

**Teachers' language policies appropriation in the process of building peace in the  
classroom**

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed at identifying the in-service teachers' perspectives and actions towards the language policy appropriation for its implementation inside the classroom to respond to the necessity of peace construction through their pedagogical practices. The study was carried out by following the literature review structure. For the process of data collection, documents, articles, and magazines were selected as most suitable for this research. The findings showed three topics: 1: The relation of globalization processes with the disconnection among policy makers, the context and the school actors, hence the increment of inequality and decrement of access to education is reflected. 2: Teachers play an important role in transforming policies into the context to meet the students and context priorities. 3: Teaching practices should emphasize in the creation of peaceful environments. This research allowed us to have a better understanding of the aspects that influence or affect the peace building process through the teaching and learning of English. In this case, the globalization processes focusing the learning of the language on economic purposes; the important performance teachers have to play to give meaningful purposes to education; finally, how education becomes an important aspect when talking about processes of peace.

**Keywords:** Globalization, language policy, peacebuilding, pedagogical practices.

## Resumen

Este estudio se enfocó en identificar las perspectivas y acciones de los profesores activos en cuanto a la apropiación de las políticas lingüísticas para su implementación dentro del aula de clase para responder a la necesidad de construir paz a través de sus prácticas pedagógicas. El estudio investigativo fue llevado a cabo siguiendo la estructura de una revisión de literatura. Para el proceso de recolección de datos, fueron elegidos los documentos, artículos y revistas más apropiados para este trabajo investigativo. Los hallazgos mostraron 3 temas específicos: 1. la relación de los procesos de globalización con la desconexión entre los creadores de la política, el contexto y los miembros del sistema escolar, por lo tanto, el incremento de inequidad y el decremento al acceso para la educación es reflejado. 2. Los profesores tienen un rol muy importante en la transformación de las políticas lingüísticas para cumplir con las prioridades de los estudiantes y del contexto. 3. Las prácticas educativas deberían enfatizar la creación de ambientes de paz. Esta investigación nos permitió tener una mejor comprensión de los aspectos que influyen o afectan el proceso de construcción de la paz a través de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés. En este caso, los procesos de globalización centran el aprendizaje del idioma en fines económicos y el importante desempeño que los maestros tienen que representar para dar propósitos significativos a la educación, finalmente, cómo la educación se convierte en un aspecto importante cuando se habla de procesos de paz.

***Palabras clave:*** Construcción de paz, globalización, política lingüística, prácticas pedagógicas.

### **Degree requirement**

This literature review project is submitted as a requirement to graduate from the Bachelor of Education in English Teaching Program (Licenciatura en Inglés) at Facultad de Educación y Humanidades, Fundación Universitaria Luis Amigó, in Medellín, Colombia in which the development of formative research is promoted.

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## **1. Teachers' language policies appropriation in the process of building peace in the classroom**

Language policies and teachers' practices are permeated by the interaction of individuals within a society along with globalization processes. The pre-service and in-service teachers' interaction with the society is shaped in a consequently way, as it is the reality and the behavior of the whole society towards the different fields (economic, educational, industrial, etc). "The current wave of globalization in relation to education systems is studied from three main perspectives: economic, political, and cultural." (Suarez- Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004 cited on Usma, J.2009, p. 135). Globalization permeates and constitutes the context each person lives in. The education is likely to be more exposed to those processes due to their responsibility to guide the young people in the growing process and guaranteeing that they are prepared to face the world properly. As stated by Usma, (2009) in this fashion, the government attempts to homogenize foreign language teaching and learning at all levels; exerts tighter control over the whole system; and gradually redesigns language programs based on certification and recertification of students, teachers and language schools (p. 23). The education changes according to the societal necessities; therefore, the Language Policy directly influences how those changes are taught as the best way to transform positively the context responding to societal needs. "Language, teaching, learning, research, and policy are perceived as political arenas and highly politicized processes, where educators, researchers, and policy-makers are conceived as political actors" (Ball, 1998, p. 119-130). In the meantime, there are many good teachers, but they are not necessarily good social agents committed to the transformation of themselves and society (Peláez, In Press, p. 24).

This investigation is situated in a Colombian context in which usually the most important things are checking out how was the football game or what is trending in social media. We live in a world and a liquid society in which people are not neither aware of

their surroundings nor what is happening around them and within their society (Z. Bauman 2000). Therefore, previous context should have teachers with some accurate characteristics to face it. “The current context of Colombia demands more reflective and political stances from future teachers” (Peláez, In Press, p. 5). This country in particular responds to these global demands through educational reforms. However, the country has to deal with some violent contexts where students are exposed to. As a fact, Gil (2013) mentioned that:

*Quien hace un estudio sobre la violencia en la ciudad de Medellín, particularmente en el periodo 1993-2013, el cual se encuentra enmarcado en la profunda influencia de los grupos armados ilegales, quienes aprovechan las graves condiciones socioeconómicas y familiares de los jóvenes para adoctrinarlos en aspectos de la guerra y la lucha contrainsurgente, generando un clima de violencia que se traslada a todos los escenarios como los colegios y comunidades.*

Given the previously mentioned national situation, the educational field has been directly influenced in guiding the educational processes in social and cognitive manners, with the aim to improve the society and directly contribute to the development of new globalized interactions for economical purposes, the incursion of English teaching and learning worldwide is reflected as the key to achieve a high demand on the English language for many purposes. New necessities arising from the Colombian society, demand the implementation of new policies that contribute to lineal progress according to what the globalized world request. At the same time, the Educational system in Colombia seeks for the creation of new policies that fit the national issues, where, the peacebuilding processes inside the classrooms is demanded. In accordance to it, “although institutional accreditation is not a mandatory process, universities are now seeking to obtain it not only to gain recognition but also to attract more students and to be eligible for programs financed by the MOE and the National Administrative Department of Science, Technology, and Innovation (Colciencias)” (Miranda, Berdugo & Tejada, 2016, p. 427). That is why the main purpose

of this literature review is to know and recognize what has been said about this claimed matter as well as identify the gaps in it.

## 2. Conceptual framework

Taking into account that this proposal was related to the teacher's language policy appropriation to build peace in their pedagogical practices inside the school, we are going to consider four main concepts for the theoretical framework: Language policies, pedagogical practices, Teacher as a policymaker, and peace building.

Language policy is what the government does in determining the languages to be used in a specific country. Language policies also involve cultivating the skills that are required to address the priorities and also respect the rights of every person so as to maintain the languages. However, the criteria used to come up with these policies is what matters. The government involves the legislation and other top most officials to come up with the policies. In words of Shohamy (2006), "language policy falls in the midst of these manipulations and battles, between language ideology and practice. It is through a variety of overt and covert mechanisms, used mostly (but not exclusively) by those in authority, that languages are being manipulated and controlled so as to affect, create and perpetuate "de facto" language policies, i.e., language practices" (p.15).

Pedagogical practices: Pedagogy is an encompassing term concerned with what a teacher does to influence learning in others. "the instructional techniques and strategies that allow learning to take place. It refers to the interactive process between teacher/practitioner and learner and it is also applied to include the provision of some aspects of the learning environment (including the concrete learning environment, and the actions of the family and community)" (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002, p.10).

Teachers as policymakers: In recent researches, some academics have work on the policies that have flourished in Colombia in the last decades. they have come up with the concept of policy appropriation which relates to the discourse that educational actors take from the policies to transform them into reality and context. Also, Usma (2016) refers to "language policy appropriation as the ways education stakeholders perceive foreign

language education policies, and how these perceptions shape the way they recreate these reforms at the ground level” (p.1).

Peacebuilding: Dr. Galtung as cited by Youngblood, S. (2017) defines peace building as “the process of creating self-supporting structures that remove causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur” (p.191). Conflict resolution plays a crucial role in this process in order to reach a durable peace between the groups that are involved in it. Also, education plays an important role when talking about peace building. According to ley 1732 (2015), “Education for peace can be conceived as the participation and civic competences for peaceful coexistence, democratic attendance, building equity, respect for plurality, human rights, and international humanitarian law”.

### 3. Methodology

At the beginning of our research, our proposal was going to be in a public high school located in Ituango, Colombia, which was deeply permeated by the country's armed conflict. However, as a result of the sociopolitical events in the last four years, the situation in this territory became so dangerous until the point it threatened our intention to develop our research, for this reason, the university suggested us to consider another possibility. Thus, the institution gave us the advice to develop a similar proposal inside the institution, more specifically with teachers of the English Teaching program. Afterward, throughout March of 2020, the local government declared a preventive quarantine in the Department of Antioquia, followed by the national mandatory quarantine declared by the president of the Republic. This owing to the health emergency declared as a response to the pandemic of Covid-19, whose consequences had a global impact. Because of that, we were obligated to stay at home, which was an obstacle to accomplish our research as it was planned. Finally, our advisor recommended us to construct a literature review in which we can gather the information to follow the aim of the research that is to identify the in-service teachers' perspectives and actions towards the language policy for its implementation inside the classroom to respond to the necessity of peace construction in their pedagogical practices.

The methodology of this literature review is based on a qualitative approach. The development implied the following steps: 1) learning about how to write a literature review manuscript in order to be prepared for the aforesaid task; 2) in a database given by teachers from the Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, we could search and select the articles related with the corresponding topic, starting with the concept of language policies, followed by teachers as policymakers, then pedagogical practices, and lastly peacebuilding in education. Those articles were carefully selected by taking into account the date of publication and the comparison of local, national, and international documents that were useful and related to our topic "interviewing the articles" defining what we want to know about them.

Consequently, we could extract fragments that we could support to accomplish our objectives and answer our question. By making a table, we organized our quotes sorted by the text titles we took them from and proceeded with the first coding process, and after that, the categorizing process. A few revisions were made in order to polish our codes and categories until we could start constructing our findings that will be exposed below.

#### 4. Findings

After a careful analysis done by the researchers, 7 different categories emerged and were grouped according to similar meaning and the following themes emerged as possible findings:

*Finding 1:* The relation of globalization processes with the disconnection among policy makers, the context, and the school actors, hence the increment of inequality and decrement of access to education is reflected.

*Finding 2:* Teachers play an important role in transforming policies into the context to meet the students and context priorities.

*Finding 3:* Teaching practices should emphasize in the creation of peaceful environments.

*Finding 1:* In this research, it was found that the process of globalization has its focus primarily on economic perspectives, and in the same way, influences political and cultural views. Thus, education towards economic development refers to the relations arisen from international markets and transnational trade with educational fields for its own development. The focus to increase the economic and financial agendas into the education and societies, serve to the consolidation of private capital, and the increment of the cultural formations into globalization processes (Suarez- Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, (2004) as cited in Usma, J., 2009). Globalization is, in itself, a challenge that Colombians are trying to face. Researchers have approached this issue from different perspectives to find a suitable solution. The basic problem they are trying to face is clearly exposed by Usma & Peláez (2017) when they state that:

*Curriculum content, methods, assessment, and testing policies have been adopted according to international models and frameworks [...] Teachers perceive how their professional autonomy is reduced by multiple limitations of transnationally imposed*

*agendas [...] From this perspective, education and language reforms [responds] to international pressures connected to economic and political agendas (pp. 45-47).*

Consequently, language policies in the country are mold by this globalization processes and the neoliberalism discourses that Colombia has adopted lastly permeates the teaching and learning of English. In line with this thinking, a study done by Peláez & Usma (2017) has shown that “the language policies in Colombia have responded throughout the years to a set of international, political, and economic interests that are not necessarily in line with the varying needs of its local populations” (p.11). As a consequence, these policies do not take into account the context where it may be applied since it does not consider the limitation of schools while implementing them. Therefore, the use of English in Colombia does not meet the priorities and needs of the local context due to the instrumentalized view that these policies have adopted. In addition, Correa & Usma (2013) and Guerrero (2010) (as cited by Peláez & Usma, 2016) state that schools are challenged by imposed policies that do not recognize the active role that different educational actors should play for a more successful introduction of these reforms in the country. Thus, increasing inequality and less access to education for those who cannot approach the opportunities that these policies give for a minority while generating exclusion for the majority of the groups.

*Finding 2:* It was found that the use of English is associated with instrumentalized views. Fandiño, Y.J. (2014) argues that “foreign language courses are generally associated with tourism or short encounters which do not offer opportunities to challenge ethnocentric attitudes and experience peaceful coexistence” (P. 81-92). Similar ideas were pictured for Gómez Sará (2017) when she said “(MEN) provides as the main reason to foster English language learning in Colombia the need of high school graduates and technicians with a B2 English level who can work in the customer service of tourism and software companies, as well as in business process outsourcing (BPO). Along with this instrumentalized view of English, language policies are highly decontextualized and detached from the realities they

are implemented. This is due to the language policies in Colombia respond to the international demands rather than the Colombian needs, and the language policy understanding determines and infers with uniformity inside schools, this is reflected when Peláez & Usma (2017) argued that “The way different actors in society understand and perceive language education policies determine how they appropriate initial policy texts, thus explaining why the adoption of international standards and reforms models in the country does not necessarily imply uniformity inside municipalities and schools”.

This is the reason why teachers as actors in society also play an active role in transforming policies, they are directly affected by policies and they cannot only become in implementers of policies, they need to go beyond and transform them to give students what they really need in terms of education. In the other hand, English teachers could embody the role of either perpetrators of inequalities or as equality builders “language teaching plays an increasingly important role in Colombian society because teachers are at a crossroads where they could either perpetuate the widening of societal inequalities or further the construction of a more equal and just society” (Peláez, In Press). The teaching of culture as part of the language policies in Colombia needs to focus on real and meaningful purposes in order to better represent their culture and accept diversity. Thus, with the gathering of the previous authors, we could find that *teachers play an important role in transforming policies into the context to meet the students and context priorities.*

*Finding 3:* Álvarez et al (2009) affirm that the violence outside the school has influence inside of it. National, and in a more tangible way, local violent, conflictive events have a negative effect in the school environments. This is why teaching for convivence inside and outside the classroom must be a priority; not only in our educational system but in our society in general. Whilst violent incidents such as physical attacks are not usual in schools, we cannot state that the school is a peaceful environment as yet. Galtung defines the concept of peace and separates it into two categories: negative peace, which is the

absence of direct violence; and positive peace, which includes the absence of structural and cultural violence. (Cited in Gawerc, 2006).

We are given a wide amount of strategies for us teachers to contribute to peace construction processes, Authors like Álvarez et al (2009), and Fandiño & Bermúdez (2016) emphasize in the development and improvement of cognitive and communicative skills. Álvarez et al specify purposes for each one: communicative skills to exchange ideas and express feelings and emotions to understand others' perspectives; creative thinking to determine solutions to conflicts; critical thinking for autocritical processes and to avoid the influence for non-reliable sources of information; and emotional skills to recognize negative emotions. Meanwhile, Fandiño & Bermúdez explain that these abilities will allow students to be educated as committed political subjects with pedagogical proposals towards their social emancipation and cultural convivence.

During our reading process, we found out that we were mostly directed towards the reinforcement of critical thinking processes. Fandiño & Bermúdez (2016) defend that the acknowledgment and appropriation of language policies help teachers to prepare students that will be able to interact in different contexts. According to Álvarez et al (2009), this critical thinking ability allows students to analyze themselves, contexts, and information. This provides a path to find the real actions that originated conflictive events without misinformation, later to define reliable conclusions, and finally to construct group consensus through negotiations. This critical thinking process is also highlighted under the context of the analysis of the language policies implementation in Colombia, in which Peláez (In Press) defends that teachers play a crucial role in Colombian society in the matter that they could either perpetuate inequalities or decrease them to construct a just society. Therefore, strengthening critical thinking, along with other communicative skills provides students with tools for conflict resolution; as for teachers, we conclude that the *teaching practices should emphasize in the creation of peaceful environments.*

## 5. Discussion

This literature review exercise allowed the researchers to explore how teachers relate language policy appropriation to build peace inside the classroom with their pedagogical practices. The findings allowed us to have a better understanding of the aspects that influence or affect the peace building processes, in which school actors and policy makers should have in mind in order to contribute to the creation of peaceful environments inside the school.

We are aware that the world is looking towards globalization, which is not bad at certain points. Globalization has focused primarily on economic perspectives, likewise, it influences political and cultural perspectives. Education also has become towards economic development; It refers to the relation arisen from international markets and transnational trade with educational fields for its own development. The focus to increase the economical and financial agendas into the education and societies, serve to the consolidation of private capital, and the increment of the cultural formations into globalization processes. From an economic point of view, globalization and education are investigated in their relation with international markets, transnational trade, neoliberalism, privatization, financial issues, transnational capital flow, poverty, economic development, inequity, and the different economic agendas that serve the consolidation of private capital and the knowledge economy (see e.g., Bloom, 2004; Stiglitz, 2002; Stromquist, 2002) as suggested on Usma, J. (2009).

Usma (2009) stands that “being bilingual in a global world is essential. Mastering a second language means being able to communicate better; understand other contexts; appropriate and circulate knowledge; understand and be comprehensible to others; enrich ourselves; and play a decisive role in the development of the country” (p. 1). The Colombian government is not stranger to it, that's why government and public institutions are promoting English learning and teaching in the schools for technical and laboral

purposes with the aim to improve the laboral incomes with software and business process outsourcing companies. To achieve this goal, the MEN stated in 2015 that Colombian graduates would reach a B2 English level at the end of their educational process at eleventh grade. Nevertheless, if we look up the *Informe Nacional de Resultados Saber 11 (2018)*, we can realize that the results on English are not as expected for the globalized international policies.

During the researching process, it was identified that language policies in Colombia are not attached to the context due to the instrumentalized view that they have adopted lastly and how those policies do not consider the necessities and the priorities that Colombians have to face daily (Peláez & Usma, 2017, p 130). Consequently, this increases inequality and less access to opportunities for those who can not afford a qualified education. This is why we strongly believe that more contextualized policies need to emerge so everyone can be included and participate in a fair way in all the education processes. Also, more understanding of how communities from the rural areas use to live is needed in order to focus on students and school priorities and needs rather than only focusing on competitiveness and global trends that are not the main issues they have to deal with.

Otherwise, Peláez (In Press) argues that “teachers are at a crossroads where they could either perpetuate the widening of societal inequalities or further the construction of a more equal and just society”(p.24). In this sense, teachers become policy makers who are not only implementers of policies, capable of going beyond to transform them to give a meaningful purpose to the process of teaching and learning. This means transforming language policies, not just implementing them. we have clear that even though the policies are not made by us as teachers, we are the ones who at the end have the responsibility to implement them and to achieve the objectives; by following the methodologies that are written within the programs that are established inside the policies. We are convinced that

the teaching of English would be better if the government involves the school community in the policy making process so that they will treat it as an asset rather than a problem. It is important to understand that the teachers and school actors are the ones who enact and portray everything in education; they should not be only implementers or followers of these policies. Also language policies need to be adapted to the context where is going to be implemented, by doing this it will be little harder to reach the objectives and proposals stated in the policies. It is true that learning a foreign language promotes competitiveness and better opportunities, but it will be a problem to learn it if people are not made to understand why they need it. Other contribution to the improvement of education, will be “the teacher’s training on language policy which has a special impact on the improvement of the communicative skills for different contexts with the aim of reaching an effective insertion to students in society as political, social, and cultural subjects” (Fandiño & Bermúdez 2016, p. 139, p. 4).

Furthermore, “education is not just for reproductive purposes but as a civic alphabetizer” (Giroux, 2019,p.151 ); therefore, human content is required more than knowledge content in order to contribute to the process of peacebuilding through the teaching and learning of English in a context where violence has been present for many years. Hence, the primary goal of education should be to help students to develop critical thinking in order to overcome poverty and therefore decrease violence. This will motivate them to perform autocritical judgments and contextual examinations without getting biased by no-reliable sources of information that may perpetuate the conflict.

Most of the schools in Colombia have been permeated by social conflicts throughout history. These conflicts are reflected in the students and make them more likely to endure disputes and disagreements with other students; this can endanger the school environment. In our educational system, in every school manual, there is a mechanism known as *el debido proceso*, which is a series of steps to follow and mediators to turn to in order to solve different kinds of conflicts. The strategies presented in there are a great

example of the competencies listed by Álvarez et al (2009) that look forward to the eradication of the problem, the revindication of peace, and a meaningful reflection to enhance a proper school convivence.

If our goal is to enhance students to reach a true and meaningful social emancipation and cultural convivence as Fandiño & Bermúdez (2016) declare, our job should go further than the discourse of teaching a language to express feelings and emotions. We as teachers must commit to taking our students into a posture in which they will recognize and value the cultural plurality in our country. This is a continuous process that does not take place in only one subject, but it is a transversal topic as mentioned by Melo de Almeida, M. E. (2014) as it involves multiple dimensions of the human being.

Although the school is a strategic location for peace construction processes, this is a duty that must be performed by all sectors in our society. The media shows the world a particular viewpoint of our history and culture permeated by violent episodes, surprisingly some defend that it is a reflection of the Colombian society. Despite the fact that these artistic representations expose past events, the fact that these chapters are over in our reality does not mean that we currently live in peace (Editorial Santillana, 2016); cultural violence remains rooted in the people. This contributes to the construction of stereotypes and influences the population in a negative way; eventually, this tears down our efforts and advances regarding peace building processes.

## 6. Conclusion

English language, as a matter of fact, is not the responsible of peace building and societal changes by itself, instead, are the ones within the society who have direct interaction with the foreign language as a mean to address a societal change and improvement. In the educational field, teachers are not only the ones who are directly in contact with the reality of each society but also the ones who are in charge to perform appropriately, through their didactic transposition, the policies established by the current government to promote the learning process in order to respond to pre-established goals on governmental laws.

In order to reach those goals from the English learning process, a lot of factors are involved, such as educational quality, resource inequality, lack of those resources in some areas of the country; therefore, are teachers and administrators on the schools who are facing these conditions. The teacher's role and pedagogical practices inside the classroom are constantly permeated by the different contexts in which each of the teachers have to reinvent their practices and accommodate them into the best option for a specific context. It was found that the government does not provide a complete backup for the educational stakeholders in order to promote an appropriate learning process in Colombia.

Besides that, support from the government is not enough when the policies are established but not resources provided to cover all the educational system and societal lacks to construct the peace expected, as found by Peláez & Usma (2016). This is why the objective of improving English learning and peace building processes corresponds to not only us as education actors, but to the National Government and the Colombian society as a whole. So, it is good to know an make sure if, are the in-service teachers prepared to include the peacebuilding discourse in their pedagogical practices? How can the teachers improve their practices to implement the peacebuilding practices.

The outcomes arising from this research project was mainly a critical perspective on the processes and how those processes are carried out in our specific context, also how they should be carried out instead. The diverse contexts in which colombian teachers are involved, are waiting for somebody to go deeper and research, trying to understand the different contexts and needs according to the specific situations demanded, from this research project, a lot of questions can arise in order to concrete the idea of the teaching and learning processes in colombian country.

Finally, this research brought us a meaningful experience, in which we were able to recognize the responsibility that we have as teachers in regards to the formation of the citizenship awareness of the need for peace constructions on the Colombian context. Also, we are immensely motivated to keep on researching on this topic, due to the necessity of including peace practices in our lesson planning based on the language policies that permeate us as english teachers. Thereby, we all together can continue improving the education system.

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