FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF

STANDARDS IN HIGH SCHOOL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Resumen

Éste estudio cualitativo denominado: Foreign Language Teachers'
Attitude Towards The Implementation of Standards in High Schools,
se llevo a cabo con el fin de identificar la opinión de los
docentes de ingles, sobre la implementación de Estándares en
secundaria. El instrumento empleado para la recolección de los
datos fue una encuesta que constó de doce (12) preguntas. Treinta
(30) profesores pertenecientes a veinte (20) diferentes colegios
públicos del municipio de Pasto, hicieron parte de la muestra
considerada para llevar acabo ésta investigación; éste grupo de
profesores es relevante por dos razones: la primera, puesto que
el Ministerio de Educación Nacional los escogió para cursar un
diplomado en la Universidad de Nariño, y la segunda, debido a que
se encuentran en el nivel mas alto, (nivel B2) según la
clasificación estipulada por el documento Marco Común Europeo.
Igualmente, términos fundamentales en el proceso de
Estandarización tales como: Evaluation, Assessment, Testing, y
Standards-Based Assessment son discutidos. Asimismo, al final de
éste documento, las más significativas conclusiones, las cuales
puedan contribuir con futuras investigaciones, relacionadas con
la implementación de Estándares son presentadas.

Abstract

This qualitative research study intends to identify what is the teachers' attitude towards the implementation of standards in high schools. The data collection process was carried out through a twelve-question survey. The sample considered in this research consisted on thirty high schools teachers of twenty different high schools from Pasto, who were previously classified by The Ministry of Education for taking a certificate in English at the University of Nariño, and because they were into the highest level of proficiency –B2 level according to the classification described by the CEF document-. Furthermore, key terms like: Evaluation, Assessment, Testing, and Standards-Based Assessment are defined. In addition, at the end of this paper some recommendations and a number of relevant conclusions, which may contribute to future research, are presented.

Introduction

Nowadays, the government of Colombia through the Ministry of Education is involved in the process of standardizing education; therefore, Standards have been set. These standards have been established as an attempt to define levels of proficiency that learners are required to attain in order to be promoted from one course to another. Consequently, standards allow teachers to check the learners' progress and measure it at each stage of learning. As it can be seen, the implementation of Standards appears to be an excellent strategy to improve education. However, there are many gaps that can be analyzed in this process, – one of these gaps is the English teachers' attitude towards the implementation of standards, the adoption of the Common European Framework as reference for language learning, teaching and assessing –CEF–, and Bilingual Colombia Programme 2019 –BCP. Therefore, our research will be carried out focusing on describing and analyzing the English teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of standards, the adoption of the Common European Framework as reference for language learning, teaching and assessing –CEF–, and Bilingual Colombia Programme –BCP.

Taking into consideration the point of view of outstanding authors key issues like: Evaluation, Assessment, Testing, and Standards-Based Assessment, will be discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

The research problem

Problem description

Since 2003, the Ministry of Education has issued policies that are intended for improving education in our country. For some people the overall 'innovative' plans are seen as the new trends for improving teaching, and learning. Nonetheless, there are some issues that have not been taken into consideration for example, the teachers' opinion towards the standardization program, the adoption of the Common European Framework as reference for language learning, teaching and assessing –CEF–, and 'Bilingual Colombia Programme –BCP'. Therefore, it seems to be that the whole new project intended by those administrators of education is somehow another additional policy of education which has no specific direction.

In consequence, the ministry of education has set a project called 'Plan de Desarrollo Educativo', which is being put into practice in the overall institutions involved in education. Hence, the field of languages has not been the exception and this is the reason by which an ambitious program known as 'Colombia Bilingüe –BCP–' has been intended. So that, public and non-public institutions like primary schools, high schools, and universities are now involved in a process that has the difficult mission of turning students into bilingual users of English in the next few

years. We say it is a difficult mission because in Colombia English is taught as a foreign language. According to Hughes (2006, p. 22), a well-known and persistent problem with teaching English as a foreign language –EFL– is the lack of resources. In addition, here in Colombia overcrowded classrooms are common in all public institutions furthermore, the students' contact with the foreign language is limited because in this EFL setting there are no real opportunities for practicing English outside the classrooms moreover, the English number of hours per week is over limited. On the other hand, there are no appropriate materials or technology at all.

Problem statement

What is the teachers' attitude towards the implementation of standards, the adoption of the Common European Framework as reference for language learning, teaching and assessing, and 'Bilingual Colombia Program'?

General objective

To describe the English teachers' attitude towards the implementations of standards, the adoption of the Common European Framework as reference for language learning, teaching and assessing, and 'Bilingual Colombia Program'.

Specific objectives

To establish the importance of this research topic taking into account the relevance of it for foreign language teaching and learning.

To explain key terms like Evaluation, Assessment, Testing, and Standards-Based Instruction, with a view to contributing to this research and at the same time to future ones.

To create instruments which allow gathering relevant and reliable information in order to demonstrate the validity of this research.

To identify whether teachers agree or disagree with the implementation of standards, the adoption of Common European Framework as a reference for language learning, teaching and assessing, and 'Bilingual Colombia Programme'.

To identify why teachers agree or disagree about the implementation of standards, the adoption of Common European Framework as a reference for language learning, teaching and assessing, and 'Bilingual Colombia Programme'.

To describe the teachers' suggestions which may contribute to obtain positive results with the implementation of standards, the adoption of Common European Framework as a reference for language learning, teaching and assessing, and 'Bilingual Colombia Programme'.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to lay bare whether English teachers from public high schools in Pasto agree or disagree about the implementation of Standards of English, the adoption of the Common European Framework as a reference for language learning, teaching and assessing, and the 'innovative' policy –Bilingual Colombia Programme 2019. In addition, we want to describe and analyze the most relevant teachers' suggestions that could contribute to the success of the policies that aim to the improvement of English teaching. However, we are not trying to show that the implementation of standards, the adoption of *The Common European Framework as a reference for language learning, teaching, and assessing* and '*Bilingual Colombia Programme*' are unsuitable. On the contrary, we are certainly sure that these measures could be significant for improving education in this country; nevertheless, we are claiming that these strategies and projects ought to be designed differently.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of literature

In this chapter, readers are provided with the most relevant information related to this research, taking into consideration that this research is part of Assessment we consider that it is relevant to star by clarifying key terms that are closely related to this subject and consequently to this research.

A bit of History

The Wikipedia encyclopaedia states that The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, -CEF-, is a guideline used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe. It was put together by the Council of Europe as the main part of the project "Language Learning for European Citizenship" between 1989 and 1996. Its main aim is to provide a method of assessing and teaching which applies to all languages in Europe. In November 2001 a European Union Council Resolution recommended using the CEF document to set up systems of validation of language ability.

The Teachers' guide to the Common European Framework states that, people have been learning, teaching, and assessing language for centuries. In this long history, there have been as many different ways of teaching as there have been ways of describing levels of language learning and assessment. Even today, schools, universities, and language academies use many different

methodologies and many ways to describe proficiency levels.
(Teachers guide to the Common European Framework)

In order to facilitate both teaching and learning, we need a
way to specify what our learners are able to do at certain
levels. As teachers, we also need to know how these levels can
guide our teaching and the way we select course books and
resources. In short, we need a common language by which we can
describe language learning, teaching, and assessment.
Reflecting this, the Council of Europe developed the *Common
European Framework of References for Languages* to establish
international standards for learning, teaching, and assessment
for all modern European languages. (Teachers guide to the Common
European Framework)

The Common European Framework describes what a learner can
do at six specific levels -Basic User (A1 and A2), Independent
User (B1 and B2), and Proficient User (C1 and C2). These levels
match general concepts of basic, intermediate, and advanced and
are often referred to as the Global Scale for each level.
(Teachers guide to the Common European Framework)

The Global Scale is not language-specific. In other words,
it can be used with virtually any language and can be used to
compare achievement and learning across languages. For example,
an A2 in Spanish is the same as an A2 in Japanese or English.
(Teachers guide to the Common European Framework)

The Global Scale also helps teachers, academic coordinators, and course book writers to decide on curriculum and syllabus content and to choose appropriate course books, etc. (Teachers guide to the Common European Framework)

As it is stated above, the implementation of CEF lasted about twenty years and it was the result of exhaustive research, carried out by experts in the field of teaching languages; among those, linguist, professors, members of the government, and teachers.

Here in Colombia, the process of standardizing education has lasted few years. For instance, in 2004 The Ministry of Education stated that Colombia needed to create a policy allowing Colombian citizens master at least a foreign language. Therefore, a new language policy called 'Bilingual Colombia Programme 2004-2019' was established. (Altablero 2005)

In order to set up common foundations that provide consistency regarding the design of standards, the foreign languages courses, the assessment instruments, the methodology, and the materials required in order to teach English in Colombia, The Ministry of Education decided to adopt The Common European Framework as reference for language learning, teaching and assessing, arguing that this document allows teachers see the students' performance and progress at each level, and offers

international standards that students should attain at a certain level in order to be promoted to a next one.

Bilingual Colombia Programme 2004-2019 aims to increase the English communicative competence within the whole Colombian educational system, and consequently making Colombian citizens more competitive not only in the field of education, and facilitating Colombian students to have access to higher education in countries like United States or European ones, but also in the field of businesses and production. (Altablero 2005)

The Ministry of Education has stated that nowadays the Colombian economy is more and more related with international economy. Therefore, it was said that learning English and being bilingual would be necessary for Colombian people in order to take advantage of those new possibilities offered by the Tratado de Libre Comecio –TLC-, the abroad business opportunities, and the global economy. (Altablero 2005)

Based on The Common European Framework of reference for language learning, teaching, and assessing The Ministry of Education designed a short book known as: *Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lengua Extrangeras Inglés*, which briefly describes the approach every English teacher should follow with a view to attaining the standards that students should achieve at each different level. (Altablero 2005)

Evaluation

According to Rea-Dickins & Germaine (1993) in Carter & Nunan (2001) the term *Evaluation* in TESOL settings is a process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting information about teaching and learning in order to make informed decisions that enhance student achievement and the success of educational programmes.

Evaluation can focus on different aspects of teaching and learning; respectively, textbooks and instructional materials, student achievement, and whole programmes of instruction. Evaluation can be undertaken for different reasons and the reasons impact in substantial ways. (p. 144)

According to the CEF document in a language programme a number of things are evaluated. These may include the effectiveness of particular methods or materials, the kind and quality of discourse actually produced in the programme, learner/teacher satisfaction, teaching effectiveness, etc. (p. 177)

According to Murphy (1999) the term *Evaluation* is a broad notion which covers a range from inspection to action research and that; however it is conceived, evaluation leaves no one and no institution indifferent. The goal may be to monitor what is done in an institution such as a school, or to attempt to learn from what is done there. The conduct of evaluation may be the domain of a small group of specialists inside or outside the

institution or part of its general activity. The outcome may be perceived as negligible, harmful or beneficial or all of these at once. Evaluation has the potential to be useful to individuals and institutions. It follows, then, that the way evaluation is conceived, introduced and managed must be thought through carefully.

Evaluation is political, its use is part of policy and, therefore, of how things are to be done. However, what is certain is that evaluation has an impact on how things are done. Evaluation is finding out about an activity to see either how well it is being done, how effective it is, or to understand it better. In other words, evaluation is a kind of research, but is not an end in itself. It is a tool of management. Murphy (1999)

Evaluation may be done to monitor people's job performance, or the achievement of programme goals. Typically we experience this kind of evaluation as some form of inspection, but evaluation is also done by teachers: to learn from or about classroom activity, or to support innovation and development. Evaluation may be small- or large-scale, and use a range of techniques: diary-keeping, classroom observation, testing, experiments, case-study, and interviews; the appropriacy of the technique will depend on the purpose and context of the evaluation. Murphy (1999)

Murphy (1999) highlights the relevance of creating an evaluation culture in which teachers and administrators of education work altogether with a view to improving education; it means, evaluation will not function unless communication takes the form of dialogue, where all sides listen and speak. So that there could be more open access to information and open decision-making, additionally goals become open to question and discussion, while change is participative and not simply imposed.

According to Casper (2003), the term *Evaluation* is about describing a situation and then interpreting that description and often making value judgments about it. Evaluation is individualized, tied to context and personal experience, and it is broader and subjective. Evaluation is needed in education because many factors are constantly shifting in a learning environment, and it is important to be able to account for them and implement changes to the various components as needed. Evaluation is also a valuable tool to employ at the end of an experience to help put the experience into perspective and to determine whether or not and how beneficial it was.

Assessment

According to Brown (2004) 'Assessment' is an ongoing process that encompasses a wider domain, which refers to a variety of ways for collecting information on a learner's language ability or achievement. So that, assessment takes place when a student

responds to a question, offers a comment, or tries out a new word or structure, the teacher subconsciously makes an assessment of the student's performance. Written work – from a jotted-down phrase to a formal essay– is also performance that could be assessed by the teacher or in some cases by students. (p. 4)

Brown (2004) states that the term '*assessment*' is also divided into formal and informal assessment.

Informal assessment

Informal assessment refers to the number of forms starting with incidental, unplanned comments and responses, along with coaching and other impromptu feedback to the student. Examples of informal assessment include saying 'Nice job!' 'Good work!' 'Did you say can or can't' 'I think you meant to say you *broke* the glass, not you *break* the glass,' or putting a ☺ on some homework.

Informal assessment does not stop there. A good deal of teachers assessment is embedded in classroom tasks designed to elicit performance without recording results and making fixed judgements about a student's competence. Examples at this end of the continuum are marginal comments on papers, responding to a draft or an essay, advice about how to better pronounce a word, a suggestion for a strategy for compensating for a reading difficulty, and showing how to modify a student's note-taking to better remember the content of a lecture. (p. 5)

Formal assessment

Formal assessments are exercises or procedures specifically designed to tap into a storehouse of skills and knowledge. They are systematic, planned sampling techniques constructed to give teacher and student an appraisal of student achievement. (p. 6)

According to Carter & Nunan (2001), there are different types of Assessment, which are as follow:

Proficiency assessment

Proficiency assessment refers to the assessing of general language abilities acquired by the learner independent of a course of study. This kind of assessment is often done through the administration of standardized commercial language-proficiency tests. (Carter & Nunan 2001, p. 137)

Assessment of achievement

This type of assessment aims to establish what a student has learnt in relation to a particular course or curriculum (thus frequently carried out by the teacher). Achievement assessment may be based either on the specific content of the course or on the course objectives. (Carter & Nunan 2001, p. 137)

Summative assessment

Summative assessment is often carried out at the end of a course term or school-year —often for purposes of providing aggregated information on programme outcomes to educational authorities. (Carter & Nunan 2001, p. 137)

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is carried out by teachers during the learning process with the aim of using the results to improve instruction. (Carter & Nunan 2001, p. 137)

Testing

According to Brindley G. in Carter, R. & Nunan, D. (2001) the term '*Testing*' is an umbrella term encompassing measurement instruments administered on a "one off" basis such as tests, as well as qualitative methods of monitoring and recording students learning such as observation, simulations or project work. (p.137)

In order to better understand the term testing it is relevant to specify what a test is and what are the most common types of tests.

Test

According to Brown (2004), a test is a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain (p. 3)

Brown 2004, states that there are five types of tests, which are as follow (p. 390):

Proficiency tests

Proficiency tests aim to measure people's general competence in a language; in other words, these tests measure proficiency. So that Proficiency tests are not related with a particular

course or any curriculum design, however they are intended to measure the knowledge one could achieve without taking attention how or where (e.g.) The standardized proficiency test ‑TOEFL‑. (Brown, 2004, p. 390)

Diagnostic tests

As the name suggests these tests are designed to diagnose a particular aspect of a language, thus such a kind of tests aim to determine what area or areas of knowledge could be hard for students to be learnt and hence determine whether what topic or topics should be taught in a more careful way. (Brown, 2004, p. 390)

Placement tests

These tests are applied with a view to placing students into an appropriate level or section of a language curriculum or school. In other words, a placement test intends to place students into a class in which they do not consider the class is either too easy or too complex. (Brown, 2004, p. 390)

Achievement tests

Achievement tests are concerned with the classroom lessons, units, or even with the whole curriculum. These tests are intended to monitor whether the objectives of class, unit, course, or language program have been achieved. (Brown, 2004, p. 391)

Aptitude tests

These tests are designed with the purpose of measure the capacity a person

has to learn a foreign language. (Brown, 2004, p. 391)

Standards-Based Assessment

According to ECEA (2008), ‾Early Childhood Education Assessment‾, Standards-Based Assessment is the process through which the criteria for assessment are derived directly from content and/or performance standards. Standards-Based Assessment is also the logical next step that follows the development of standards.

In a sequential process to implement Standards-Based Education, the previous step or steps inform each step and the sequential process is represented as follows: Content and performance standards, Standards-Based Assessments and instruction for learning. (ECEA 2008)

Standards-Based Assessment differs from traditional assessment by closely linking assessment to curriculum comparing students to a standard of achievement, not to other students incorporating new forms of assessment ‾ECS 2002.

According to the Education Commission (2002), stated in Strater (2006), Standards-Based Assessment is an approach that compares students' performances to the standards, rather than comparing them with other students. In addition The Standards-

Based Assessment movement also encourages linking assessment to curriculum and incorporates new forms of assessment.

According to Strater (2006), in Standards-Based Assessment, the students are graded on how well they learned and achieved the standards. This is different from traditional assessments that compare students to how they performed compared to other students.

Standards-Based Assessment should continually evaluate the tests (and their grading criteria) based on the desired levels of student achievement. Sample assessment questions need to be made available to teachers, students, and parents. There should also be samples of student work that demonstrates the standards made available. Strater (2006)

According to the Education Commission of the States (2002), stated in Strater (2006), there are six desirable features of assessments that are as follow:

1. Assessment tasks should involve activities that are valued in their own right, engaging students in 'real-world' problems rather than artificial tasks.

2. Assessments should model curriculum reform.

3. Assessment activities should focus on objectives consistent with the goals of instructional activities, thus contributing to instructional improvement.

4 Assessments should provide a mechanism for staff development.

5. Assessments should lead to improved learning by engaging students in meaningful activities that are intrinsically motivating.

6. Assessments should lead to greater and more appropriate accountability.

CHAPTER THREE

The research method

Research design

The research design applied in this study is useful not only to reach the proposed objectives but also to answer the research question of this study. It can be described as follows:

Design

The design of this study is associated with the qualitative research, which primarily consists of collecting supportive information about the topic. This information is going to be collected through a survey. This qualitative research is also descriptive because it is going to provide the most relevant responses given by the English teachers who will participate in this study.

Type of research

The descriptive type is the one related to this qualitative research. According to Calvache (2005), stated in chapter two. Descriptions are intended to identify certain people's characteristics, opinions, and attitudes. Therefore, in this research readers will be provided with the most relevant responses and suggestions given by the English teachers who will participate in this study.

Population, Sample and Setting

In this section, important aspects like the population being the object of this research, the sample that will be selected and the setting where the research is going to take place are specified.

Population / Participants

The population or participants, who will help us to accomplish this labor, are 30 English teachers of 20 different public high schools from Pasto who are between 30 to 50 years old and their gender is both male and female. The participants considered in this research are significant for two reasons. The first one, because this group of teachers has been ranked by the Ministry of Education into the highest level of teachers' proficiency in public high schools of Pasto –B2 level, according to the classification of the CEF document. The second reason, because the Ministry of Education has chosen this group of educators to take a certificate at the University of Nariño.

Sample

Taking into consideration the relevance of the population (the 30 English teachers of 20 different public high schools); the whole group of educators who are taking the certificate at the University of Nariño will be considered as the sample.

Setting

This research is going to take place in the University of Nariño, *Sede Las Acacias*, which is a public institution of higher education. This university is located in the northern zone of Pasto, specifically in the Panamericana Avenue.

Data Collection technique

Data Collection instrument

The data collection instrument designed in this research project is as follows:

Survey: Calvache (2005) states that surveys are designed with the purpose of collecting primary information. (p. 69) Hence, we attempt to gather relevant data associated with the teachers' attitude towards the implementation of standards, and CEF in Colombia. In addition, this survey is going to reflect the possible teachers' suggestions for the success of the process of standardization. (The survey can be seen in appendix A).

CHAPTER FOUR

Data analysis

In this chapter, the most relevant information gathered in this research will be presented. In addition, key issues like the teachers' opinions towards *'Bilingual Colombia Programme (BCP)'*, the implementation of standards, and the adoption of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, and Assessment* (CEF) will be described. On the other hand, the most significant teachers' suggestions which could positively contribute with a view to getting outstanding results with 'Bilingual Colombia Programme (BCP)' will be pointed out.

Taking into consideration that the fourth and fifth specific objectives of this research are to identify whether and why English teachers agree or disagree with the implementation of standards, the adoption of CEF and BCP. The most relevant information having relation with the teachers' opinion towards these issues is presented bellow.

Concerning with whether English teachers agree or disagree with the implementation of BCP, it could be said that 72% of the teachers surveyed agree with this policy. For the reason that BCP is a challenging project that encloses relevant issues concerning with language teaching and teacher preparation, and highlights the need to revise the way English has been taught in Colombia. Consequently, English teachers stated that BCP invites them to

look for positive shifts that could lead them to teach English using less traditional methods, and traditional techniques.

In addition, foreign language teachers suggested that this project could lead to a significant improvement of education in Colombia, in the sense that students may attain a higher English proficiency level and consequently, become more competitive. Therefore, English teachers stated that BCP could be a good option allowing students to have opportunities to travel abroad either to apply for scholarships or to work.

As can be seen the teachers are certainly sure that turning Colombian students into bilingual users would be a wonderful feat that could positively contribute with the improvement of education, as well with the development of the country. Conversely, the whole group of teachers who agreed with the implementation of BCP emphasized that this project would only reach the results intended by the Ministry of Education whether the conditions of public schools were different.

On the contrary, all those teachers who expressed disagreement with the implementation of BCP – 24% of the teachers surveyed– affirmed that this project was not a good idea, because here in Colombia the conditions in which English is taught were being disregarded. Furthermore, English teachers supported their opinion by stating that they were aware that they needed more training in order to be able to turn students into bilingual

users. Moreover, they added that according to their English teaching experience, the current amount of English hours per week was too little whether the fact of turning students into bilingual users was considered. Besides, they pointed out that the schools, in which they were working, were not equipped with the materials and the technology required for achieving the objectives of BCP. Additionally, teachers affirmed that classrooms were overcrowded.

As stated by teachers who do not agree with the implementation of BCP -24% of the teachers surveyed-, the government is disregarding the real conditions in which public schools are, the English hours per week, the lack of materials and technology, and the teachers preparation.

Taking into consideration that this paper is the product of serious research, it is required to say that 4% of the teachers who participated in this research gave no answer to the question concerned with this objective.

Table 1 illustrates the proportion of teachers who are in favor, who are against, and those who gave no answer regarding the implementation of *Bilingual Colombian Programme* -BCP-.

Teachers´ opinion percentage towards the implementation of BCP
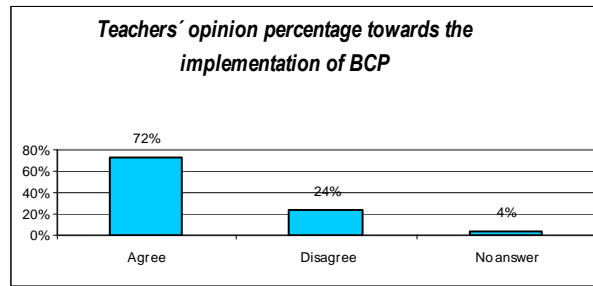
Table 1

Taking into account the implementation of standards, it could be said that 52% of the teachers surveyed agreed about its implementation. The most significant observations stated by these teachers were as follows:

First, teachers suggested that standards could be a suitable alternative that permits to check students' progress. In addition, they stated that standards are an excellent choice, which suggests educators not only what to teach but also what to assess at each level; so that standards become an outstanding tool which aims to connect teaching English with the assessment process. On the other hand, teachers declared that using standards in language teaching could be a relevant instrument that offers teachers the option of designing their syllabus with clear objectives. Finally, foreign language teachers said that by using standards in teaching English might let them see what students should know and be able to do as a result of instruction.

On the other hand, the group of teachers who did not agree with the implementation of standards -40% of the teachers surveyed- stated that the government was adopting standards designed for people from other countries and for different purposes. This group of teachers claimed that the English standards would possibly work better in the Colombian context in the case that these European standards were adapted to the Colombian people necessities rather than simply adopted.

Teachers who expressed disagreement towards the implementation of standards -40% of the teachers surveyed- affirmed that they were against the standardization process because they were certainly sure that the context, necessities, and conditions of public high schools were considerably disparate from one to another. Consequently, all the above elements needed to be seriously analyzed before starting a project like *Bilingual Colombia,* teachers said.

Finally, most of those foreign language teachers who made part of this research -92% of the sample- stated that they needed to receive formal training in order to be able to use standards adequately. In addition, it is relevant to say that 8% of the teachers surveyed gave no answer to the question analyzed in table 2.

The percentage of teachers who agree, who disagree and the percentage of those teachers who gave no answer regarding the

implementation of standards in foreign language teaching may be seen in table 2.
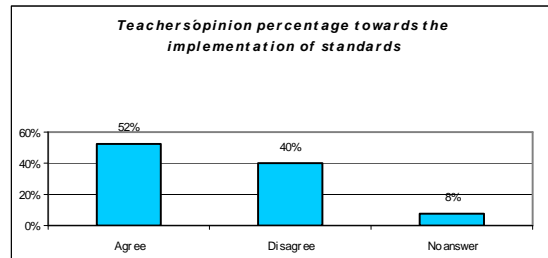

Table 2

Regarding the adoption of CEF, 30% of the teachers surveyed agreed about it. For the reason that they strongly believe the CEF document is the product of exhaustive second language acquisition research carried out in Europe for European people. Conversely, they assume this document could be a relevant instrument for the success of BCP.

As stated by teachers, the CEF document is the product of research carried out by expert people in the field of language teaching and learning; there is no doubt of this fact. However, it is relevant to mention that '*not always what is researched in developed countries is appropriate for those underdeveloped ones*'. Nonetheless, it should be required for the government to bear in mind that the CEF paper was designed to fulfill the necessities of European people; rather than those necessities of Colombian inhabitants.

English teachers who did not agree about the adoption of The CEF document -70% of the teachers who took part in this research

asserted that the economic situation of Colombia influences negatively the use of a document design for developed countries like European ones. So that, foreign language teachers stated again that the Colombian conditions, Colombian necessities, and Colombian context were significantly different from those of Europe.

Furthermore, those teachers who did not agree with the adoption of the CEF document -70% of the teachers surveyed-questioned the fact that here no serious research had been done in order to make sure whether the adoption of the CEF document is the worthiest option for the Colombian educational system.

Finally, another particular teachers' opinion was as follows: *'the bad copies of foreign countries are not always the best for our country'*. This sentence clearly indicates that the product obtained here in Colombia –the short 'book' called *'Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas extranjera: inglés'*– is not a good result, for the reason that this 'book' is an extremely reduced one which is the product of what according to the Ministry of education is seen as serious *'research'*. On the contrary, this short 'book' is a factual proof of bad 'copying and pasting'.

The percentage of teachers who agreed or did not agreed with the adoption of the CEF document can be seen in table 3.
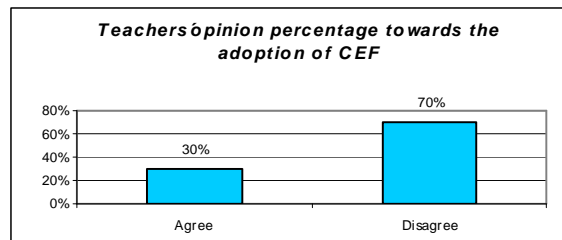
Table 3

Considering that, the last specific objective of this research is to describe the most relevant teachers' suggestions, which could certainly contribute, in order to get positive results with BCP. The most significant teachers' suggestions are presented bellow.

One-hundred percent of the teachers surveyed stated that many changes need to be done; being the case that the government really wants to achieve positive results with the implementation of BCP. Teachers stated that here in Colombia public schools do not have the best conditions regarding settings, materials, technology, English hours per week, number of students per class, English teachers level, and quality of education. Therefore, teachers asserted that the government should invest more money in education in order to prepare teachers, build more classrooms, and equip public schools with English laboratories, internet rooms, and English books.

Another issue suggested by teachers was that the number of English teachers in most of the public high schools was too

little; hence, they proposed that more English teachers needed to be hired.

One more teachers' suggestion was that the government should be more concerned with their preparation. Therefore, educators proposed that the Ministry of Education ought to be aware that permanent English teachers' training was needed with the intention of making them up to date.

An additional teachers' suggestion was that the Ministry of Education should seriously consider the fact that in Colombian public schools, English lessons are taking place in overcrowded classrooms. Then, foreign language teachers stated that it is going to be a little difficult to carry out a communicative lesson in a thirty or more student-class. Therefore, in a situation like this, there could be impossible to make students use the target language effectively and there could be limited opportunities to use the English language for authentic communication.

An extra teachers' suggestion was to increase the English hours per week. The surveyed educators stated that three English hours per week was too little; they suggested that the learning process could be more meaningful and effective if English were taught from six to eight hours per week.

On the other hand, 85% of the foreign language teachers who took part of this research asserted that in Colombia serious

research in the entire educational system was needed; of course, teachers were claiming for serious research in the field of language teaching primarily. Therefore, English teachers suggested that The Ministry of Education should be more concerned in promoting research by persuading and rewarding public educational institutions to do it. So that, meaningful evaluation of the educational system can be done and consequently education could be leaded to a valuable improvement of the way English is taught in Colombia. Hence, the government itself should be involved in the research projects because research can only be carried out whether there is enough money. In addition, there could be significant government suggestions, which may contribute to the improvement of English teaching. So that, English teachers experiences and the government's ideas can significantly contribute in order to get better results within the Colombian educational system.

An additional teachers' suggestion was to hire English teachers in primary schools. As teachers stated, nearly all of the public primary schools have no English teachers. According to the teachers who participated in this research, the fact of not having English teachers in primary schools is contradictory whether the levels stated by the CEF document are considered. For the reason that according to the short 'book' published by Ministry of Education, by the time students get the fifth grade,

they should be into the level A1.1 according to the CEF document, which suggests that students should be able to: 'produce brief everyday expressions in order to satisfy simple needs of a concrete type: personal details, daily routines, wants and needs, requests for information. Can use basic sentence patterns and communicate with memorised phrases, groups of a few words and formulae about themselves and other people, what they do, places, possessions etc. Has a limited repertoire of short memorised phrases covering predictable survival situations; frequent breakdowns and misunderstandings occur in non-routine situations'. (p. 24)

Taking into consideration that no English teachers are 'teaching' English in primary public schools, how can no English teachers of primary public schools make students achieve the A2.1 level stated by the CEF document?

Finally, English teachers suggested that the government should implement real programs of immersion for English teachers, in order to provide them with real opportunities to speak English naturally. Therefore, English educators can have the chance to improve their English. Then, most of the English teachers stated that real immersion programs in countries where English is spoken were needed.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In our opinion, the research process carried out in order to know the teachers attitude towards the implementations of standards, the adoption of the Common European Framework as reference for language learning, teaching and assessing, and 'Bilingual Colombia Program' was relevant.

Thus, it can be concluded that most of the teachers agree with the implementation of this measures, for the reason that not only the government but also English teachers are aware of the necessity of improving the way in which foreign languages are taught in Colombia. Hence, it is suitable to highlight what teachers said. They stated that standards are a suitable alternative which permits to check student progress at each level, suggests what to teach and what to assess, in addition they said that standards bridge the gap between teaching and assessment. Nevertheless, it is relevant to say that standards could not be the best measure, and it is important to remember that there are not perfect source able to fulfil all the requirements the acquisition of a foreign language demands.

Regarding the adoption of the CEF document teachers asserted that it could be a very useful tool whether it were adapted to our necessities, context, and reality rather than simply adopted and imposed.

Taking into consideration the implementation of BCP teachers said that it is a challenging project that encloses relevant issues regarding language teaching and teacher preparation, and highlights the need to revise the way English has been taught in Colombia; opinion that let us assure that English teachers of Pasto are really concerned with their profession.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that standards are the state of art in education. For this reason, European countries, Australia, and United States had implemented it within their educational system. These countries are real evidence that standards really work. However, it is important to stress that all these countries made a very well constructed process. First, they started by discussing the necessity of designing standards in education, then they did preliminary research that of course demanded years of investigation and considerable quantities of money, finally standards were designed; while here in Colombia the standardization process had been shorter. Hence, it is relevant to point out that in all those countries where standards were adopted *they were designed by each country*, *probed in pilot studies, adapted whether it was the case, and then adopted* by the institutions, and of course all this standardization processes took into consideration the opinion of expert people, members of the government, teachers, and even users. In contrast, here in Colombia, the process of implementing standards was significantly

different; therefore, the government decided to adopt standards designed for all those European countries and for different purposes -facilitating people mobilization because of the Plurilingual countries of Europe. While, the purpose of the Colombian government is to turn Colombian people into bilingual users.

Another thing to be considered is that here standards were imposed by the government rather than the product of mutual agreement between the concerned parts -government educators and administrators. Cardenas (2006) affirms that regarding the BCP goal -turning Colombian students into bilingual users-, it is advisable to be cautious. Due to the fact that, many teachers, educators, and linguists do not see it possible, because the government cannot impose bilingualism as a natural and spontaneous phenomenon for the reason that imposing causes dislike and little interest.

Furthermore, it could be much better if the term *bilingualism* were understood as what being bilingual means -being able to speak two languages equally well because of its use. It seems to be that this term has been misunderstood by the government and by those institutions hired to carry out *the Bilingual Colombia Program.* It could be even much better if the process of bilingualism in Colombia were conceived as a measure

to improve the English level of proficiency in students rather than as a process for turning them into bilingual users.

From where we stand, at this point turning people into bilingual users is not a *challenge* as it is for the Ministry of Education. The real challenge is to make the government become aware of that English teachers have a crucial role in the design and realization of Bilingual Colombia Program, so that we are claiming that English teachers must be respected and trained instead of being judged by the administrators who most of the times are illiterate in the field of language teaching.

Hence we want to highlight that in order to attain the standards described by the CEF document, the Ministry of education is required to look for real solutions like providing public schools with appropriate infrastructure, doing considerable changes to the curriculum, increasing the English hours per week, and being more concerned in teachers preparation.

As far as we are concerned, there should be a connection between the implementation of BCP and the theory of Standards-Based Assessment, which states that 'Standards-Based Assessment is the process through which the criteria for assessment are derived directly from content and/or performance standards. Standards-based assessment is also the logical next step that follows the development of standards' Early Childhood Education Assessment (2008)-ECEA. In addition, Standards-based assessment

encourages linking assessment to curriculum and incorporates new forms of assessment. So that, in this research we are claiming for the necessity of knowing the differences between Evaluation, Assessment, Testing, and Standards-Based assessment.

Finally, taking into consideration the absence of research related to this topic in our region, this paper could also be considered as a starting point for further research in standards implementation.

Recommendations

The Bilingual Colombia Project is an important step in the constitution of a necessary change in the educational system of Colombia. As the results of this research process showed, the implementation of standards is not a bad idea to take into consideration. Conversely, it is necessary to evaluate the process. Some of the aspects that could be considered are as follows:

First, in order to start looking for real solutions with a view to getting good results with BCP, a good beginning can be to start by clarifying the ideas and purposes of the English immersion program, offered by the Ministry of Education in San Andres islands. Hence, it is relevant to point out that English is not the official language there –the code used by San Andres dwellers is a *Pidgin* not a language and it is called *Patois*. In addition, the three-month immersion program is not suitable even whether the chosen place were the most appropriate. Another issue to be considered is that according to our culture San Andres is not a place to go to study but to go on vacations; therefore, the immersion program becomes a great opportunity for those chosen teachers to take a three-month rest with all the expenses paid by the government. Furthermore, the way teachers are selected is unfair for the reason that the teachers' selection process looks like a raffle where the luckiest foreign language teacher is the

one who gets the opportunity to take the three-month course; rather than the most prepared one.

Another thing to consider is that the reality established in the CEF document would have to be contrasted with the conditions of Colombian educational institutions. Namely, infrastructure, curriculum organization, working hours and competences of language teachers (Cárdenas 2006). Therefore, taking into consideration Cardenas' opinion we want to emphasize that the European countries where the CEF document has been adopted are significantly different from Colombia. For instance, Europe is a continent where at least eight different languages are spoken, and the necessity to talk at least two of them is not an election but compulsory, not only for educational purposes, but also to work, to go on vacations and for business purposes. In addition, Europe is a developed continent, is a congregation of different countries that got together through a process of many years. In this process, the purpose of each country was making a strong and an efficient part of a system that aims to reach mutual benefits. Based on this concept, European countries decided to start a complex and well constructed project. –In which years of previous research and money were invested, in order to constitute teams of work, in which the most qualified professionals like: linguist, sociolinguists, ethnolinguists, members of the council of Europe, and obviously professional people devoted to language teaching

took active part. Finally, after this long process the well-organized book, *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Learning Teaching, and Assessment*. On the contrary, Colombian standards were copied and the process took little years.

Another issue to be considered is to identify which regions of Colombia could be the most suitable to start carrying out this process of standardization as a pilot study, and even, to identify which institutions can be able to satisfactory develop this project -taking into account teachers staff, environment, technical resources, budget, and so forth. So that, the government should consider the possibility to promote this plan not as something imposed, but as a possible strategy to improve English level in our country.

Another key issue to take into account can be to invite expert public and private universities, having either English program that prepares language teachers or at least a Language Center, in order to make these institutions take active part in the development of a viable bilingual program. This process can be reached by letting these institutions share their experiences in language teaching, which can surely contribute in the development of a viable bilingual program.

Finally, it could be relevant whether the Ministry of Education were more engaged in the process of *Evaluation*, which

according to Murphy (1999) implies *finding out about language teaching to see either how well it is being done, how effective it is, or to understand it better*.

Thus, through this study we want to point out that the way in which BCP has being managed is not exactly the most appropriate for the public education in Colombia, due to the improvisation of this project. Furthermore, we are claiming that the government should open the Bilingual Colombian Program to the public discussion, to all parts directly concerned with English teaching, with a view to receiving feasible suggestions that could contribute positively to obtain good results.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

University of Nariño
Linguistics and Languages Department

*Dear teacher: this survey is intended to collect your personal ideas and perceptions about the "Colombia Bilingüe" program. This survey is anonymous and it will **only** be used for research purposes as part of a monograph.*

Survey

1. What do you know about the project Colombia Bilingüe?
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. Do you agree or disagree with the implementation of Colombia Bilingüe? Why?

   Yes   No

   ☐   ☐

3. Do you know what a Standard is?

   Yes   No

   ☐   ☐

4. Have you received any formal training on how to use standards? Was it effective and who provided it?

   Yes   No

   ☐   ☐

5. What do you know about the "Estándares Básicos de Competencia para la Enseñanza de una Lengua Extranjera: Ingles"?
_____
_____
_____
_____

6. ¿Do you agree or disagree with the implementation of standards in foreign language education? Why?
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Do you agree or disagree with the implementation of the Common European Framework (CEF) as a reference for language learning, teaching and assessing in Colombia? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

8. What do you know about this document (CEF)?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

9. According to your knowledge and experience in English teaching, what changes do you think the Ministry of Education should implement in order to obtain suitable results with Colombia Bilingüe?
_____
_____
_____
_____

10.   Considering your knowledge in English teaching, do you feel fully prepared to teach, and assess your students using the standards?
   Yes   No

   ☐   ☐

11.   In order to accomplish the standards, The Ministry of Education has suggested the use of the Communicative Approach. Are you familiarized with this approach?
            Yes   No

   ☐   ☐

12.   Considering the number of hours devoted to foreign language teaching, the teachers' preparation, and the resources high schools have, do you think Colombia Bilingüe will achieve the proposed goals in the time proposed by the government? Why?
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you very much for your valuable cooperation ☺

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