

English Teaching for Peace Building.

By:

Carlos Eduardo Zuleta Puerta.

Lix Builes Betancur.

Sara Puerta Manco.

Valentina Jaramillo Jaramillo.

Advisor:

Oscar A. Peláez H.

Universidad Católica Luis amigó.

Facultad de Educación y Humanidades.

Licenciatura en Inglés.

Medellín, Colombia.

2020

Abstract

This manuscript is the report of an investigation that explores the importance of English teaching taking as a reference one of the established language policy, and based on that, implement an specific pedagogical practice guided by an UBD as a contributing factor to create a peaceful environment inside the English classrooms, that is mean, how to use the language as an excuse to improve some contexts. Taking into account the qualitative research that explains how sociocritical factors influence the academic performance inside the classroom, and how the Colombian teacher's beliefs about teaching can help to assume the responsibility of teaching through the conflict, knowing the context, local politics, social problems, and other important aspects. And last but not least, it talks about how English can be used as a facilitator for connecting people with the culture, and build an adequate learning environment full of peace in which teachers make use of different strategies to implement new policies that enable the relationship between the teaching and learning process in the best possible way.

Keywords: Context, English teaching, language policies, learning, peace.

Resumen

Este manuscrito es el reporte de la investigación que explora la importancia de la enseñanza del inglés tomando como referencia una de las políticas lingüísticas establecidas, y en base a eso, implementar una práctica pedagógica específica guiada por un UbD como un factor contribuyente para crear un ambiente pacífico dentro de las aulas de inglés de los estudiantes de séptimo grado, lo cual significa, cómo usar el lenguaje como una excusa para mejorar ciertos contextos. Teniendo en cuenta la investigación cualitativa que explica cómo los factores socio críticos influyen en el proceso académico dentro del aula de clase y cómo las creencias de los docentes colombianos sobre la enseñanza pueden ayudar asumir la responsabilidad de enseñar dentro del conflicto, conociendo el contexto, las políticas locales, los problemas sociales y otros aspectos importantes. Por último y no menos importante, habla sobre cómo el inglés puede ser utilizado como un facilitador para conectar las personas con la cultura, y construir un ambiente de aprendizaje adecuado lleno de paz en el cual los profesores hacen uso de diferentes estrategias para implementar las nuevas políticas que permite la relación entre el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje en la mejor manera posible.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje, contexto, enseñanza del inglés, paz, políticas lingüísticas.

Degree requirement

This research was carried out as a way to put into practice what we learned about investigation throughout our career. This is also an academic requirement to graduate as professional teachers of English at Facultad de Educación y Humanidades, Universidad Católica Luis Amigó.

Acknowledgment.

We want to give special thanks to our professor Oscar A. Peláez for all the support and guidance we received from him during this process. We also want to thank the educational community in which we carry out this research for all the learning and experiences we obtained during this process. At last but not least, we want to extend our gratitude towards our families for all the support, the love and the patience they have with us. They all contributed to our personal development not only as teachers but also as better human beings.

Content

<i>Abstract</i>	2
<i>Resumen</i>	3
<i>Degree requirement</i>	4
<i>Acknowledgment</i>	5
<i>Introduction</i>	7
<i>Problem</i>	8
<i>Literature review</i>	10
<i>Objectives</i>	14
<i>Methodology</i>	15
<i>Findings</i>	16
<i>Discussion</i>	19
<i>Conclusions</i>	19
<i>Bibliography</i>	21

Introduction

Culture is a term that involves lots of systems, processes, and ideologies. Among those systems and processes culture has, there are two really important things which are economy and politics. Those two terms permeate and condition every single thing inside the culture. In this case, politics and economy highly influence education. According to Usma and Pelaez (2017), Education responds to political and economic agendas. It means education works according to what politics and economy say most of the time. This is important because it gives the light to what is expected of education. Moving to the linguistic field; we feel that English has become one of the most important languages currently, and it is because of business. Many of the businesses around the world are done using English as the main language; that is why, for us, English, has gained relevance in almost every aspect of society.

Colombia, as a country that wants to be part of the global market, has designed some laws that control and regulate the teaching of English in its territory; better known as language policies. That is why English has become a necessity and obligation for Colombians, these programs and laws have been formulated in order to be more competitive and to show better results regarding English level in our country; but there is decontextualization between what the government establishes in its documents, and what actually happens inside the different contexts according to Usma and Pelaez (2017). One of the reasons why these programs have not been successful is the adoption of foreign standards without taking into account the variations of our context. The established language policy does not fit in the diverse and multicultural country we live in. (Drago, Peralta & Santacruz, 2018.) In some cases, it is really difficult to employ those language policies as the government expected; taking into account what is established by the MEN (Colombia)

“education in Colombia must help the Colombian citizens to overcome those complex problems.” Due to the different contexts in which we were doing our practicum, we can say that for example, teaching in Bello, which is a community with a lot of social issues, and maybe some students go to the school as an excuse to escape of their reality, the learning process become more difficult, so there is a decontextualization in those situations.

Problem

In the municipality of Bello, during the current year (2019), there has been a wave of violence that affects every aspect of the sociocultural context there. As we mentioned before, education is one of the most affected aspects by the violence among gangs; that violence involves acts such as murders, extortions, shootings near to the institution. It creates fear inside the educational community, changes in the educational schedule, stereotypes and social stigma; indeed, students consider that being involved in that world is the best; but they are the ones most affected by these problems, the ones that are recruited for gangs, the ones that are killed in the corner of the streets, the ones that are the girlfriends of the dangerous people in that municipality. The conflict has left a feeling of terror in that community and it is not only the fear of letting children out of the schools, it is that unfortunately in this community, a large part of the victims are minors.

The school in which we want to carry out the research is Fe y Alegría Nueva Generación, located in Niquía, Bello. This school is near some highly violent places and is affected by those problems. It is important to ensure that students are still working in their learning process and make them aware there are other possibilities to get by; indeed, they have an active role in the social change. Students are able to contribute to a better

environment. Nevertheless, talking specifically about English teachers, they must be leaders and supporters of the appropriation of the current language policies that are supposedly the base of English education.

What we expect doing this research is: From an English as a foreign language (EFL) class to contribute to forming students as agents of social changes. Use the language as a way to open their view of the world and give them different reasons and opportunities to take into account their future and even in different aspects of their life. Moreover, what we are looking through this research is to be aware of our role as teachers, not only as English teachers but also, as teachers of life. We should know that we have a lot of influence on our students, and it is important to take advantage of this and give them reasons to fight for their dreams.

Literature review

Based on our experiences, teaching English has been seen as a tool to get more opportunities, to reach for a better future, to be at the avant-garde of globalization. As is mentioned in (MEN 2006, p. 3) “Having a good proficiency level in English facilitates the access to job and education opportunities that help ensure the quality of life”. Colombia is a country that follows standardized policies established by the government focused on economic goals, but the laws should be more contextualized. Solarte, A and Guerrero, G (2008, p. 182) state that: “Standards have been obtained by importing the ones that were developed in other places, under different circumstances and contexts.” That is why we wanted to discuss the role of English as a foreign language in this society, with the perceptions of different authors. Those concepts such as English for peacebuilding, teacher use English as a connector with the culture, and teacher’s beliefs will be addressed and have an important place in this paper.

According to Hurie, H. A., (2018.) “The United States of America and Europe have influenced every aspect of the occidental society, and this includes education.” Teaching and learning processes in Colombia, especially English teaching, underlies in neoliberalism and globalized context, and from that point, the Colombian government has designed lots of laws and programs, also known as, language policies such as *Colombia Bilingüe*. Moreover, he also states in his article that “Despite this criticism, the educational practices of *Colombia Bilingüe* continue without interruption, demonstrating neoliberalism’s ideological hegemony and control over many aspects of the school curriculum.”(p.2) Besides, this author argues that English teaching is “even less likely to contribute to the construction of peace.” Hurie, also wrote in his paper that despite there being no colonialism, understood as physical colonies, there is colonialism in terms of power hierarchy, economy, and politics.

As is mentioned in Hurie, H.A (2018) also it retakes the concept of English for peace from the government, as well as its strategies for peacebuilding, and he analyzes them. In the

first strategy, he questions why English teachers in Colombia should be from abroad. According to that question, the ones who should teach English should be Colombians, the people who lived through the conflict, the ones who understand the context, local politics, social problems. Regarding this last part, the argument about who are the ones who should teach the English language in our country. It can be approached through critical pedagogy using the following perspective taken from Freire, P. (2004):

“The historical, political, social, and cultural experience of men and women can never be acquired outside of the conflict between those forces that are dedicated to the prevention of self-assumption on the part of individuals and groups and those forces that work in favor of such an assumption. Teaching preparation that considers itself to be above such "intrigues" does nothing less than work in favor of the obstacles to self-assumption. The socio-political solidarity that we need today to build a less ugly and less intolerant human community where we can be really what we cannot neglect the importance of democratic practice. Purely pragmatic training, with its implicit or openly expressed elitist authoritarianism, is incompatible with the learning and practice of becoming a "subject." (p.34)

Besides (Freire, 2004) says:

“A more radical sense of "to assume" is when I say: One of the most important tasks of critical educational practice is to make possible the conditions in which the learners, in their interaction with one another and with their teachers, engage in the experience of assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons; dreamers of possible utopias, capable of being angry because of a capacity to love. Capable of assuming themselves as "subject" because of the capacity to recognize themselves as "objects." All this, while bearing in mind that the assumption of oneself does not signify the exclusion of others. Because it is the otherness of the "not I" or the "you" that makes me assume the radicality of the "I."

Regarding how a teacher should act according to Freire, to exercise the teaching profession can offer some beliefs that also influence the teacher role. In that sense, according to Williams (1997) teachers, “may hold one or a combination of beliefs about those whom they teach.” It means, how you see or perceive your students, it will directly affect the teaching and the learning process; it means, you cannot or you should not see your students as resistors because it can generate conflict. In this sense, if the government wants language policies to influence the building of peace, they should be aware of the teacher role (in this case Colombian English teacher) and its implications; that means, the process of formation, their actions, and their beliefs. In that way, Teaching English could be a tool for peacebuilding.

It is important to mention that the teacher's role goes beyond the classroom, where is giving instructions, grading, etc. As it is mentioned by *Kumaravadivelu.B* (2003): “Professionals who are able and willing to reflect upon the ideological principles that inform their practice, who connect pedagogical theory and practice to wider social issues” (p,13). So, this written is intended to look at the teacher as someone who can achieve a transformation in those difficult contexts, taking into account that several aspects affect the educational community, in which the goal is permeated through teaching English for good relationships, adequate behavior, and tolerance to a better human life.

Finally, and according to what was mentioned before, this work is oriented by the suggested curriculum from Colombia Bilingue where the following module is mentioned: “Propose actions for getting along and inclusion in the classroom”. Based on that, there is a different intention with the language, but, the schools and teachers are implementing this specific policy? So, the action is focused on promoting a good relationship among students with the purpose of creating a peaceful environment inside the classroom. The idea in this module is that students will be part of the class and also of a community in which they are involved and they should have an active role in social changes.

As (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2012) explain “the basic premise of critical pedagogies in the context of troubled society is not simply to question the dominant educational arrangements; “the people there, the bodies in the classroom who carry knowledge within themselves that must be engaged, interrupted, and transformed”. (p.42).

Teachers appropriate policies, innovate in their schools and classrooms according to their school context, students needs; while focus their attention on those critical areas that need to be addressed in each community. Teachers appropriate policies with the main purpose of attending to student’s emotional, behavioral, and personal needs in order to motivate them towards something different to what they find in the streets, in the academic approach policies are enacted with the clear purpose of improving student’s communicative competence and academic skills according to the official expectation (Usma, 2015). We consider that teachers are always those who know the process and reality in each school, so it is a bad decision to bring teaching strategies from other places, from other countries knowing that each place and each country has different needs, the appropriation of these language policies has been the challenge for many schools in our country and also in our city due to the different changes that these policies have suffered. Teachers have tirelessly tried to put into

practice what is established in these policies, but without having a favorable result; and that it is necessary to know the students to create methods that go hand in hand with their skills.

The main emphasis given to the educational process was placed on the formative and supportive aspects required by students and their families, but not necessarily on reaching the goals established by the national government in terms of foreign language teaching and learning. It is a bit frustrating for a child to have to learn a new language without motivation, without having variations in teaching, if we do not look at their needs, if the strategies do not fit their culture and especially if we do not immerse them in the language, and let them appropriate it with their customs. We cannot allow students to think that they will be classified by the state in terms of their linguistic level or that they will determine their socio-economic level, we must help them feel comfortable when developing skills in another language regardless of at what rate go your learning. We need to try that our classes become more interactive, which requires students to be more engaged, to participate and to use the language more and in multiple situations.

Language policy must always go hand in hand with the needs of the contexts, and above all, it must be included with the participation of those who are part of it, those who know it and can help their determinations and proposals give the expected results to grow as a country, but also to open doors to new knowledge. It is through language policy that decisions are made with regard to the preferred languages that should be legitimized, used, learned and taught in terms of where, when, and in which contexts. (Shohamy, 2006). Teachers are expected to act as policy actors and policy agenda creators who respond to the specific needs, lacks, and wants of their students and school communities. It is demanded that they understand the social, political, cultural, economic, and educational implications of teaching an international language such as English in a highly unequal society such as our country (Pelaez, 2019).

As Spolky (2004) explain “language policies are constituted by three elements: practices, beliefs, and language management” (Spolsky, 2004). We know that language policy refers to “the determination of the major decisions concerning the relations between languages and society”. It is an interesting bet on the part of the rulers, who in the first place have the leadership in making decisions about education even if they have no idea of what is "teaching" and even educational projects. but it is a bit illogical that those who make the

language teaching decisions are not those who know them or who are part of the education, so there is a disconnection between the state projects and the reality of the contexts.

Taking into account what was mentioned above, we were wondering how the implementation of an understanding by design (UbD) based on the (language policies) suggested curriculum, contributes to the building of peaceful environments in the classroom?

General Objective:

- To apply pedagogical practice that helps to improve the environment in the classrooms.

Specific Objectives:

- To identify the factors which allow the creation of peaceful environments inside the classroom.
- To propose a plan (UbD) that contains topics, strategies, lessons and activities, digital resources, content.
- To redirect the intentionality of teaching English to a social purpose.

Methodology

This research aims to develop through a socio-critical theory, as it is the action research. (Lewin 1948) mentioned: “The research needed for social practice can best be characterized for social management or social engineering”. In this order, the proposal is to become part of the context to have an active role in the educational practices and reach some positive changes through English teaching.

Also, (Elliott 1991) argued: “that action research had more potential and that it could improve practice by developing the practitioner’s capacity for discrimination and judgment in particular, complex, human situations.”

To achieve this, an action plan was designed in order to meet the established objectives with specific characteristics that allow us to be part of the context and also to create what we want, which is peaceful environments into the school and classrooms.

We carried out this research specifically in the seventh grade of the public school Fe y Alegria Nueva Generacion. Through action research, we wanted to become part of the context of these students, we proposed and UbD (understanding by design) in order to build meaningful and positive scenarios for its students.

With the degree project, in the company of my colleagues, we had been working with the theme of how our practicum can contribute to building peace. We decided to take this field of research since each one of us had had the experience of violence in our practicums as teachers. We were starting to work with the implementation of a UbD for our research, but unfortunately due to the health emergency, we had to transform that research into a narrative and thus tell everything that we have lived and reflected on all this time.

We were starting to work with the implementation of a UbD for our research, but unfortunately due to the health emergency, we had to transform that research into a narrative and thus tell everything that we have lived and reflected on all this time.

Findings

We carried out this research in the seventh grade of the public-school Fe y Alegría Nueva Generación. Through action research we wanted to become part of the context of this students, we proposed a UBD (Understanding by design) in order to build meaningful and positive scenarios for its students, this action plan was designed with established objectives and specific goals that allow us to have an active role in the educational practices and create what we want, that is peaceful environments.

We had to change, the way in which we carried out our research, due to a pandemic. In that way, we decided to write a narrative, for analyzing the implementation process of our action research. During the process of codifying, categorizing, and creating the themes, we came up with the following: Knowledge and implementation of language policies during the career; inquiries and perceptions about that we came up during the action research and emotions during our experience as pre-service teachers.

During the construction of the narrative, we did a coding process, with which we wanted to remember why we had started to carry out this research and we as a group express how the process was from our different points of view. We organize it by pointing out phrases and organizing them by codes according to what we wanted to express in the idea. We found codes such as issues, violence, murders, challenge and many others that correspond to the category of bad feelings and experiences, in which we talk about the situations we lived through during our investigation and which were the main reason why we decided to carry out our degree work; We also found other codes that speak about vocation, colleagues work, and learning during the career that was the consequence of our research in the school, starting to work in such a difficult and challenging environment made us wake up and really see that vocation of being teachers, and that we wanted to contribute to change from our career and thus make our students see English as a way out or a path for a different life.

The findings that we find in the themes first of all were all those methods and approaches learned during the career. In this school, the English perspective was the same as in other contexts, for economic goals; maybe trying to follow an established curriculum, but that curriculum was not contextualized with the real needs. It was evident that English classes have been used just for globalization. Besides, teachers did not have other purposes that differ from English teaching. That is why the classes before implementing this UBD did not go

beyond grammar rules and memory. In that order, we started to design the classes based on what we learned, and then, we had to check what was the student's reaction for each new activity, in order to keep in mind our goal in this research to contribute with better learning environments. However, the classes that were prepared, not always could have the same effect or results, and that was something we had to deal with. We have to clarify that every public school has specific issues, and in this case violence had a big impact on the learning process.

Secondly, in the inquiries and perceptions that we came up with during the action research, we categorized our thoughts about the students, our process, and our role. Being immersed in that context with different situations, needs, and personalities; and to know that we as teachers should meet every single student to connect that reality with the class was difficult. Also, be part of a subject that is seen just to make money, and not with the purpose of a social change, made us realize that English is stigmatized because of globalization. This process made us realize that some of us are not prepared for being teachers, and it is because there are a lot of situations that we do not know how to deal with. Also, in many cases, students perceive English as an imposition or obligation for the future and that perception made them feel disinterested, unmotivated. On the other hand, some students feel motivated because they want money, but it is not the majority of the students.

It is incredible and unexpected that most of the students really do not know how to talk about their own feelings, and how to express or to be honest with others and even with themselves. With that in mind, students started to feel interested in the class due to its focus on the emotional part of the human being, related to them and their background, and they appreciated that a lot.

Finally, inside this theme, emotions during our experience as pre-service teachers, we talked about how was the construction and the implementation of our research, how we perceived it, and improve it. During our process with the context and our experiences, we were involved in all kinds of emotions that made us reflect. We were frustrated when we realized that our goals as teachers were affected by violence.

We also feel bad knowing that we could not continue implementing our project because we had an idea and we had to change everything. Since we started the career we

were comfortable with our profession and we had always a positive vision of the things that could happen in the classroom, but we were not prepared to have an approach to violence. Many times we have to go through these situations to feel the fear that others feel, although we have not been deeply touched by violence, having been immersed in those contexts made us feel fear, insecurities, we even did not know if we were doing the right thing.

Sometimes we get confused and do not even know what strategies to take. It was a tough but satisfying process, as you learned too much from the situation. Despite the ups and downs in emotions, we learned too much from the experience, overcame fear, and supported each other. It is not easy to be in a context where the lives of others are not respected, but we as teachers have the most powerful weapon that is education.

Discussion

We found that the environment in which the students learn has a high impact, even the external factors can affect the good development of the class; that is why we as teachers must have knowledge about the student's reality. This can be very useful to know how to contextualize the content in which we are going to teach. Applying half of the pedagogical practice, it was very meaningful first, to connect the research with the student's feelings and this worked and help to keep students motivated and focused on the purpose of the class.

Starting with the discussion and the first finding Knowledge and implementation of language policies during the career we have to mention that English in Colombia is mandatory and also the government tries to regulate it. The government has created laws, papers, guides and other kinds of stuff to promote it. In that sense, teachers must know why they are teaching English, what is expected by the government and how to apply those laws, papers, and guides or not apply them.

Taking into account what was mentioned above, about teachers and their relation with language policies, it can be said that teachers are called to be policymakers. We as researchers and preservice teachers create a pedagogical practice based on an understanding by design (UbD) it implies the critical thinking about the reason and the purpose, the how, the needs and lacks of the school. During our research we realize our role in the English teaching process in Colombia. We can adapt and feel free to create our classes and plans and how to direct our practices.

A lot of perceptions came up during the research, about the teachers, about the students, about the language policies. The implementation of the language policies has long been a topic of discussion. In fact, we wanted to know what are those details that have been reason of nonconformity. Ayala and Alvarez (2005), Usma (2009) state that the educational, social, linguistic and economic reality in Colombia may not be compared to Europe in the achievement of language goals.

Conclusions

One of the perceptions seen during the implementation of this action plan was that students are not really engaged in the English classes, they do not find a deeper motivation than to get a "better job". Actually, in this specific scenario, some of them do not care about their future, they do not care if the English classes are useful or not. This situation could

happen when not even the teacher is worried about the external factors that may be affecting the teaching-learning process; in this case is violence.

On the other hand, teachers are not participating on the crucial decisions, and that is affecting the real goal in all the process. In fact, they are the ones who know the reality of each educational context, and who know how to deal with all situations creating strategies that help with the real needs.

In our experience as pre-service teachers, we have had emotions that have marked our vision as teachers. Being in a context where life is not respected and laws are not observed, we saw a very important responsibility in the classroom and that was to guide students to see school as a place of peace. We were concerned about not doing things well, feeling frustrated, but we were filled with hope and the desire to do things well. We would have felt better if we had had the opportunity to have participated more in the environment with the students, but the circumstances did not allow it.

Bibliography

- Bekerman, Z., & Zembylas, M. (2012). *Teaching contested narratives; identity, memory, and reconciliation in peace education and beyond*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Colombia Bilingüe (2016) Suggested Curriculum Structure.
- Drago O, Peralta J, Santacruz D (2018) Educational Actors Seek to Make sense of Language Policies.
- Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogía de la autonomía: saberes necesarios para la práctica educativa*. Revista de paz e terra SA, são paulo. ISBN 85-219-0243-3. <https://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/areas/salud/dircap/mat/matbiblio/freire.pdf>
- Gómez Sará, M. M. (2017). Review and Analysis of the Colombian Foreign Language Bilingualism Policies and Plans. *HOW*, 24(1), 139–156.
- González, A (2010) English and English teaching in Colombia tensions and possibilities in the expanding circle. Research Gate. <https://aprende.colombiaaprende.edu.co/>
- Hurie, A. H. (2018). ¿Inglés Para La Paz? Colonialidad, Ideología Neoliberal Y Expansión Discursiva en Colombia Bilingüe. *Íkala: Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, 23(2), 333–354. <https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.ikala.v23n02a09>
- Kumaravadivelu, B (2003). *Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teaching*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Mathew, R. (2005). *Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teachers*. *ELT Journal: English Language Teaching Journal*, 59(1), 72–75. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/cci011>
- Minglin Li. (2010). EFL Teachers and English Language Education in the PRC: Are They the Policy Makers? *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher (De La Salle University-Manila)*, 19(3), 439–451. <https://doi.org/10.3860/taper.v19i3.1852>

- Pelaez, O. A. (2019). Reflection and Analysis of Official Language Policies as Key Skill in Teacher Education.
- Shohamy, E. (2006). Language Policy. USA and Canada: Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Solarte, A. C. S., & Guerrero, G. V. O. (2008). Is Colombia ready for “Bilingualism”? Profile: Issues in Teachers’ Professional Development, 9, 181–195.
- Spolsky, B. (2004). Language Policy. Cambridge University Press.
- Usma Wilches, J. (2015). What others are saying.
- Williams, M., & Burden, R. L. (1997). Psychology for Language Teachers: A Social Constructivist Approach.