relevant for them, offering a potent means of potentially shaping and reshaping their conceptual knowledge (Peercy & Troyan, 2017). It also appears that this consistent dialogue and personal inquiry can foster student teachers' identity development as more reflective teachers.

Rehearsal sessions have the potential to be crucial in teachers' development as they are,

> informed not only by the knowledge for enacted practice that is the goal of the activity (i.e., unassisted implementation of the core practice), but also by the broader individual, historical, and contextual factors, including the kind of mediation provided, that construct the activity setting of learning to teach a second language. (Troyan & Peercy, 2018, p. 270)

In this sense, it is important to consider that a practice-based approach is adopted in more than one course of a teacher education program. Such iteration allows student teachers to develop a more sophisticated understanding of language teaching practice. This means not only developing an appropriate set of effective instructional moves, but also a complex understanding of what teaching and learning a foreign language implies.

Furthermore, this collaboration affirmed that teacher educators must carefully plan instructional activities within the context of the university setting, considering appropriate mediation tools and scaffolds in each phase of the practice-based learning cycle. The learning cycle implemented proved to be essentially student-centered and contributed to the construction of a continuum of practice-based teaching opportunities from university settings to school contexts. In this sense, we confirmed that instructional activities need to be aligned with the school so that they can foster student teachers' learning in a situated context. Reflecting on the outcomes of our differing implementations of this approach, we concur with the observations of Peercy et al. (2019), who contend that:

> Teacher educators must employ [practice-based teacher education] in ways that are mindful of tensions between providing sufficient support to [novice teachers], while also not ignoring context, teacher and student subjectivities and agency, and the cultural and linguistic resources that students and teachers bring to teaching and learning. (p. 9)

As language teacher educators, we have been challenged in integrating and adopting this practice-based approach as a viable pedagogy in our foreign language teaching methods courses. We have implemented this approach, taking clear account of the cultural and linguistic resources of our student teachers, through the development of responsive tools to support them in our unique settings. However, we have also reflected on our own understanding and expertise of language teaching, as well as the complexities of practice (Peercy & Troyan, 2017). Consistent with this perspective, we

concur with other studies (see Grosser-Clarkson & Neel, 2019) that call for more "transparent reporting on practice and investigation of practice" (p. 11). Such transparency can provide a more developed understanding of how the practice-based approach impacts teaching and thereby contribute to the design of more effective learning responses.

Finally, we conclude that future studies should critically investigate the longitudinal effects of a practice-based approach to teacher preparation to make a more robust empirical foundation for informing language teacher education practice. This form of research could potentially allow for the development of more responsive language teacher pedagogies that more effectively contemplate the realities of changing classroom practice.

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A Reflection on Initiatives for Teachers' Professional Development Through Language Assessment Literacy

Una reflexión sobre iniciativas para el desarrollo profesional docente mediante la literacidad en evaluación de lenguas

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In this reflection article I examine language assessment literacy initiatives and their possible impact on teachers, and I discuss the connections that exist between language assessment literacy and teachers' professional development. I explain that training for language assessment literacy may primarily foster teachers' knowledge and skills and, secondarily, principles for language assessment (e.g., fairness). In conclusion, existing language assessment literacy initiatives, while limited in number, have the potential to advance teachers' language assessment literacy overall and contribute to their professional development. Thus, this article may be useful to language teacher educators, particularly in the Colombian context.

Keywords: language assessment literacy, language testing and assessment, professional development programs, teachers' professional development, teacher training

En este artículo de reflexión examino las iniciativas que han surgido alrededor de la literacidad en evaluación de lenguas y su posible impacto en la docencia. Asimismo, establezco la relación entre dicha literacidad y el desarrollo profesional docente, y explico cómo la capacitación en este ámbito se ha enfocado, primero que todo, en el conocimiento y las habilidades y, seguidamente, en los principios de evaluación de lenguas (por ejemplo, la justicia). En conclusión, las iniciativas existentes en la literatura, si bien son pocas, podrían fomentar la literacidad de evaluación de docentes de idiomas y, así, contribuir a su desarrollo profesional. Por ello, este artículo puede ser útil para formadores de profesores, en particular en el contexto colombiano.

Palabras clave: capacitación docente, desarrollo profesional docente, evaluación de lenguas, literacidad en evaluación de lenguas, programas de desarrollo profesional

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Introduction

Language assessment literacy (LAL) is one of the most recent discussions in the area of language testing. Research in this specific aspect of the field has gained increasing attention since Davies's (2008) review of language testing textbooks and what they aim to teach. Davies concludes that textbooks revolve around three components: knowledge, skills, and principles for language testing. Particularly, current discussions in LAL include the need that various stakeholders (e.g., teachers, students, language testers, and others) have to deal with language assessment. An appropriate context-sensitive level of LAL can allow these stakeholders to derive sound interpretations to make appropriate decisions based on scores from assessment. Specifically, LAL is needed across a range of contexts and people because language assessment plays a prominent role in educational and social contexts (Fulcher, 2010). Finally, at a more fine-grained level, scholarly work on LAL has attempted to define what this construct is, and authors have proposed definitions and models to operationalize LAL. Because of the discussions that LAL has triggered, this construct is necessarily expanding, with calls being made to include stakeholders such as students and school administrators (Malone, 2017) and to provide specific competencies of LAL for teachers (Stabler-Havener, 2018).

In fact, language teachers have been a central stakeholder group in the LAL puzzle. The research for these agents of language assessment has, most prominently, examined their practices, received training, and specific needs in LAL (Frodden Armstrong et al., 2004; Fulcher, 2012; Hasselgreen et al., 2004; López Mendoza & Bernal Arandia, 2009; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). Authors have also offered insights into what shape LAL should have for language teachers (Fulcher, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2013b). In synthesis, language teachers' LAL comprises a wide range of knowledge, skills, and principles, some examples of which are presented in the following list:

Knowledge of

- models describing language ability;
- key concepts, (e.g., validity, reliability, and authenticity);
- language pedagogy;
- second language acquisition theories;
- bilingual issues.

Skills in

- the design of instruments for assessing language skills;
- connecting language assessment and instruction;
- statistical interpretation and calculation;
- planning, implementation, and evaluation of assessments;
- reporting interpretations from language assessment to various users.

Principles for

- guarding language assessment against misuses;
- treating students fairly;
- using language assessment data ethically;
- evaluating the quality of language assessment procedures;
- bringing about positive consequences for student learning.

Because of its width and depth, a major impetus in researching teachers' LAL is warranted in the near future. For example, the field is still debating what exactly the LAL for teachers can and should be (Stabler-Havener, 2018). Thus, construct operationalization is ongoing, specifically because language assessment is naturally responsive to the contexts where teachers do their work (Hill, 2017; Scarino, 2013). Notwithstanding the need for further research, a trend is evident in the literature: Scholars in language testing suggest and expect that teachers have a wide repertoire in LAL, and language teachers themselves have reported burning needs in a wide variety of issues for professional development in language assessment, as I discuss below.

The call for teachers to have appropriate levels of LAL is sensible. They are the ones most directly and frequently involved in collecting data about their

students' language ability. As commented, they claim they need to increase their LAL across the board, and the call for this to happen is constant. Thus, the need for professional development in LAL is ever present.

My purpose with the present reflection, then, is to offer language teacher educators in Colombia a reflection and synthesis of existing initiatives for language teachers' LAL and, especially, focus on how they seem to help language teachers develop professionally in the area of language assessment. To make the analysis useful to teacher educators, I have divided the reflection into five sections. The first part is about the meaning of professional development in language teaching and its relation with LAL. Then, I review particulars of how assessment literacy and LAL have been defined, and I provide a synthesis of LAL specifics for language teachers. In the third section I examine studies that report teachers' needs in language assessment, followed by a review of trends in LAL initiatives to foster this construct. I end the paper by explaining how initiatives for LAL and language teachers' professional development intersect.

Professional Development in Language Teaching

In general terms, professional development is considered a reflection-based approach to teachers' improvement in language education. Various authors (Díaz-Maggioli, 2004; Farrell, 2013; Freeman, 1989) generally contrast professional development with training, arguing that the former seeks to empower teachers to become reflective and proactive towards their work as teachers; training, on the other hand, is related to specifics and technicalities of the teaching profession (Farrell, 2013; Richards & Farrell, 2005). More recently, Farrell (2013) warns that teachers should not be recipients of top-down professional development by outside experts but become engaged in what he calls bottom-up professional development; this approach is more akin to teachers' context of teaching. Farrell defines professional development as "a continual intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal growth of teachers" (p. 22). In conclusion, the consensus seems to be that professional development, rather than training, is the goal of teacher education. However, as might become apparent later in this article, teachers in LAL initiatives have been recipients of training, which may also involve professional development.

To promote professional development, authors have agreed on a number of principles upon which professional development programs are designed and their types. Table 1, by no means an exhaustive list, includes features that scholars have suggested for effective professional development (Atay, 2008; Cárdenas et al., 2010; Castañeda-Londoño, 2017; Clarke, 2003; Díaz-Maggioli, 2004; González, 2007; Johnston, 2009).

Table 1. Principles and Types of Professional Development Programs

Principles	Types
• based on context-specific needs of teachers; • based on reflection, collaboration, observation, feedback, and change; • responsive to and respectful of teachers' voices; • receiving explicit and sustained institutional support (e.g., time to be in workshops).	• study groups; • collaborative action-research; • reflective writing, (e.g., in journal entries or narrative inquiry); • group discussions; • formal professional development programs administered by institutions; • narrative inquiries; • blended learning.

Undoubtedly, the task of doing language assessment is part of teachers' practices. Thus, furthering their professional development must also involve close attention to how and why teachers do language assessment (Giraldo, 2020; Hill, 2017; Scarino, 2013). In fact, principles such as delivering professional development programs based on teachers' needs and providing sustained support are echoed in LAL discussions (Brindley, 2001; Inbar-Lourie, 2008). Importantly, for LAL programs to happen, the construct of LAL needs to be operationalized. Next, then, is an overview of what assessment literacy and LAL mean.

Assessment Literacy, LAL, and Language Teachers' LAL

In general education, the term assessment literacy is attributed to Stiggins (1991). He defined assessment literacy as the knowledge and ability necessary to use and evaluate assessments effectively to account for student learning. More specifically, teachers' general assessment literacy has been operationalized through standards proposed by the American Federation of Teachers et al. (1990). The standards cover a range of issues in assessment, from using and designing assessments and their results, to criticizing uses and misuses of assessment.

Similarly, LAL comprises these generic competencies but, clearly, the term *language* differentiates LAL from assessment literacy (Inbar-Lourie, 2012). Because LAL is an ongoing issue in language testing, the construct has embraced multiple shades of meaning. For instance, it is agreed that LAL includes knowledge, skills, and principles for language assessment (Davies, 2008; Inbar-Lourie, 2008). However, teachers' LAL has taken a rather granular level. Inbar-Lourie (2013b) claims that their LAL should include the following elements:

1. Understanding of the social role of assessment and the responsibility of the language tester. Understanding of the political [and] social forces involved, test power and consequences. (p. 27)
2. Knowledge on how to write, administer and analyze tests; report test results and ensure test quality. (p. 32)
3. Understanding of large scale test data. (p. 33)
4. Proficiency in Language Classroom Assessment. (p. 36)
5. Mastering language acquisition and learning theories and relating to them in the assessment process. (p. 39)
6. Matching assessment with language teaching approaches. Knowledge about current language teaching approaches and pedagogies. (p. 41)
7. Awareness of the dilemmas that underlie assessment: formative vs. summative; internal external; validity and reliability issues particularly with reference to authentic language use. (p. 45)
8. LAL is individualized, the product of the knowledge, experience, perceptions, and beliefs that language teachers bring to the teaching and assessment process (based on Scarino, 2013). (p. 46)

As can be discerned from the list above, language assessment is far-reaching in teachers' professional development, so it cannot be understudied in language teacher education, as research has shown (López Mendoza & Bernal Arandia, 2009; Sultana, 2019; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). Additionally, LAL may be a catalyst of reflection in professional development, especially because it can have an impact on technical aspects (i.e., design of assessments), people, and institutions. In fact, Fulcher's (2012) empirical definition of LAL for language teachers highlights these areas:

> The knowledge, skills and abilities required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate, large-scale standardized and/or classroom-based tests, familiarity with test processes, and awareness of principles and concepts that guide and underpin practice, including ethics and codes of practice. The ability to place knowledge, skills, processes, principles and concepts within wider historical, social, political and philosophical frameworks in order to understand why practices have arisen as they have, and to evaluate the role and impact of testing on society, institutions, and individuals. (p. 125)

As the definitions above clearly suggest, much is expected of language teachers. Most importantly, perhaps, is that these authors do not conceive assessment as an afterthought but rather something that underlies language teachers' professional development. For instance, both authors agree that teachers need to be aware of and evaluate how assessment impacts society; I argue that this implies a reflective stance natural to professional development. However, the authors also highlight the technical aspect of assessment (e.g., the act of design) as a fundamental part of LAL. This, as I will show, reflects the training aspect of LAL: One that requires detailed knowledge and skills for sound practices. It seems then that LAL for teachers should conceive both training (i.e., study of operational skills for assessment) and development (e.g., reflection upon the impact testing can have). Studies that have tapped into language teachers' needs for LAL have suggested this dual approach. In the next section, then, I review studies that support this contention.

Teachers' Perceived Training and Needs in LAL

Most of the research to date on teachers' LAL has focused on describing their perceived training and needs. Consistently, studies have indicated that these stakeholders feel unprepared for doing language assessment and this has remained a trend in the literature (Berry et al., 2017; Hasselgreen et al., 2004; Lam, 2015; Lan & Fan, 2019; Tavassoli & Farhady, 2018; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). Considering their lack of LAL, when asked about further training, teachers express needs regarding theoretical and technical aspects, with secondary attention to critical issues such as the impact of testing on social communities (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2018; Fulcher, 2012; Lam, 2015; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). Overall, their needs reflect Davies's (2008) components: knowledge, skills, and principles. The studies also remark, perhaps naturally, on the need for emphasis on classroom-based language assessment, as opposed to large-scale testing. However, as Vogt and Tsagari (2014) argue, teachers should become critical towards the power that large-scale tests have and their impact on the language classroom; here it is worth remembering that Fulcher's (2012) definition of LAL also connects language teachers to evaluating large-scale testing.

While the trends above—especially lack of training—are common to LAL research across various regions in the world, studies have also shown some specificities. For example, Xie and Tan (2019) studied the perceived needs of both practicing and preservice teachers on the verge of becoming in-service ones. The results in this study indicated that preservice teachers felt prepared for assessing speaking and writing and for adapting their assessment practices based on students' needs. The authors, citing DeLuca and Klinger (2010), claim that this attitude could be considered unrealistic optimism and that perhaps the preservice teachers did not really envision the complexities of doing assessment in context. Further, in a study on teachers' assessment literacy related to assessing writing, Crusan et al. (2016) found that teachers generally reported themselves as being able to deal with the task of assessing writing; however, they expressed specific needs in rubric creation. Lastly, Giraldo and Murcia's (2018) study with preservice teachers pointed towards a specific aspect that may impact LAL. When asked about what to learn in a language assessment course, these stakeholders expressly expected attention to general assessment policies in Colombian education.

Two crucial aspects about the findings in these studies warrant analysis. Clearly, language teachers and LAL researchers agree on the burning need to foster higher levels of LAL. More importantly—and I believe this marks a central call—the studies emphasize the need for language assessment courses to be foundational in language teacher education programs. Authors have repeatedly called for this emphasis (Herrera & Macías, 2015; Lam, 2015; López Mendoza & Bernal Arandia, 2009). Language assessment should not be studied

superficially; if such is the case, teachers might have to resort to learning about language assessment on the job through experience and contextual factors (Berry et al., 2017; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014; Xie & Tan, 2019; Yan et al., 2018). I would like to think language education programs in Colombia are increasingly becoming more adept towards embracing core courses for language assessment; if so, then they should disseminate their practices for interested stakeholders to learn from these experiences.

The other crucial aspect is that the studies above suggest the need for training more than the need for professional development. In other words, teachers seem to want more LAL for operational purposes rather than for reflective ones. For instance, quantitative surveys consistently show higher percentages when it comes to tasks such as designing language assessments or knowledge of theoretical aspects (e.g., validity and reliability; Brown & Bailey, 2008; Fulcher, 2012). However, teachers do not explicitly report the need to study ethics and fairness in language assessment (Giraldo & Murcia, 2018; Harding & Kremmel, 2016; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014); arguably, these topics may spark more reflection than technicalities and therefore be more aligned with what professional development represents. Perhaps teachers take these issues as relevant to their teaching in general, and this is why they do not report any need in these aspects for language assessment. Additionally, ethics and fairness are mostly discussed in large-scale testing and are under-researched in classroom language assessment. Thus, these two principles could lead to interesting discussions if included in professional development programs for teachers' LAL, but this may imply a judgment call by teacher educators.

Since teachers report various needs in language assessment, this represents a challenge and an opportunity for teacher educators to foster LAL. The next section, then, discusses trends in initiatives that seek to help language teachers to improve their LAL. The section focuses on proposed foci for LAL programs to help teachers learn about language assessment; an overview of self-access materials; and finally, a review of formal programs (e.g., workshops) for teachers.

LAL Initiatives

Self-Access Materials

Self-access materials for fostering LAL can be divided into three kinds: textbooks for language testing, scientific journals, and other online resources. On the one hand are textbooks for language testing. Some of these resources can be somewhat theoretical but there is an increasing call to make them more practical for language teachers. For example, Fulcher's book (2010) is based on feedback given by language teachers as to what they would expect from a language testing book. The practical book by Carr (2011) offers practitioners the opportunity to study basic measurement with the use of Excel; Brown's (2011) has a similar approach. Of course, these resources explore common theoretical aspects such as validity and authenticity. Finally, these textbooks also include guidelines for constructing assessments and they explore the social aspect of language testing, particularly the works by Fulcher and Carr. (For reviews on textbooks for language testing, see Brown & Bailey, 2008; Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; and Malone, 2017.)

While many of these textbooks include practical exercises with answer keys, a challenge may be that teachers do not get feedback from more knowledgeable peers. Teachers get what is offered in the book only. Another possible challenge is the books' relatively high cost, but this of course depends on personal budget. Besides, various textbooks can be bought online, so the problem of not having access to specialized bookstores can be overcome.

Publications such as journal articles or research reports, though in many cases technical, can be a second source for LAL. Publications such as *Language Testing*, *Language Assessment Quarterly*, *Papers in Language Testing and Assessment*, and *Studies in Language Testing*

are particularly written for an expert audience of language testers and applied linguists. Occasionally, they have articles with a more practical approach. However, more general journals in language education include language assessment articles that have teachers as their audience. Table 2 lists some journals that include articles on language assessment that do not generally require advanced knowledge of the field.

To find articles in these journals, teachers can access the links and use a search bar. Then, they can type keywords (or combinations thereof) to find relevant articles, for example: *assessment*, *portfolio*, *peer assessment*, *testing reading*, *exam*, and so on. Many universities pay to have access to journals, so if teachers have an official university email account, they may be able access their universities' paid online databases to find the journals above and others.

A last type of self-access materials in this review are those delivered online. Some of these require teachers to pay a fee, but there are others that teachers can access for free. I will focus on four that can be used at no cost.

The British Council's *How Language Assessment Works* (https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/assessment-literacy) is a video-based exploration of key qualities and issues in language assessment like test development and validity, the assessment of language skills, and others. This resource also includes a PDF for teachers to study the glossary about language assessment (Coombe, 2018). This resource can be used to target the *knowledge* side of LAL (Davies, 2008).

Table 2. Some Journals With Teacher-Oriented Articles on Language Testing and Assessment

Journals	Fee required	Open access
ELT *Journal* (https://academic.oup.com/eltj)	x	
TESOL *Quarterly* (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/15457249)	x	
TESOL *Journal* (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/19493533)	x	
The Journal of Asia TEFL (http://journal.asiatefl.org/)		x
English Teaching Forum (https://americanenglish.state.gov/forum)		x
Íkala: Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura (http://aprendeenlinea.udea.edu.co/revistas/index.php/ikala)		x
Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development (https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile)		x
HOW Journal (https://www.howjournalcolombia.org/index.php/how)		x
Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal (https://revistas.udistrital.edu.co/index.php/calj)		x

Understanding Assessment (http://www.cal.org/flad/tutorial/), developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics, is a resource where teachers can explore language testing issues such as practicality and reliability. It includes an online glossary and a link to external resources for LAL. However, some of these external materials no longer exist. The information is presented through examples and has an interactive component that asks users to reflect on questions before they see suggested answers. This resource may also be considered on the *knowledge* side of LAL.

The *Teachers' Assessment Literacy Enhancement Project* (TALE) is a comprehensive resource for teachers which has a downloadable handbook (Tsagari et al., 2018) that teachers and teacher educators can print and refer to whenever needed. The handbook covers issues such as purposes, methods, and constructs for assessment. It also provides sample items and tasks for teachers to evaluate and extra suggested sources for LAL. Importantly, the handbook also engages users in examining test impact as it underlies assessment practices. Thus, the handbook targets LAL at large: knowledge, skills, and principles.

Additionally, TALE provides users with eight open courses for language assessment. To access them, teachers need a user account. The courses cover the same areas as the handbook but teachers can provide feedback to course tasks. Another advantage is that the courses include embedded videos that illustrate topics in assessment. The TALE project is arguably one the most complete free resources for practitioners to thoroughly learn about language assessment at large (http://taleproject.eu/).

Glenn Fulcher's *Language Testing Resources Website* (http://languagetesting.info/) can also aid in developing LAL. This website offers numerous articles about language testing and includes videos and podcasts in which scholars offer definitions for concepts such as test impact, validity, integrated skills, and others. Although the contents may be theoretical for practicing language teachers, the materials are curated by an expert (Fulcher) and thus offer reliable information. Finally, Fulcher frequently updates the site with relevant news articles and recent publications.

To date, there are no published reports that trace the effect of these free online resources on their users. Thus, the extent to which they impact teachers' LAL, and their professional development, is currently unknown. However, Tsagari et al. (2018) explain that, by accessing TALE's courses, teachers express their consent on data usage for research purposes. This means there might be official reports, at least of this program.

Professional Development Programs for LAL

The focus in this section is on research studies that sought to target specific aspects of language teachers' LAL, from only *knowledge*, to *knowledge*, *skills*, and *principles*. Table 3 includes information about the type of professional development program the teachers were engaged in, the topics and/or tasks that formed the contents of the programs, and the most salient learning points in the studies. To find these studies, I consulted specialized journals (e.g., *Language Assessment Quarterly*) and local journals in Colombia. The main criteria for selecting the studies was that they had to explicitly report (a) initiatives in which teachers studied language assessment and (b) clearly reported results from these programs.

Several commonalities may be discerned in the studies below. Except for Giraldo and Murcia (2019), the professional development initiatives did not last long periods of time but a week (for example, Baker & Riches, 2017) or three weeks (Kremmel et al., 2018), or even a few hours (Boyd & Donnarumma, 2018). The reason for this can be traced to a second commonality: All studies, except Giraldo and Murcia, involved in-service teachers who were not taking official courses and naturally were doing their in-service work.

Table 3. Studies Reporting the Impact of Professional Development Programs on Teachers' Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)

Publication	Type of Program	Focus of LAL	Main Results Impacting LAL
Nier et al. (2009)	Blended learning course	Knowledge and skills: key concepts; task and rubric development; assessing culture	Participants expanded their understanding of assessment.
Walters (2010)	Workshops	Skills and principles: standards reversed engineering, item specifications; critical analysis of items and standards	• Increase in critical awareness regarding standards and performance indicators for English language learning. • Awareness of possible connections between standards and indicators, and test items.
Arias et al. (2012)	Collaborative action research	Knowledge and skills: communicative language ability, key concepts (e.g., validity and reliability), design of instruments for speaking	• Better articulation between formative and summative practices • Rigorous design of instruments • Reliable practices • Higher levels of interactiveness in alternative assessments • High content validity in instruments • Greater inter-rater reliability. • Transparent practices thanks to rigorous rubrics • Fair and democratic assessment practices
Baker & Riches (2017)	A series of workshops that lasted one week.	Knowledge (superficially), skills, and principles: key concepts (e.g., validity and reliability); writing test items and tasks for reading, vocabulary, grammar, and writing; analyzing sample test items; doing student-centered assessment	Participants in this study • became critical towards large-scale test items used in their country; • learned how to create questions for reading comprehension; • described intricate constructs for reading assessments, that is, from superficial understanding to inferences; • became aware of the importance of vocabulary tasks for teaching and assessment; • learned how to design test items in grammar, vocabulary, and writing by having texts as their base; • connected teaching and assessment; • developed a more formative view of assessment; • became aware of the existence of key concepts such as validity and reliability; and • had difficulties sharing and/or accepting ideas from other workshop participants.

Publication	Type of Program	Focus of LAL	Main Results Impacting LAL
Boyd & Donnarumma (2018)	One three-hour workshop	Knowledge and skills: assessment purposes; traditional and alternative assessment; communicative competence as a construct; validity, reliability, and other assessment qualities; guidelines for the design of test items	Participants in this study • developed confidence to judge the validity of a test; • became aware of how students may react to assessments; • learned to identify poorly designed test items (e.g., questions); • connected test preparation and learner performance; • realized they needed further training for writing multiple-choice questions and judging writing and/or speaking performance; and • raised awareness on the importance and complexity of testing.
Kremmel et al. (2018)	Training for teachers as item writers. Three workshop weeks each year, for three years in a row.	Mainly skills: test specifications; using oral texts for listening; tasks for writing and items for listening; rating scales; item and task evaluation; improvement of tasks and items after trials; benchmarking	Participants in this study • learned mostly about item and task development (writing and evaluation); designing test specifications; test development (e.g., stages); test selection; validity, practicality, and reliability • related knowledge for large-scale testing to their own classroom assessment.
Giraldo & Murcia (2019)	Language assessment course for preservice teachers (16 weeks, 4 hours weekly)	Knowledge, skills, and principles: qualities such as validity, reliability, and authenticity; design of items for listening and reading; design of tasks for writing and speaking; communicative language testing; ethics and fairness; general assessment policies in Colombia	Participants in this study • radically changed conceptions: They went from a grade-only view to a broader conception of assessment. • developed a sophisticated metalanguage to analyze and critique assessment and assessment instruments • became aware of the intricacy involved in designing assessments (i.e., items and tasks) • connected their developing LAL to their practicum experience

As explained earlier, scholars have urged teacher educators to have a contextual, needs-based approach to professional development programs. Arias et al. (2012) and Giraldo and Murcia (2019) completed studies that directly align with this principle. In Walters (2010), the study was based on teachers' context but there is no explicit reference to their needs or institutional context in his research. In Baker and Riches (2017), the authors asked teachers about standardized examinations in Haiti *before* the workshop took place, but the authors do not report having planned the workshop based on teacher feedback, although it may be sensible to think they did. Finally, the remaining studies do not report how the professional development programs were planned but rather focus on how they were delivered. This does not mean these programs do not align with professional development principles at all. For example, Kremmel et al. (2018) had teachers carefully analyze and improve test items and tasks, which required consistent reflection. Additionally, these programs respected teachers' voices to analyze language assessment issues (Boyd & Donnarumma, 2018; Nier et al. 2009; Walters, 2010): Teachers had the chance to criticize policies for language learning, increased their awareness of language assessment, and reflected on how language assessment impacts students.

Lastly, most of the initiatives mainly focused on the *knowledge + skills* side of language testing (Davies, 2008). In other words, emphasis was placed on the nuts and bolts of testing, but the programs did not explicitly target critical issues such as ethics and fairness, or the social impact of language assessment. In this respect, Kremmel et al. (2018) clearly state that this was not the focus of the training they provided. Conversely, principles such as fairness and transparency were pivotal in Arias et al. (2012). These authors in fact highlight these principles as major findings in their study. Interestingly, the findings in Giraldo and Murcia (2019) do not refer to ethics and fairness, even though these were central contents in their LAL program. Thus, it remains unclear whether students in Giraldo and Murcia became aware of these issues in language assessment.

Three conclusions are worth highlighting. Not only did these initiatives teach specific aspects of language assessment (e.g., validity), but they helped teachers become more critical towards their practices or assessment systems. For example, in Baker and Riches (2017), the participating teachers became critical towards the way standardized tests are designed; also, in Walters (2010), teachers criticized test items and their relationship, or lack thereof, with standards for learning English. Finally, the participants in Boyd and Donnarumma (2018) aligned knowledge of high-stakes testing to how they involve students in assessment; additionally, these teachers identified strengths and gaps in their learning. Thus, explicit training in language assessment can have the potential to lead to reflection, a major feature of professional development.

The second conclusion refers to the connection between teachers' needs and the development of their LAL. As commented above, teachers mainly report they need training in practical matters of language assessment. The studies in Table 3 seem to align well with such needs. This trend may be another reason why principles are not generally featured in LAL initiatives. Notice, however, that Giraldo and Murcia's (2019) study did include explicit attention to principles; the authors explain that this was a judgment call in their diagnostic study (Giraldo & Murcia, 2018) rather than something the preservice teachers needed or expected. Similarly, Arias et al. (2012) explicitly addressed principles in language assessment, with corresponding positive effects. In this case, however, the authors deliberately included these aspects, because, in an earlier study, they found unsystematic and invalid practices (see Arias Toro & Maturana Patarroyo, 2005) and therefore had compelling reasons to address principles.

Finally, some of the studies targeted LAL within a wider social context. Baker and Riches (2017), Boyd and Donnarumma (2018), and Kremmel et al. (2018)

educated teachers in their studies by having socially impactful tests (i.e., high-stakes) as points of reference. Walters (2010), similarly, studied items—a small unit of analysis—to scrutinize public standards for English as a second language.

Scoping the Territory: LAL and Professional Development

There are enough empirical and conceptual arguments to highlight LAL as a crucial aspect of language teachers' professional development. The call, as commented elsewhere, has been constant and emphatic. Only recently, however, the answer to cultivating teachers' LAL has gained impetus, but current resources and programs for LAL have clear potential to foster teachers' LAL.

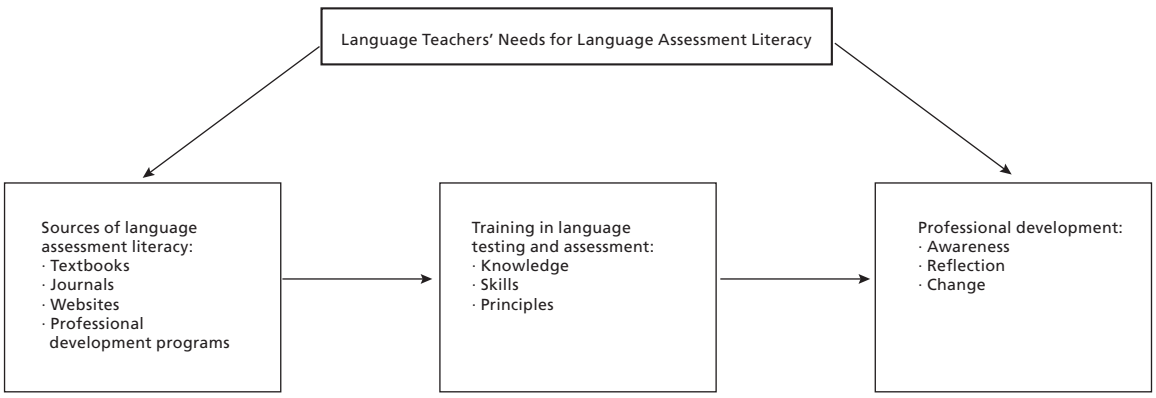
Whereas several resources for LAL development require fees, there are other available materials teachers can use on their own. Some of the latter I have reviewed in this paper. Fortunately, they may be considered of high quality since they are developed by experts. Thus, one recommendation for teacher educators and teachers in general is to explore these initiatives and personally reflect on how they impact and help to advance LAL.

Language teachers' self-reported needs in language assessment have tended to relate to *skills + knowledge*. Fortunately, the resources and programs reviewed in this paper have responded to these needs. What seems to be a revealing trend is that as teachers are engaged in technical aspects of language testing, their institutional and broader social contexts come to play a role. Consequently, it can be argued that training in language assessment leads to reflection, an expected feature of teachers' professional development in language education. In other words, as teachers are studying the design and nature of instruments, they may become aware of the social implications of language assessment.

As for the professional development programs reviewed (see Table 3), they are, perhaps not surprisingly, well received among teachers and exert positive change overall. Most importantly, teachers in professional development programs, as the studies report, tend to connect learning about language assessment to their general teaching and their students' learning. It is unfortunate, however, that few programs for language teachers' professional development in LAL are reported in journals (see more in the Limitations section below). More experiences should be made available to further fuel the LAL discussion (Inbar-Lourie, 2013a).

Figure 1 shows the relationship between LAL and professional development, as I have discussed it in this paper.

Figure 1. Relation Between Language Assessment Literacy and Professional Development



The needs language teachers express regarding LAL seem to be starting points for initiatives to happen. This decision makes sense and is consonant with principles for professional development in general; that is, professional development in language education is receptive of teachers' needs and contexts. For example, Fulcher's (2010) textbook for language testing, Tsagari et al.'s (2018) TALE, Arias et al.'s (2012) professional development program, and Giraldo and Murcia's (2018, 2019) course are all based on thick descriptions of teachers' needs. This means some of the sources for LAL presented in Figure 1 are informed by teachers' life-worlds (Scarino, 2013).

Taken together, the sources of LAL are used for training teachers, mostly in *knowledge* and *skills* and with some emerging attention to *principles*. Thus, training programs lead to professional development as teachers reflect on and raise awareness of what language assessment means (Giraldo & Murcia, 2019; Nier et al., 2009), how language assessment impacts or relates to learning (Arias et al., 2012; Baker & Riches, 2017; Boyd & Donnarumma, 2018; Kremmel et al., 2018; Walters, 2010), and what positive changes can occur through enhanced LAL (Arias et al., 2012).

Limitations

Two limitations need discussion in this paper. My search for studies on the connection between LAL and professional development was limited to major specialized and general journals, through both paid and open-access sources. However, there may be other studies in less commonly-known journals of which I was unaware at the time I wrote this paper. Thus, language teacher educators interested in reading about LAL initiatives may do their own search to see if more information can be found. Overall, as of 2019, there is a scarcity of research studies that bring LAL and professional development together; notice that Table 3 shows most studies started to appear after 2017. More case studies can be useful to aggregate findings and lead to conclusions on how programs impact teachers' LAL, especially if they report what methodologies and principles for professional development are used, what contents are included, and what results arise from the experiences.

Another related limitation is that the trends I have highlighted in this paper may not be indicative of LAL initiatives at large. For example, I argue that there is limited emphasis on principles of language assessment, but this needs empirical validation, especially because of the limited available literature. As I commented, studies have recently started to appear, so it seems that research integrating LAL and professional development is and will be ongoing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

LAL definitely contributes to language teachers' professional development; because of this positive impact, it is past time that LAL become a more prominent component of language teacher education programs. Lack of LAL in pre and in-service teachers' professional development may have detrimental effects on their practices and therefore on student learning.

In this reflection paper, I have reported that, in general, language teachers want training in practical and technical aspects of language assessment. When engaged in training, however, teachers may become aware of issues that go beyond practical matters and into critical ones. This seems to connect LAL and professional development but further research is needed to confirm or refute the trend. Because of the needs expressed by teachers, the initiatives upon which I reflected in this paper have responded accordingly. In other words, they have targeted the *knowledge + skills* side of language assessment, though a few others have addressed *principles*.

Overall, there exist valuable, high-quality resources for teachers to improve their LAL levels. The free resources I included in this paper have the added

advantages that they are compiled and designed by experts and can be used however needed or desired. Additionally, if teachers can have the chance to be engaged in official professional development programs for language assessment, then it is likely that they will improve their LAL in general, that is, knowledge, skills, and principles.

Against these conclusions, I first invite language teacher educators to use the highlights in this paper to have a general perspective of how LAL helps with professional development. Along with general principles for professional development programs, these stakeholders can use the resources and insights in this paper to plan and implement programs that can impact teachers' professional development in language assessment.

Teacher educators can also encourage language teachers to use the available resources and customize them for their specific needs; for example, if teachers need to work on the assessment of reading, they can read articles in journals (see Self-Access Materials section and Table 2) or take relevant courses (e.g., in TALE). Also, teachers can use these resources in study groups so they can give and receive feedback on their developing LAL. Collectively, these efforts should lead to language assessment practices and instruments that are based on the theoretical, technical, and critical dimensions of the field.

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Issues in Teachers' Professional Development

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Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. Bergman Ramos, Trans.). Bloomsbury. (Original work published 1968)

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Chapter in an Edited Book

Wright, T. (2012). Managing the classroom. In A. Burns & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to pedagogy and practice in second language teaching* (pp. 60–67). Cambridge University Press.

Conference Session or Paper Presentation

Inbar-Lourie, O. (2017, July 17–21). *Language assessment literacies and the language testing community: A mid-life identity crisis?* [Conference session]. 39th Language Testing Research Colloquium, Bogotá, Colombia. https://www.iltaonline.com/page/2017InvitedPlenaries

Proceedings Published in Book Form

Bailey, K. M. (2004). Plenary: Language teaching journals and reflective teaching. In A. Pulverness (Ed.), *IATEFL 2003 Brighton Conference Selections* (pp. 80–91). International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language.

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