

Approaching a Peaceful English Teaching in Colombia

**A Critical Analysis of the Current Colombian Language Learning Policy: A View in
the Framework of Peace Education**

Eddy Harley Valencia Vásquez

Graduation Paper Advisor: Liliana María Maturana Patarroyo

Universidad Católica Luis Amigó

Facultad de Educación y Humanidades

Licenciatura en Lenguas Inglés

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Abstract

This research intends to explore different academic sources that provide information about the implications of the *Colombia Bilingüe* program (CB) in Colombian education. This documentary research puts forward the issue of having a Bilingual policy that defines certain standards and limits opportunities in a plurilingual context as Colombia. There is a description of the characteristics of such policy and the social context in which it is imposed. Through this research, it will be shown how *Colombia Bilingüe* follows a straight route to structural violence, what results in contradiction to Peace Education aims.

Key words: Peace education, Colombia Bilingüe Program, bilingualism, plurilinguism, structural violence

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Introduction

Colombia Bilingüe program started in 2004 aiming to prepare Colombian students to be competent at speaking English when they graduate from school and from university. Due to the status of universal language that it has been conferred, this would allow international trading for being part of the new globalized world (Guía 22, 2006, p. 6). This policy is still carried out as the only language policy in the country; from this perspective, the policy points out that being bilingual is speaking Spanish and English, as García León J. and García León D. (2012, p. 57) point out, any other language policy that involves minor languages in Colombia does not reach such relevance nor transcend their status of Ethnic-education Programs.

This situation arises concerns on why there is such a hurry to teach English in Colombia. Additionally, why it is that relevant for the Colombian context where, according to Trillos M. and Etxebarria M., it is spoken 64 indigenous languages, 2 creoles, a variation of English, besides some Portuguese in the border with Brazil (2002, p. 2). This fact is put aside, as it will be figured out through the exploration of the papers published for carrying out Colombia Bilingüe program and also different sources which depict different issues surrounding that language policy.

Therefore, this research intends to discuss the implications that Colombia Bilingüe program brings about for Colombian citizens. This issue will be analyzed from the perspective of Peace Education theory, which provides a framework to allow education proposals be in accordance with the specific needs of an educational context and avoid the

implementation of curricula that would affect the interests of communities just to adjust to the interests of a reduced group of people.

Research Question

What are the implications of Colombia Bilingüe Program in the frame of Peace Education?

General Objective

Identify the implications of Colombia Bilingüe program in the frame of Peace Education.

Specific objectives.

- Distinguish the characteristics which integrate Peace Education.
- Recognize components of the Colombia Bilingüe program which favor otherwise threaten Peace Education aims.
- Detect aspects in the Constitution and General Education Law 115 referring to Bilingualism.
- Collect academic sources that discuss the implementation of Colombia Bilingüe program.

Method

This is a qualitative research done using the documentary research method. To clarify what research which uses such method intends, Bailey, (as cited in Uddin, 2010, p. 2), explains that “documentary research method refers to the analysis of documents that contains information about the phenomenon we wish to study”. In other words, this type of research implies the critical analysis of different documentary sources which provide relevant data about the concerning issue.

For the development of this research, first of all, the content of the different documents of the Colombia Bilingüe program were read over. Besides, the research required a thorough exploration of academic sources that arise issues about the current Colombia Bilingüe language policy. Those academic works were useful to provide different perspectives that helped addressing the problem stated for this research intended to seek for the implications of such linguistic policies in the education and life of Colombian students.

As Uddin points out, the documents do not put forward arguments themselves, but they “need to be situated within a theoretical frame of reference in order that its content is understood” (2010, p. 2). Thereby, Peace Education Theory provides that required frame for all the sources to be analyzed in this paper.

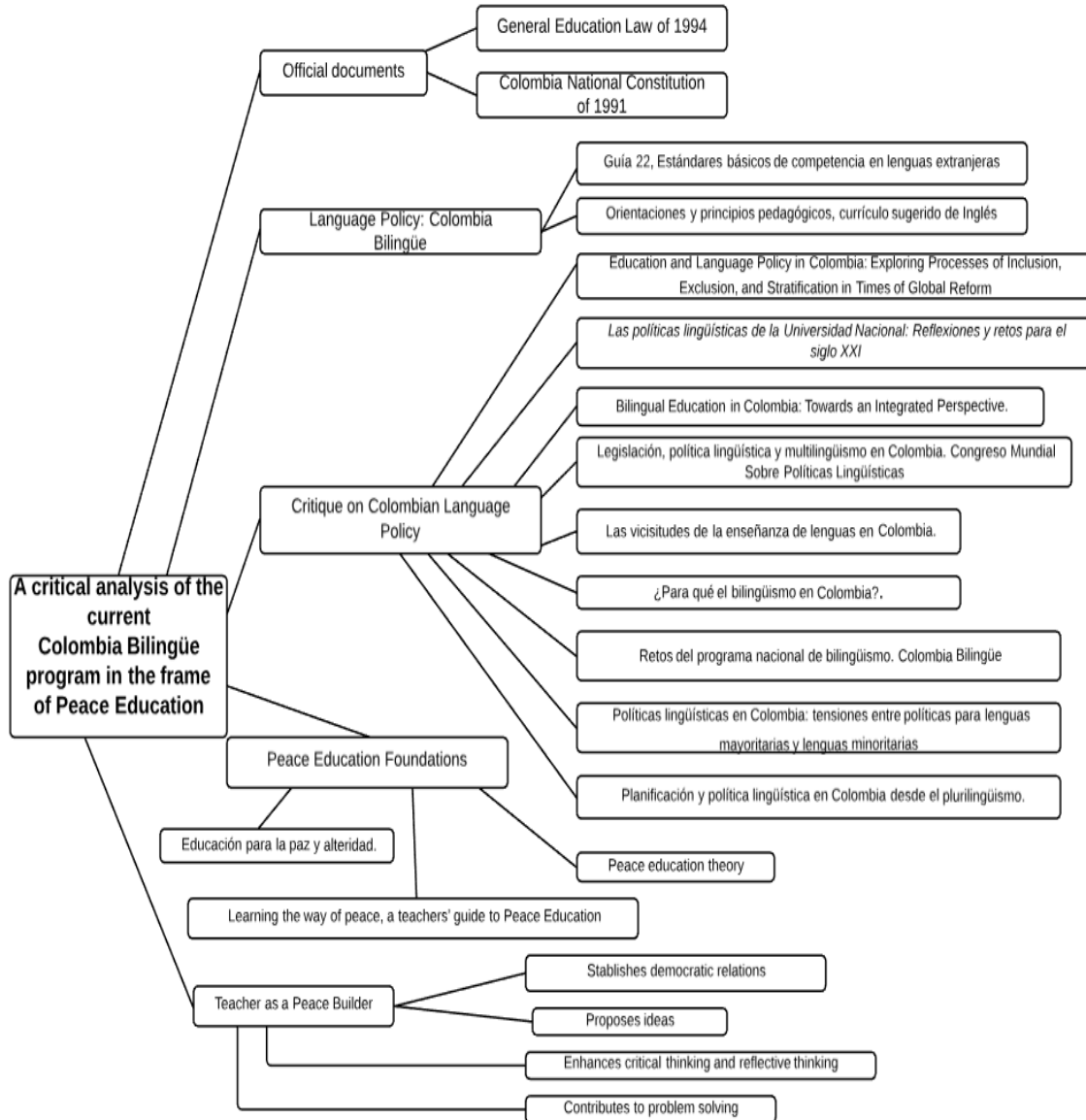
All of the revised documents are from academic sources and provide actual and current information about the approached issue. These documents are written and revised by academic authorities which analyze different aspects of the language policies in Colombia and/or peace education; moreover, they provide interviews, besides historical facts which make well rooted arguments. Thence, the academic sources used for developing this very specific research follow the characteristics of authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning, as it is required for presenting trustworthy scientific results (Uddin, J., 2010).

On the other hand, the General Education Law 115 and the Colombian National Constitution of 1991 were revised as their content points out different reasons that are relevant for further triangulation purposes.

The following figure is a mind map which depicts the sources used and the category they are part of. (The full source citation is in the reference section).

Figure 1

Mind map of sources and their categories.



Note: Depending on their focus, the sources were divided into five different categories: Official documents, Language policy: Colombia Bilingüe, Critique on Colombian language policies, Peace education foundations, and Teacher as a Peace Builder. The last category branches out into four characteristics of Peace Building Teachers.

Documentary Research

The National Education Ministry (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, MEN), apparently seeking for better opportunities for Colombian citizens in the globalized world, has implemented since 2004 the National Bilingualism Plan (PNB), which is now the Colombia Bilingüe program (CB). This program intends learning English as goal to be achieved by colombian citizens:

Lograr ciudadanos y ciudadanas capaces de comunicarse en inglés, de tal forma que puedan insertar al país en los procesos de comunicación universal, en la economía global y en la apertura cultural, con estándares internacionalmente comparables.

[Being able to achieve that citizens can communicate in English, so that they can insert the country in the processes of universal communication, in the global economy and in cultural openness, with standards comparable at international level] (Guía 22, 2006, p. 6).

For achieving that goal, CB has established certain standards based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and has endeavored to promote the improvement of English programs in schools through the implementation of diverse initiatives carried out by the different Education District Office in the country. Moreover, the MEN declares to the educational community that it values and understands the cultural diversity of the country and expresses the following:

Los Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje y el Currículo Sugerido de Inglés son una apuesta clara que busca generar igualdad educativa y hacer que la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés sean vistos como una herramienta que fortalezca la formación integral y pertinente para los estudiantes del siglo XXI en Colombia. Por esta razón, el Currículo Sugerido integra diferentes ejes de formación, tales como la Paz y la Democracia, aspectos fundamentales en la construcción de un país en paz que busca abrirse cada vez más al mundo globalizado y multicultural en el que vivimos.

[Basic Learning Rights and the Suggested English Curriculum are a clear commitment that seeks to generate educational equality and make English teaching and learning seen as a tool that strengthens comprehensive and relevant training for 21st century students in Colombia. For this reason, the Suggested Curriculum integrates different axes of formation, such as peace and democracy, which are fundamental aspects in the construction of a country in peace that seeks to open more and more to the globalized and multicultural world in which we live] (Orientaciones y principios pedagógicos, currículo sugerido de inglés, 2016, p. 7).

Opposedly to the previous statement put forward by the MEN, Fandiño and Lugo (2012, p. 366) reflect that “a la luz de esta declaración, el Programa aparenta estar siendo desarrollado y aplicado de manera satisfactoria. Sin embargo, hay cuestiones en su diseño e implementación que se deben abordar de manera crítica.” [In the light of this statement, the

Program appears to be being developed and implemented successfully. However, there are issues in its design and implementation that must be addressed critically.]

Then, the discussion opens up with the question, why is learning English compulsory in Colombia? Fandiño and Lugo (2012, p.367) assure that this choice was imposed; that it was never discussed; as any other political decision that intends to colonize. In this case, the justification for such an imperialist policy is to engage more competitively in the global market. Indeed, from one of the papers created for the implementation of CB, it can be noticed that such decision has no reasons:

Aunque el número de lenguas extranjeras influyentes en Colombia es considerable, debido a todas las razones anteriormente expuestas, el inglés es la lengua extranjera por la que el gobierno nacional se ha comprometido en la consecución de un país bilingüe y competitivo a nivel internacional.

[Although the number of influential foreign languages in Colombia is vast, due to all the reasons stated above, English is the foreign language with which the government has been committed to achieving a bilingual and competitive country internationally.] (Orientaciones y principios pedagógicos, currículo sugerido de Inglés, 2016, p. 15)

On the other hand, the name of the language policy on discussion is highly ideologically charged. According to The Colombian National Constitution of 1991, all communities in Colombia where another autochthonous language, besides Spanish is spoken, contains bilingual teaching (Art. 10) Furthermore, General Education Law of 1994

considers every community with linguistic tradition different to Spanish as bilingual (Art. 57).

Moreover, Usma J. (2009, p. 135) declares that “by imposing a particular notion of bilingualism, the National Bilingual Program does not seem to provide a favorable context for these cultural and language minorities; instead, it seems to continue to stratify and under appreciate them.” García J. and García D. (2012, p. 59) highlight that, “el PNB, al denominarse como nacional, y al utilizar una noción específica de bilingüismo, contribuye a la estratificación y subvaloración de las demás lenguas y culturas del país”. [The PNB, when denominated as national, besides using a specific notion of bilingualism, contributes to the stratification and undervaluation of the other languages and cultures in the country.] Therefore, CB eagerly approaches the aim of bilingualism from an ambiguous and useless perspective for a wider population in the Colombian context.

In addition, General Education Law of 1994 (Art. 77) states that schools have full autonomy to define what courses and subjects of interest, according to the context needs, are to be taught. However, as mentioned in the same article, such freedom is limited by the guidelines provided by the National Education Ministry. Thence, this perspective ties down language learning, as García J. and García D. declare “Las políticas lingüísticas del país han desconocido la diversidad lingüística del mismo y centrado sus esfuerzos en la implementación del inglés”. [The country's linguistic policies have forgotten its linguistic diversity and have focused its efforts on the implementation of English] (2012, p. 64).

Mufwene, (as cited in Fandiño and Lugo, 2012) mentions, what he names as, the fallacy of global English. This fallacy is that several countries, similar to Colombia, have tried to be globally competent by opening their gates to English. As a result, some citizens

have engaged to learn English getting to reach some degree of proficiency, but it has not solved inequality; otherwise, it has broadened it. Mufwene points out that these countries are so concerned with opening their markets globally that it turns out in the oblivion of rural areas, which in comparison to urban ones, have not such a direct contact, not even the need to economically interact at a global range. It seems that opening gates to the international trading community implies closing them for the native people.

Suárez makes his stand clear about the low relevance citizens have when implementing government policies:

Tampoco es extraño o novedoso escribir que Colombia es una nación que en lugar de gestar opciones y de estar a la altura de los tiempos, al nivel de sus ciudadanos, se deja someter o cuando menos imponer diferentes políticas para su desarrollo político, económico, jurídico y, como no ser así, el educativo.

[It is also not rare or new to write that Colombia is a nation that instead of gestating options and being up to the times, at the level of its citizens, it submits, or at least, lets itself be imposed different policies for its political, economic, legal development and, if it's not like that, the educational one.]

(Suárez, 2017, p. 8)

To understand what Suárez states above, it is required to have an overall review of the language policies implemented in the country since the Spanish colonization. The

following is a table taken from Suárez (2018, p. 9-10) which schemes an overview of the language policies that have been carried out in Colombia.

Table 1. From ¿Para qué el bilingüismo en Colombia?

Historical overview of the different language policies in Colombia

Year, law, title	What does it promotes?
From 1820 to 1826: Law from The Congress of Cútuta	It demanded that every province had to have at least one school with two chairs, one of them had to include Spanish grammar, Latin and principles of rhetoric. Some English and foreign schools are established through the <i>British and Foreign School Society</i> .
From 1934 to 1938: Education Reforms	Formalization of a program for teaching foreign languages, the first one that gives methodological orientations related to French and English teaching specifically.
1953 and 1955: Education Reforms	English teaching is extended to four years. No more Latin, no more philosophy, nor French, but a reinforcement of English teaching.

1974: Decree 080	Stablishes teaching only one foreign language in high school. The introduction of a second language is up to the schools which favor English.
1979: Decree 1337	It is offered two years of teaching: English, French and an optional language.
1994: Law (115) General Education Law	Foreign languages are promoted to the category of compulsory and fundamental subjects.
2004: National Bilingualism Program 2004-2019	English as a foreign language: A strategy for competitiveness.
2006: Decree 3870	The CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference), is adopted as the reference system for the learning, teaching and evaluation processes.
2015-2015: National Plan of English <i>Colombia Very Well!</i>	Reply to the challenge that competitiveness and globalization imposes in nowadays world and improve the quality of education through the development of competencies in English for the children and youth of the county.

Note: The original version is in Spanish from Suárez (2017). Non-content was edited to favor or discredit any policy. This English translation intends to be clear and accurate.

As an additional information to the previous table, García J. and García D. (2012, p. 53) reference Gröl, who recalls that Carlos III imposed a castilianization program which made indigenous languages forbidden in order to implement Spanish as the only official language. This program generated a decrease of indigenous language learning. Thence, from the language policies established since colonization, it can be appreciated that autochthonous tongues have been considered only for evangelization and colonization purposes. Is it clear or is it a mere speculation concluding that nowadays it is happening the same with English that happened once with Spanish?

To evidence this is a real issue, indigenous students at a university degree are worried because their native tongues are not considered as a first language so they have to graduate not only being bilingual at proficiently speaking their autochthonous language besides Spanish, but they mandatorily have to choose another foreign language, essentially English, in order to graduate under the National established standards. These indigenous students comment that it is unfair for them since no other foreign student, who come to study at a University in Colombia, requires speaking English because their foreign native tongue is already taken into account, except to the Colombian native tongues, which are practically neglected.

At this point, it is relevant to bring up the analysis Quiñones came up with after having done a survey:

Como se puede observar, los resultados de esta encuesta muestran el panorama preocupante de las lenguas indígenas en la educación superior colombiana. Las lenguas indígenas al no ser reconocidas en el ámbito académico son subvaloradas y desposeídas de todo conocimiento y saber. En otras palabras, las Instituciones de Educación Superior colombianas están desarrollando un modelo educativo multicultural, es decir, un modelo que reconoce la diversidad lingüística pero que la considera como un problema para el desarrollo de la institución, la nación y el Estado.

[As it can be seen, the results of this survey show the worrying panorama of indigenous languages in Colombian higher education. By not recognizing Indigenous languages in the academic field they are undervalued and dispossessed of all knowledge and wisdom. In other words, Colombian Higher Education Institutions are developing a multicultural educational model, that is, a model that recognizes linguistic diversity but considers it as a problem for the development of the institution, the nation and the State.]

(Quiñones, J., 2013, p. 107)

Adicionalmente, García J. and García D (2012, p. 60) manifest that all language policies carried out in the country have found support by different international institutions, what does not happen with the promotion of indigenous languages. At the end, there is not direct interest from the government nor any external institution in protecting such heritage.

If we consider that 98% of the population in Colombia speaks Spanish and only the 2% speaks a different autochthonous tongue (García J. and García D., 2012, p. 50), this takes to conclude that there is a crisis in the usage of native tongues in Colombia. Indigenous tongues have lost importance not due to uncontrollable circumstances. On the contrary, it has been stated through this research that this is a result of the international imperialist demands imposed at different moments in the Colombian history in addition to a lack of interest of the government to promote the own cultural values.

In order to highlight, not only the current, but the historical importance of such issue, it is relevant to mention the experience that Rafael Uribe Uribe had back in 1907. This memorable politician did a trip around South America and different areas in Colombia. From such experience he could figure out that many Colombian citizens had wrong ideas about indigenous communities. Besides that, he strongly criticized those language policies that gave indigenous tongues a second, or even none degree of importance (Torres, S., 2009, p. 71).

By now, it has clearly depicted that CB does not help accomplishing educational aims but only political interests. At this point, it is important to mention a concept used in Peace Education Theory, which is Structural Violence. Balasooriya (2001) explains that Structural Violence is:

(Violence arising from the way school is set up) e.g. pushing students to compete with others, comparing individuals, keeping children sitting passively for hours, subject-centred and teacher-centred delivery of lessons,

neglecting students' special needs, harsh imposition of rules, externally imposed discipline, drilling” (p. 55).

If the implementation of CB were taken into account only from what is established in the Basic Learning Rights, it could be concluded that the language policy is apparently developed with a clear idea of what Peace Education aims. When revising those Basic Learning Rights it can be perceived that they are in accordance with what Melo M. (2014, p.10) suggests about the roots of Peace Education:

Una cultura de paz debe desarrollar, promover y cultivar los valores del compromiso social de los derechos humanos, la justicia, la igualdad, la libertad y la solidaridad, pues son una más valía para la humanidad, al permitir que cada individuo tenga el placer de compartir, de cooperar, de ser solidario y de ser feliz contribuyendo a la construcción de una cultura de paz.

[A culture of peace must develop, promote and cultivate the values of the social commitment to human rights, justice, equality, freedom and solidarity, since they are an extra value for humanity as they allow each individual to have the pleasure of sharing, cooperating, be supportive and being happy contributing to the construction of a culture of peace.]

However, as Balasooriya wonders, “is it enough having mere peace concepts in the curriculum?” (2001, p. 1). Melo M. provides a clear and practical perspective which could easily serve as an answer to Balasooriya's question. Melo M. (2014, p. 8) states that:

Para que esto sea posible, es indispensable que cada cultura reconozca y respete la otra, en toda su dignidad y se encuentren referencias transculturales que permitan alcanzar la globalización solidaria, construyendo una ciudadanía de comunión donde se registre la diversidad cultural como base de una plena democracia.

[In order for this to be possible, it is indispensable that each culture recognizes and respects the other, in all its dignity and that the cross-cultural references found allow to achieve a solidary globalization, building a communion citizenship where cultural diversity is registered as the basis of full democracy.]

Therefore, in order to have a language policy that aims Peace Education, the status of bilingualism is to be modified. The idea of being bilingual just for speaking English and Spanish neglects the plurilinguism present in Colombia.

In addition, the Colombian National Constitution (1991) in the 70th Article declares:

El Estado tiene el deber de promover y fomentar el acceso a la cultura de todos los colombianos en igualdad de oportunidades, por medio de la educación permanente y la enseñanza científica, técnica, artística y profesional en todas las etapas del proceso de creación de la identidad nacional. La cultura en sus diversas manifestaciones es fundamento de la nacionalidad. El Estado reconoce la igualdad y dignidad de todas las que conviven en el país. El Estado promoverá la investigación, la ciencia, el desarrollo y la difusión de los valores culturales de la Nación.

[The State has the duty to promote and foster access to the culture of all Colombians in equal opportunities, through permanent education and scientific, technical, artistic and professional education at all stages of the national identity creation process. Culture in its various manifestations is the foundation of nationality. The State recognizes the equality and dignity of all who live in the country. The State will promote research, science, development and dissemination of the cultural values in the Nation.]

In order for this constitutional article to be fulfilled, indigenous languages should have the same status as Spanish, English or any other official language. Moreover, government is obliged to create a National Language Policy that raises cultural awareness of the native linguistic traditions and should stop establishing general standards that, at the end, turn out to be seeking the achievement of political and economic demands imposed by external interests, which have nothing to do with the National reality, but only with imperialistic and colonizing aims.

As it has been shown in this research, the basis in which CB is rooted defies peaceful coexistence. This language policy is violent, in the way that imposes a learning paradigm and lowers the importance of other matters; it promotes competition among students in order to fit in the established standards. Consequently, it brings inequity to learners because not all of them have the same opportunities to achieve the required standards to be competent in the new globalized society, as described from the perspective of MEN.

Consequently, not everything has to be disposed by the national government. At the end, teachers are the ones in charge of providing the final conditions in which teaching is carried out. Thereupon, they need to remember that “Educators whose priorities are preparing students for high stake tests in a capitalist, competitive economic order, are largely ignoring peace education theories and peace practice” (Harris, 2004, p. 17.) Accordingly, an English teacher whose purpose is seeking for Peace Building should not blindly follow top-down policies, but he has to be fully concern on how to create learning environments that avoid violence. At the end, who would think that a simple policy generates violence? That is why, Fandiño (2016, p. 138-139) assures:

Conocer sobre la planificación y política lingüística (PPL) puede ayudar a los profesores a preparar estudiantes que puedan, por medio de las lenguas, interactuar adecuadamente en los diferentes ambientes académicos, laborales, sociales y culturales del mundo de hoy. Igualmente, les permitirá formarse como sujetos políticos comprometidos, no con modelos o propuestas homogeneizadoras u opresivas, sino con propuestas pedagógicas orientadas a lograr la verdadera emancipación social y la convivencia cultural.

[Knowing about planning and linguistic policy (PPL, as it stands in Spanish) can help teachers prepare students who can, through languages, interact appropriately in the different academic, work, social and cultural environments of today's world. Likewise, to allow them to train as committed political subjects, not with homogenizing or oppressive models or

proposals, but with pedagogical proposals aimed at achieving true social emancipation and cultural coexistence.]

Finally, to extend Fandiño's thought, it is worth mentioning that Colombian teachers should realize how convenient it is to understand what they teach, why they teach and who they teach, so that the learning and teaching processes are carried out in harmless ways; also to promote freedom of choice, thence every student can develop his own capabilities according to his context and preferences. Moreover, it is vital to comprehend and let students thoroughly understand the implications of international education standards and the national policies that pop up, so that, neither the profession, education, nor the lives of people themselves, serve as a tool to achieve the personal interests of big companies or the imperialistic purposes of some reduced political groups around the world.

Conclusions

National efforts for language and cultural awareness are focused merely on the international relevance of English for its universal language status. This interest is practically reduced to favoring trading opportunities for supposedly benefiting Colombian citizens. However, this focus privileges population in closer contact with such language. Thence, this circumstance leaves other citizens out of the range of opportunities.

Then, there is a cultural extermination going on in Colombia due to the lower status of native languages and dialects compared to Spanish or English. Population belonging to these reduced groups are being threaten due to the lack of importance of their language,

thus their culture, for trading purposes. For avoiding this, Colombia needs language policies that seek more for firstly strengthening Colombian citizens' integration within instead of forcing adoption of other foreign cultural schemes which only intend to benefit processes of monetary participation and integration to the so-called universal culture. For achieving this, indigenous languages have to be taken into account so that processes of inclusion, which help building peace, can permeate all Colombian citizens.

On the other hand, the role of an English teacher transcends the simple duty of teaching English as established by top-down policies. English teachers have to take into account sociolinguistic issues and students' needs. Thus, English classes can turn into a space to enhance cultural awareness so that issues as the one addressed in this research can be put forward.

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