

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE APPLICATION OF ENGLISH STANDARDS  
IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS IN PASTO

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Factors that influence 1

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Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo, describir la manera como los profesores de inglés están actualmente desarrollando sus clases, bajo que condiciones se están llevando a cabo la enseñanza de una lengua extranjera y la incidencia que estos procedimientos ejercen en la correcta aplicación de los estándares en los colegios públicos de la ciudad de Pasto. Adicionalmente este trabajo describe el punto de vista que los profesores encargados del área de Inglés tienen en cuanto a la implementación de los estándares diseñados por el Marco Común Europeo como punto de referencia para los estándares de la lengua extranjera: Inglés en Colombia y del proyecto Colombia bilingüe propuesto por el Ministerio de Educación. La información para dicha investigación fue recolectada gracias a la valiosa cooperación de los profesores de ocho colegios públicos ubicados en las diferentes localidades de la ciudad de Pasto. Los colegios fueron escogidos al azar y los profesores tanto de Básica primaria como de Bachillerato contestaron por escrito una entrevista que constaba de nueve preguntas abiertas en las cuales se trataban temas como metodología, factores administrativos y preparación profesional.

Los resultados indicaron claramente que los profesores implementan en sus clases de Inglés, estrategias diferentes y

procedimientos basados en métodos tradicionales como GTM, Grammar Translation Method (el método de gramática traducida). Además, se pudo deducir que algunos procedimientos comunicativos no se llevan a cabo de una manera adecuada y por lo tanto no hay una correcta aplicación de los estándares; lo que hace que no haya un buen resultado en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera. De igual forma en los resultados se pudo resaltar la utilización de materiales como: grabaciones, lecturas, videos juegos lúdicos y otro tipo de materiales descritos más adelante en el apéndice. La conclusión a la que se llegó con este trabajo de investigación es que las condiciones bajo las cuales se desarrolla la enseñanza del Inglés, puede dificultar la aplicación completa, adecuada y exitosa de los estándares a pesar del esfuerzo y el entrenamiento profesional que los profesores encargados de esta asignatura posean.

*Abstract*

This study had the purpose of describing the way English teachers are currently conducting their classes and under which conditions, and to analyze if these procedures may have an incidence on the application of standards in public high schools in Pasto. Additionally, the paper describes the teachers' views on the implementation of the Common European Framework standards and the Bilingual Colombia Project.

The data was collected thanks to the valuable cooperation of teachers from eight public high schools in the city of Pasto. Public high schools were selected at random and teachers from both basic and high education were surveyed with a nine opened-question inquiry.

The results indicated that English teachers implement in their classes different strategies and procedures from traditional methods like GTM to current approaches like Communicative approaches, moreover they implement materials like recordings, readings and some other materials. However, the conditions under which teaching takes place may hinder the complete application of standards regardless of the effort and training received by teachers.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*Introduction*

Currently, English teachers have become the principal agents in English language learning which takes place in the classroom as the main setting. Teachers attempt to improve their teaching skills by using new materials as well as several techniques and strategies, which facilitate learning. However, this might not be enough to achieve the standards set by the national government and based on the Common European Framework.

The Common European Framework (CEF) proposes that when teaching, teachers must be aware of the proficiency level and needs of students, which is a challenging and complex task in helping students to acquire literacy in two languages at the same time as stated by the Colombia Bilingüe project. Besides, the goals set by the Ministry of Education of Colombia call for the professional development of teachers who are responsible for encouraging social change through the accomplishment of a better education. Supposedly, this improvement will be attained by means of the use of international standards for foreign language teaching.

Colombia Bilingüe, whose central purpose is that students develop communicative competence in formal and informal education by achieving different standards for each level,

should be implemented in Colombia right now. However, given that in Colombia there are different conditions for teaching and learning it is not clear the extent to which the procedures used by teachers comply with the standards proposed by the government or if these procedures hold back their implementation. This paper intends to describe this situation in Pasto.

#### *Problem Description*

As in any subject, standards in English as a foreign language are very important criteria which allow students, teachers, educational institutions, the government and everyone involved in the learning process to know what should be learned and taught and to have a common framework to compare ourselves to other foreign language learners nationally and internationally.

The importance of learning English in the different public high schools in Pasto and across the country is evident: Being competent in another language, in this case English, will facilitate the access to employment and educational opportunities that will improve people's life quality, as the Ministry of Education suggests.

Moreover, teaching English considering standards constitute an essential point of reference for English teachers, principals and parents to have clarity about the

communicative competence which students are expected to develop in different stages of school life. Nevertheless, when English teachers face their students, questions, doubts and hesitation about how to implement standards appear. Teachers may not be sure about the means to use the standards, how to take advantage of the limited hours for English instruction, how to teach to a large number of students and how to alleviate the lack of material and resources. All those problems could make teachers feel unable to discover and fulfill the needs of students while applying the standards as the government suggests.

This disconnection between what teachers do in their classrooms, the expected results the government is aiming for and the teaching conditions may also affect students, because when they take the ICFES test, the results suggest that the English instruction is not as good as it should be. The standards based on the CEF, and supported by the Colombian government, have set a very demanding task that involves not just the active participation of students but also the urgent training of teachers to make the objective of communicative competence achievable. However, some training sessions may be insufficient to make teachers change their procedures inside the language classroom; and even if teachers try to incorporate innovations in their classes, the current



conditions under which the teaching-learning process might constitute an obstacle for obtaining positive results with the programs the government has proposed.

*Problem statement*

How do teachers in public high schools in Pasto provide foreign language instruction and what is their view on the application of English standards in the foreign language classroom?

*Significance of the study*

This research is relevant because it attempts to describe the way English is taught in different public high schools in Pasto taking into account the existing situation in public high schools. Hence, with this research we want to determine if currently, English teachers have knowledge about standards and recent approaches like the communicative one (which is the approach that the CEF suggest to apply in order to achieve the standards), and if they consider standards as paramount criteria in English instruction. Having this information will be valuable because despite the fact that teachers have been included in some training sessions, so far the government seems to ignore what teachers really do in their classrooms regarding materials, procedures and methods. Additionally, it is important to know if those current practices inside public high schools are in agreement with

the principles set in the documents about standards or if they impede an effective implementation of those standards.

In addition, this study concerns an up to date topic, which the Ministry of Education considers relevant for the transformation of education in Colombia. What the government wants is evident, but it is not clear if teachers, who are the direct agents of English teaching in Colombia, are fully aware of the government guidelines. In addition, there is not a study that describes the teachers' views regarding the implementation and the implications of incorporating standards.

The implementation of Standards seems to be an excellent strategy to improve education in Colombia. However, many gaps should be analyzed in this process. The main purpose of this monograph is describing and analyzing what English teachers in public schools in Pasto are doing, what their opinions are about standards, and if teachers have received training on using them. This study might be helpful for teachers in high schools who want to be more informed about standards, for student-teachers at the University of Nariño who will work in high schools during their practicum and for teachers at the University who need to be informed about the new regulations and demands of the government.

*General objective*

Given that this is a descriptive piece of research the main purpose of this work is to describe the professional practice of English teachers in public schools in Pasto and the way these procedures relate to the standards issued in 2006 by the Ministry of Education.

*Specific objectives*

The specific objectives that are intended to be achieved through this paper are:

To contrast the procedures carried out by teachers in their classes with those suggested by the government and based on the Common European Framework.

To describe the teachers' view regarding the implementation of the Colombian standards and the Common European Framework as a point of reference for language learning in our setting.

To identify how familiar teachers are with the Colombian standards and what they think about standards.

To determine if the current teaching and learning conditions in Colombia are adequate for implementing the standards issued by the Ministry of Education by analyzing current literature on the subject.

*Limitations*

Some of the most important limitations for this research project were the motivation of teachers to get involved in the application of standards and procedures for foreign and the fact that in some schools there are not many foreign language teachers; sometimes only one teacher is in charge of teaching English to all grades. Fortunately, teachers finally agreed to help us providing us valuable information about the topic being studied by answering the survey previously designed and which provided information on teaching practices and views

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

*A Bilingual Country*

Teachers in Colombia have the challenging and complex task of helping students to acquire an L2 within the context of bilingual education programs, but under conditions that are less suitable for teachers and students. These programs have evidently worked in private binational schools in Colombia, where the main goal is to make students become competent in speaking, reading and writing in two prestigious languages and to appreciate the traditions and culture of the home country and of the country of the target language (Mejia, 2004).

However, the situation is not the same for the public schools who serve the needs of a good number of people. Mejia (2006) argued that in Colombia the economic factor is the reason, which allows or obstructs the study and the performance in a second language. Public schools do not provide the basis, neither the tools needed to learn a second language at an early age as it can be observed by student-teachers and practicum supervisors who visit these schools regularly. Additionally, the limited number of hours for English language teaching, not having resources, dealing with large classes, a shortage of qualified teachers, and scarce use of the English language in authentic communication make

English instruction with the purpose of becoming bilingual unfeasible in public institutions.

*What is Bilingualism?*

Since the Colombian government wants to achieve bilingual speakers once the standards have been accomplished, it is important to start by defining what bilingualism is. According to Lightbown & Spada (1999, p. 3) Bilingualism can be understood from different points of view, depending on the context. Simultaneous bilingual are children who hear more than one language practically from birth, whereas subtractive bilingualism refers to children who are cut off from their family language when they are submerged in a second language for long periods; for example, in early schooling day care. In such cases, children may begin to lose their family language before they have to develop an age-appropriate mastery of the new language. As it can be seen, Bilingualism is an umbrella term, which has several meanings depending upon the context. In the Colombian context those who begin later to learn a *second or a foreign language* should be referred to as sequential bilinguals whose objective is learn and improve the basic skills for communication. This is the type of bilingualism that we should aim for, but in the standards document issued in 2006, the government fails to

make this description and it is not clear what they want to achieve with the standards.

According to the literature regarding bilingual programs or immersion programs which use content-based instruction extensively, what schools need in order to develop a program in which only English prevails in the environment is to have very well prepared teachers so that they can help students to achieve this goal. Besides, there is the need of coherent policies regarding the linguistic and cultural development to guide the bilingualism processes, it is important to highlight the need for Colombian bilingual teachers with a high level of proficiency who serve as models and provide input. Principals in schools must be aware of their teachers' proficiency and knowledge of bilingual processes, and universities have to promote professional development programs focused on bilingual curricula. These general guidelines common to bilingual programs make possible to carry out bilingual education programs in public schools and in private schools as well.

According to the vice minister of education, Juana Inez Diaz (2007) (quoted by Mejia, 2006), the level of teaching and learning of a second language in most of the public institutions in our country, and in spite of the amount of hours, is deficient. The knowledge of children and

adolescents does not evolve at all in this area. That is why the National Ministry of Education has set the initiative of working with all the education secretaries in order to train teachers in a second language, mainly English. Once training for teachers is implemented, they could improve their abilities and pedagogical skills that will enhance the performance of students in the use of the L2. This would also lead to the application of the standards. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Education (2006) argued that there is a lack of experience in teaching a second language in public schools in our country; that is why they consider that if there is an alliance with institutes and entities that have better domains, education and especially English instruction in Colombia would improve as well. This is unrealistic, though, because a short English course or training course in using the standards is not going to solve all the problems in foreign language teaching in Colombia.

Consequently, the Ministry of Education (2006), presents a variety of policies in order to develop the capability of understanding and assimilating other cultures as well as achieve a better communication in the L1 as in the L2 since the modern citizen is more exposed to situations that involve intercultural meetings. Therefore, the bilingual policies are divided into three main categories: language, communication



and culture, since the linguistic learning is cultural learning as well.

*The Colombia Bilingüe Program*

According to Sánchez & Obando (2008), the initiative of implementing bilingual programs has effectively worked in other countries like Canada or Australia, but this does not mean that these experiences can be replicated in Colombia with the same success. They argue that the success of this type of project depends on several factors, some of which have nothing to do with policies or standardization, but with academic requirements and issues. Therefore, it might be neglected due to project presented by the government seems to focus on the outcomes rather than on the process of expecting foreign language learners to become proficient in a second foreign language. Then, it does not matter how the policies are issued or if the government forces institutions to adapt these policies. If the conditions are not adequate, the results will not be the best. The authors suggest an example of language policies issued from the top:

In Colombia, the General Education Act 115 (1994) states that one of the objective of education should be the acquisition of some skills like speaking, reading and comprehension in at least one foreign language, making it the starting point for the creation of

new methodologies concerning the teaching and learning a foreign language in Colombia. (p. 182).

Sánchez & Obando (2008, p.182) claim that this objective is somewhat "vague" since in order to create curricula, syllabi, schedules, learning tasks and assessment everyone should have a very clear idea of what we need to achieve in foreign language education and considering the way teachers feel about the implementation of standards. One may think that the objectives for foreign language instruction in Colombia are not clearly stated, or at least they have not been effectively communicated to teachers, school administrators and teacher trainers.

The Colombian government then started a series of actions towards the achievement of what they refer to as Bilingualism.

According to the MEN publication "Al Tablero" (2005) quoted by Sánchez & Obando (2008) It is expected that the "Programa Nacional de Bilinguismo" (The National Bilingual Colombia Program) will be fully implemented by the year 2019. This project has focused on adopting not "adapting" standards from Europe to be applied in Colombia, taking into account that the similarities between that context and the Colombian one are basically unreal. Besides the Common European

Framework (CEF) was created under different circumstances and with different purposes.

According to Ayala and Alvarez (2005) quoted by Sánchez and Obando (2008), the Ministry of National Education chose this option - The implementation of the Common European Framework - and not others which might have been more culturally sensitive to Colombian learners. They claim that it is because Colombian Standards for foreign language teaching are barely structured so attention has been given to foreign models. In general, standards have been obtained by importing the ones that were developed in other places under different circumstances and contexts. Although those standards are valid and reliable for foreign academic communities but it is important to clarify that it does not mean that they would fit the particularities of our institutions, language learners and so on".

*What does the Colombia Bilingüe Program look for?*

According to the government, this program intends to answer to the national necessities regarding English instruction; the idea is to make teachers and students from basic and high education, conscious about how to respond to a new bilingual environment and promote the development of communicative competences on an international context (Ministerio de Educacion, 2005).

The project proposed by the MEN (2006) - based on the Common European Framework (CEF)- involves new standards and methodology formation, which allow teachers to focus more on communication than on translation and memorization of grammar structures. This public document establishes the basic levels of quality in the Communicative Competence that Colombian people have to achieve in all the regions in our country. This seems positive. However, given the way English has been taught in our country for the past decades it is not certain that teachers will be willing or able to apply these changes in public institutions across the country. Gonzales (2007) argues that the first challenge for our teachers is to understand the English competence length that students must develop, while standards present the starting point to know what and how to develop these competences; this is according to children's age and grade.

The proposal based on the Common European Framework (CEF) has the objective to reach general competences and communicative language. Students will take into account that English learning is very useful to spread their knowledge, to establish a relationship with the world, to know how to get their ideas across, how to express their identity and how to acquire the linguistic, the sociolinguistic and the pragmatic

competence. In other words, they will be able to communicate, to understand and be understood in the L2 without losing their identity and their nature as Colombian citizens.

Regarding high Education, the bilingual program is intended to promote the improvement of English teaching as an L2. In 2007, a system of solid evaluation was defined through the ECAES evaluation, where the English component measures the level of English competency that the future professionals of the country have according to the European framework. In the same way, it is very important to promote the language and methodology models offered by superior educational institutions for in-service English teachers' formation in elementary and high school through the different programs they present.

Other strategies for the development of competences are those that offer educational credits to public and private institutions for teachers to improve English level in foreign countries.

According to Cely (2007) some ideas that have to do with the appropriation and adaptation of the English standards that involve not only teachers' awareness but also students and society have emerged. Some of them are:

- The teacher must be aware that he is the person who should influence the context where he interacts.
- The teacher as a human being must take possession of his/her knowledge so that children and teenagers can imitate it and spread it as well.
- Teachers' motivation must focus on key and significant moments to strengthen his performance and give sense to the realization of their project of life.
- The teacher must self evaluate his/her level of proficiency in English before evaluating students.
- The standards must be seen as tools that help to improve teachers' work within the educational context.
- A language is the vehicle through the human being shows himself to the world, so it is normal that people consider as frustrating the fact of not being capable of interacting successfully with other cultures.
- There is a lack of attitude and cooperation from part of both teachers and directives in the task of molding student's mind.

- It is everybody's task to become aware of how, for what and why people are educated.
- To unify the criteria about English teaching as a second language in Colombia: that is, the point that we have to reach.
- We must keep studying and deepen more about achievement, achievement indicators, performance level and standards according to English students needs.
- The administrative management, SEM- Secretaria de Educación Municipal- and MEN -Ministerio de Educación Nacional- must adopt quality programs and English language and didactic formation.
- The idea is to shock the educational community, showing students new possibilities of access to a global knowledge through a second language.
- The standards are the starting points which contribute to the organization of the pedagogical and didactic processes that seize in each institution, and in a flexible way they will contribute to the skills development.
- To define or characterize clearly the levels of performance that every institution must apply

according to the requirements in the CEF- Common European Framework.

- To adapt and take possession of laboratories and resource centers that enable learning processes.
- To perceive English learning in our country as an issue that involves the whole community, both native and non-native speakers.

These thoughts and suggestions seem logical, but it is fair to be cautious here because just because the government says that we have to implement or create resource centers and laboratories it does not mean that the institutions can actually do this in real life and in a short time. Teachers might be motivated, but without resources at all, motivation is lost. An additional challenge is the professional development of EFL teachers represents a great challenge for teachers, teacher educators and policy makers in the accomplishment of better standards in education. Literature review on the area reveals the need for new models of professional growth for Colombian teachers. Within the framework of "*Colombia Bilingüe*", the Ministry of Education (2006) proposes a professional development model that aims to reach a significant number of teachers. The professional development of teachers is a constant concern in TESOL



research (Richards, 1990, 1998; Richards and Farrell, 2005; Freeman, 1989) (quoted by Singh 2006). Diaz-Maggioli (2003) defines teachers' learning as a permanent process that initiates when they are learners in classrooms and schools, and continues when they are participants in teacher development programs, when they learn from their experience teaching in their own schools.

This concern is also valid in Colombia because better-qualified teachers have the power to promote social change. The national government is developing several projects to extend quality education coverage to the majority of the population through "*la Revolución Educativa*" (Education Revolution). One of the subprojects of the "Education Revolution" is *Colombia Bilingüe* (Bilingual Colombia). This institution is in charge of the main four components of the project: the national standards for teaching and learning English, the professional development of English teachers, the policies of English testing, and the accreditation of institutions that teach English.

One of the first of still very few reactions towards the adoption of the CEF for defining the language policy and standards was proposed by Ayala and Alvarez (2005) (quoted by Alvarez 2007). The authors argue that the implementation of the CEF may be quite complex for our setting. The authors

find profound differences between Colombia and Europe that are strong enough to question the adoption of the CEF as the support for a national English teaching policy. They believe that the practice of adopting foreign models as standards needs to be revised and they invite the government, administrators, and the academic community to be aware of the complexities of educational standardization. In their conclusions, they urge all actors involved in foreign language teaching learning processes to assume a critical view of the adoption of foreign models as changes in education, which must fulfill the particular needs of the learners.

Thinking about how to fulfill needs of learners, the Ministry of National Education decided that the British Council leads this national policy in order to fulfill learners' needs. The British Council's webpage address in Colombia reports its devotion to strengthening Colombian governability and to attaining social change. Sharing experiences between the United Kingdom and Colombia in areas such as democracy, civil society, civic education, and human rights are some of the key purposes of its presence in the national educational scenario.

The imposed leading role of the British Council, or of any other academic foreign institution that might have been

chosen to guide the policy of Bilingual Colombia, holds back the development of a local community with enough validity to construct a language policy.

*Standards and Standards-based assessment*

The document issued by the Ministry of Education does not define clearly and specifically what a standard is or the conception that the government has of standard; instead, the document explains that in order to achieve the goal of having citizens able to perform in different communicative situations, the government decided to adopt the CEF levels since they provided us with a common language and a common ground to start with (p.6).

O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) quoted by Brown (2004) suggest that standards are benchmarks for accountability, while the ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 students (1997) states that "standards indicate more specifically what students should know and be able to do as a result of instruction" (p.15). Thus, a standard can be understood as a goal, as the place where learners should be after being exposed to a learning experience. Standards are closely linked to assessment since it is through assessment that teachers, administrators or stakeholders will be able to verify if learners achieved a certain set of standards. This is

something that the Colombian government has to keep in mind. Since the Ministry of Education is setting new education standards, defining what students should know and be able to do with a foreign language, it is important to design and implement new assessment systems to help students meet these standards and to measure their progress in doing so (Linn & Herman, 1997). These systems are designed to support improved student achievement, but their effectiveness depends on a number of factors. That is what this paper intends to do, to make readers aware of the fact that the implementation of standards in a society is a very difficult task, not only because it entails deep changes in education, but also because it may be affected by variables that the government has failed to consider and that in the long run will have an incidence on the proficiency developed by learners in the L2.

Additionally, standards must be specific enough to enable everyone, students, parents, educators, policymakers and the community to understand what students need to learn. They must also be precise enough to permit an accurate judgment of whether the standards have been met. Finally, standards must make clear what is expected of students.

Standards could be an important approach in improving education but standards alone cannot produce the desired improvement. The success of standards-based reform requires a

set of systematic changes throughout the education system such as curriculum specifications and materials, guides, professional development and assessment.

*The role of assessment in Standards-Based reform*

Assessment plays a fundamental role in standards-based reform because throughout assessment it can communicate the goals schools, teachers, students are expected to achieve, shape the performance of educators and students and motivate students to learn better, teachers to teach better and schools to be more effective.

Furthermore, assessment allows teachers to compare performance of students to a standard of achievement and not to other students. Standards-based assessment incorporates new forms of assessment, for instance, by writing an essay or solving a problem. In short, standards-based assessment involves activities, which engage students in real world rather than in artificial and fictitious tasks.

Communicative approaches also make use of different types of assessment that move beyond the traditional paper and pencil test, which commonly feature multiple-choice items to a focus on receptive skills and questions with only one right answer. (Brown, 2004 quoted by Sánchez & Obando, 2008).

As Hancock (1994) and Rodriguez (2007) (Quoted by Sánchez & Obando, 2008) suggest, alternative assessment and self-

assessment encourage learners' participation and self-reflection in teamwork. We should reflect if these types of assessment are being used by teachers or have been used by teachers in high schools even before the government issued the Standards in 2006. The answer might be no, since as it is evident from experience and from informal talks carried out with teachers and student-teachers, the focus on high-schools is on preparing students to face the ICFES test, which neglects interaction and listening skills and is focused exclusively on assessing elements of language separately. This makes evident that there is a serious disconnection between the standards that are supposed to be implemented, instruction and assessment.

### *CHAPTER THREE*

#### *Methodological aspects*

In this chapter, the steps that had to do with the methodology used for the research project were explained to know the qualities and features not only of participants and the sample, but also of the setting. Furthermore, the most appropriate techniques used to collect the data and the validation criteria were described.

#### *Design*

The design of this study is connected with the qualitative research; the focus of the method is completely descriptive, which intended to explain the current situation of the application of standards in some public high schools in Pasto.

#### *Participants, setting and sample*

The settings for this research project were the chosen public high schools located in the urban zone of Pasto. The population was composed by English teachers, both males and females whose age ranged from 30 to 50 years old. The sample was composed by twenty teachers who are in charge of foreign

language instruction in eight public high schools were surveyed.

*Data collection and Techniques*

To achieve the main goal of this descriptive research project, the data was collected through written surveys, which were the most appropriate tools to gather important and primary information and to accomplish the main objective of this study. Each survey consisted of nine open-ended questions related to the teaching practices of the surveyed teachers, the standards for English teaching, the CEF and the project "Colombia Bilingüe". (See Appendix A)



*CHAPTER FOUR*

*Data analysis*

In this chapter, the information is categorized taking as a basis the written survey applied and the most common answers teachers provided, their opinions and replies about the Communicative Approach, the most common procedures, methods and the additional materials that they implement, intending to develop what Standards establish.

It is important to highlight that the interview consisted of nine open-ended questions; therefore teachers replied by selecting more than one option or point of view. For instance, when they were asked about the materials they use in their classes, teachers mentioned some resources repeatedly. In order to present a detailed analysis of the information, each of the questions and the answers provided by the teachers are described and a short analysis is included whenever necessary.

The first question was: "What do you know about the project Colombia Bilingüe?"

The answers teachers gave were written literally in order to provide a clear and complete account of their views:

"It's a very important project in order to get to be better in the school between students and teachers"

"It hasn't been developed because there aren't conditions; for example, number of hours, schedules and appliances"

"This project pretends that people learn English especially in schools, including teachers of different subjects and all students in order to handle English in a good way"

"The project Colombia Bilingüe is a very important alternative for improving English learning in our country"

"I know that it pretends that the students in the 2019 will be speaking the foreign language but it is a great work to obtain excellent results"

"It is an important project of the President. He wants that all the Colombian people at 2019 speak English. The purpose is good but there aren't the conditions"

"The project is an excellent idea but in the conditions like Colombia, it very difficult to reach those objectives"

"This is a program which is present in Colombia nowadays. It must make students to learn English with all the abilities as well as Spanish"

"It is a project from MEN and it seeks to promote and improve the way how English is taught in Colombia by teachers. The idea is that teachers should teach what the

students need to learn and also it must be useful for their lives"

"It was created by MEN and the principal is that all students who study English must know all about a foreign language. In fact, it is said that in 2015, most of the population in Colombia must speak English because they need to get into a world which is changing because of technology and the new requirements"

"It's an alternative that the government gives for teaching of foreign language in the Plan Decenal de Educación"

"It is an impossible project to implement in Colombia because we, teachers are not given all the instruments necessary for teaching English accurately"

"The purpose of the Project Colombia Bilingüe is to achieve a high English level of proficiency among students and teachers. This goal is impossible to get because public institutions do not count on enough time to develop several and necessary activities for students"

"The project proposed by the government is a very important criterion to take into account when teaching"

"It is an impossible project (Based on Bogotá Bilingüe en 10 años). The ideal, unreal objective is to form bilingual students in ten years; the hidden objective is to spend money in unnecessary things. Bogotá Bilingüe en 10 años failed"

"This project is designed by the MEN in order to become Colombia in a competitive country and consequently it improves the quality of citizens' life. In this project English is considered as an instrument to immerse people in the cultural, economical and global communication"

"What I know about the project Colombia Bilingüe is that it is a new proposal by the government to improve English teaching in the country, but it would be a very good idea to receive more information and training about what it really looks for, before putting it into practice"

"I don't know much about this project but I think it's an important decision that will have good results"

"As far as I'm concerned, this project is an obligatory document that we have to put in practice in order to get English speakers in 2019. This project it is impossible because not everybody is motivated by English"

"This project would be useful and possible only if the government gives more instruments and materials for schools; like books, CDs and more training for teachers"

As it can be seen, not all teachers know with absolute certainty what the project Colombia Bilingüe is; for them it is not more than a project created by the Ministry of Education - in fact, this program was not created neither by the government nor the Ministry of Education. It was adopted

by the MEN- who intends to make Colombian people improve English learning by the year 2019. Besides, teachers expressed that even though the purpose of the project is to achieve a high level of English, the project is not feasible because public institutions do not count on the minimum necessary requirements for the project to be adequately developed. Specifically, there are not appropriate conditions, such as materials and enough time for English instruction, they lack documents that inform them about The Common European Framework and finally, the high schools in Pasto lack teams of teachers (in some cases one or two teachers have to teach English to the entire school) that can tackle the task of designing and applying syllabi based on the standards set by the government. Here it is evident that there are some factors (e.g., time, resources, and training) that may impede the adequate development of the projects proposed by the government and that are out of the control of teachers. Then, these factors should be analyzed by the government in order to decrease the impact that these might have on instruction and on the attainment of the standards.

The second question addressed to teachers was "How many hours a week do you teach English?"

Four teachers have from twenty-one to twenty-five hours a week. Seven teachers have from three to six hours and nine teachers have one hour a week.

Normally in Colombia, students do not have more than three hours devoted to English learning during elementary and high school as it was expressed by the surveyed teachers. Here, it is important to note that as Lightbown and Spada (1999 P. 165) quoted by Sánchez and Obando(2008), suggest, "one or two hours a week will not produce very advanced second language speakers, it often leads to frustration as learners feel that they have been studying for years without making much progress" In order to acquire an L2, it is necessary to have enough exposure to it and in Colombia, or specifically in Pasto, exposure to the foreign language seems to be very limited to lead to efficient learning. Of course, it is also very limited to attempt to implement demanding standards.

The Common European Framework established that the number of hours needed to develop communicative competence in the L2 is from four to nine hours a week adding up to 720 total hours so that the exposure to the language is continuous. Even if the number of hours suggested by the CEF is achieved by adding up all the hours assigned to English through the years, as it was suggested before, the results will not be the best because the weekly schedule is deficient.

The third question asked to teachers was "Do you use any additional materials (other than the textbook) what do you use?"

In this question, teachers had the opportunity to select more than one material. The most common materials teachers implement in their classes are videos, readings, recordings, flashcards, games and the least common material implemented in classes is technology. (See table 2)

Contrasting the materials implemented by teachers in public high schools in Pasto with the materials suggested by the Common European Framework, we highlighted that in Colombia teachers only tend to use textbooks (if students buy the books or if the institutions allow teachers to require books for their classes) and the Common European Framework suggests English teachers explore all the possibilities offered by today's modern world, using media, music, internet and many other aids which are so relevant to the younger population. Resources are endless and teachers need to start profiting from them. However, again the current conditions of some schools where there are not available computers, tape recorders, DVDs or television sets make it very difficult to follow the guidelines present in the CEF. This does not mean of course, that schools have to give teachers all these materials. Nowadays there are ways to download materials like

worksheets, flashcards or songs from web sites. Teachers need to be more creative and to be willing to invest some time and effort in obtaining additional resources and authentic material. Even if the standards are hard to follow completely, the use of these resources will help teachers carry out more meaningful and communicative classes.

The fourth question concerned "What procedures or method(s) do you normally implement in your class?"

For this question, teachers were free to select more than one answer. The recurrent answers were GTM, Audiolingual Method, Communicative Approach and Direct Method. (See table 1)

The Common European Framework suggests methods and procedures that aim towards the enhancement or development of communicative competence; specifically, the CEF suggests the adoption of communicative approaches, but in Colombia teachers keep on working with traditional, grammar-based methods which are more focused on the development of isolated skills than on allowing learners to experience interaction, negotiation of meaning or language awareness. The answers provided evidence that the teaching practices here do not agree with the theoretical background that supports the CEF, and consequently, the Colombian standards for foreign language learning.



It can be said that approaches such as Content-Based Instruction, Communicative Language Teaching or Competency-based language teaching are needed in Colombian classrooms if the goal is to achieve Bilingualism or just to enhance foreign language teaching in all the levels.

The fifth question for English teachers was "How many students do you normally work with?"

The number of students in Colombia, more specifically in Pasto is higher than thirty although sometimes teachers have to deal with up to sixty students. According to the Common European Framework the ideal number of students to work with is ten to twelve students; however large classes in public high schools are "normal" and the government does not seem to think that class size is a factor that contributes to developing or hindering learning, particularly EFL learning, which is not true. It is impossible to prepare students for facing a standardized test or a communicative situation in real life when each student has less than one minute to talk in a 50-minute class.

According to Brown (2001, p.196) teaching English to large classes is like teaching 600 people to swim in one swimming pool without displacing all the water in the pool. Ideally, language classes should have no more than a dozen students, but the lack of resources and teachers forces schools to do

the opposite. Of course, the possible consequences of having too many students in Colombian classrooms might be lack of opportunity to participate in classes, to interact with students and with the teacher and get individual attention and feedback.

The sixth question asked teachers "What do you know about the "Estandares Basicos de Competencia para la enseñanza de Lengua Extranjera: Ingles?"

The answers teachers provided are:

"I know about these standards because in the school we have had many courses"

"They show us how English should be taught"

"They are criteria about quality and also about knowledge; they are a guide for teachers to teach what students have to learn in the different levels"

"They are a whole of knowledge, attitudes, aptitudes and abilities. They provide a flexible performance into new contexts"

"They are foreign parameters based on the Common European Framework for the learning, teaching and evaluation of languages; it is designed by the Council of Europe. These "standards" were adopted by MEN without consulting teachers or universities"

"Standards could have high expectations but public Institutions do not consider important elements which play a relevant role into classroom such as: time, materials and teachers' proficiency"

"The teachers know the material of Ministerio de Educación"

"In our Institution we have received training about standards but it has been difficult to apply them"

"I read about Estandares básicos but I need further information"

"We apply them in our topics, in each class and we have to plan them in advanced because at the end of the period we analyze if we are working on them or not"

"They develop four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing focused on the environment of each region"

"The standards are related to listening, reading, writing and speaking. They are also related with the daily life situations"

"I need further information about them"

"I know that they are the steps to teach English but I need extra information and training"

"As in the majority of subjects, the standards are the parameters to know what to teach at the different levels"

"They show teachers what to teach taking into account the four skills listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing"

"I only know that they a series of rules and steps for teaching English adequately in the different stages"

"They are a point of reference for English teaching; we can take them into account and adjust them according to our students' level and needs"

"They are the basis when teaching, where we can find what is the most appropriate in each level"

"The term standard means the same for everybody and everywhere; they are parameters to teach English according to the grade and students' level"

Taking into account the answers teachers provided in the survey, it can be highlighted that teachers do not have enough knowledge about standards, they are aware of this situation, and they ask for further information and training. Obviously, in order to be able to fully implement standards it is necessary to understand their principles completely. Providing teachers with information, or even better, involving teachers in the creation of standards or at least in its evaluation before its publication (as it happened in The United States) would have been a good way to make teachers feel respected and included in a very important process that affects them directly because they are the ones who have to teach their classes considering the achievement of the standards.

The only thing teachers know is that standards are a sort of parameters to take into account when teaching, but it seems that teachers do not have any clear ideas about how to put them in practice and they are not looking for additional information either. It is worth mentioning that abundant information about national and international standards is available online for free, and that many articles like those included in this review of literature are available through different journals. Then, it is fair to say that teachers have to be more active in looking for information that allows them to understand the concept, the importance and the application of standards-based instruction in an EFL setting like Pasto.

The seventh question was "Have you ever been trained on the Standards use? Do you think it was effective? Why?"

Three teachers answer that they have not been trained on the use of Standards but they consider very important to receive more information about this kind of criteria. Three teachers argue that they have received training and it has been useful; eleven teachers argue that in spite of having received training they need further information because they do not have idea how to put them in practice in our context, one teacher argues that he has received training and it has allowed him to frame the content to his context under the

real conditions public schools have. Two teachers do not reply the question so it seems that they have not received training. It would be important to research what is the opinion teachers have regarding the training provided by the Government because when schools do not achieve the standards the Minister of Education might argue that teachers received enough information and that if the standards are not being reached is because of teachers, not because of the quality of the training sessions or the content of these sessions.

The eighth question for English teachers was "What do you know about the communicative approach?"

Seven teachers argue that the communicative competence is synonym of interaction and expression, they are aware of the fact that that practice makes perfect, so everything we learn must be put into practice; learning not only means memorizing grammar structures but producing output. One teacher is really concerned about what the communicative approach constitutes is the linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences. Two teachers consider the Communicative Approach as the "ideal" purpose when teaching and learning a foreign language, it seems that if they refer to it as an ideal or real purpose of teaching, they do not implement this approach into their English classes. In fact, the answers provided when asking about materials and strategies suggest that the

teaching practices are more traditional than communicative. Here is another potential problem for the implementation of standards: while the theoretical background of the CEF suggests that teachers use communicative approaches as the way to achieve communicative competence and reach the standards, teachers are still using procedures that might not lead to communication, interaction or negotiation of meaning. Thus, it is not very likely that the set goals are going to be fully achieved.

The ninth and final question was "Do you agree with the implementation of the Common European Framework (CEF) as a point of reference for language learning and teaching in Colombia? Why?"

Twelve teachers do not agree with the implementation because standards do not take into account our context they argue that if we travel around the country and go to other Latin-American country we are going to meet Spanish speakers furthermore, one teacher says that they -English teachers - could have designed their own parameters based on their real context-, five teachers claim that they would agree if the MEN gives more training and supply institutions with enough material. Finally, two teachers do not give an answer; therefore, we infer two possible answers; the first is

teachers do not agree with the implementation and the second teachers do not know about the Common European Framework.

Table 1 shows the diverse procedures and methods, commonly used when teaching English.

*Table 1*

<b>Methods and Procedures</b>	<b>Number of Teachers who use a certain method</b>	<b>*Percentage (%)</b>
GTM	5	25%
Direct Method	3	15%
Audio Lingual M.	7	35%
TPR	3	15%
Communicative A.	8	40%
CBI	1	5%
TBL	1	5%

\* Teachers suggested that they use more than one method. That is why the percentages do not add up to 100%

As it can be seen, in the first table, 40% of teachers surveyed tend to use the Communicative Approach using simple and short conversations according to the information gathered, nevertheless they are not focused on what Communicative Approach calls for, the different competencies comprised on this approach are Linguistic Competence, Sociolinguistic competence and Pragmatic competence, thus English teachers in the different public high schools in



Pasto, apply it to an extent, focusing on only a part of it, oral production.

On the other hand, 35% of English teachers use the Audiolingual method as a reference for English teaching and learning. According to the information collected, teachers make use of this method by using a tape recorder all the time, expecting students to command the language based on what they hear. Furthermore, 25% of teachers still use the most traditional method as GTM; considering the use of it as the main point of reference when English teaching and learning occur. Additionally, it can be observed that communicative approaches such as content-based instruction (CBI) or Task-based learning (TBL) were very low in frequency, which indicates that teachers are not familiar with these recent methodological trends.

If the goal of the project Colombia Bilingüe is to achieve Bilingualism and enhance foreign language teaching in this country the best methods according to the CEF are Content-Based Instruction (CLT), Communicative language teaching or competency-based language teaching; methods and approaches that enable students to learn based on the real ways in which the L2 will be used outside the classroom. It is interesting to note that teachers seem to have a partial view of what a method is, since they state that they adhere to one method

because they use only one element that belongs to it. For instance, saying that the audio lingual method is used because teachers make use of a tape recorder. This makes evident that teachers need additional training on methodology which is more updated and which agrees with the ideas and goals behind the CEF.

Finally, table 1 depicts the less common methods used in class such as Direct Method and TPR; representing 15% each, this means that there is a low exposure of students to the L2. On the other hand, methods like Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Task-based Instruction (TBI) are being taken into consideration as the less promoted when teaching English, represented by 5% each.

Taking into account the additional materials teachers surveyed used in their classes in order to complement the methods and procedures in English teaching; we can see in table 2 that the most common materials used are recordings, represented by 65% of teachers who use it through songs, short conversations, sound discrimination like minimal pairs and tape recorded texts; this percentage also shows that English teachers are really concerned with the development of students' listening skill, which is a very good option for the foreign language acquisition. Besides, the implementation of readings represented by 40% of English teachers enhances

students' pronunciation as well as fluency; however this percentage, for us, it is low because it demonstrates lack of knowledge from the part of teachers concerning vocabulary and pronunciation. On the other hand, flashcards or pictures, which are represented by 35%, have been used in the same magnitude, maintaining the importance of using this kind of material in English classes.

Materials such as videos and puzzle games -crossword puzzles, soup of letters- corresponding to 25% and 15% correspondingly, are not used in the way they should be, taking into account the answers of teachers surveyed, these material are used in order to change the pace of the class, that is to say, not with an academic purpose but with the objective of amusing students and to avoid students' lack of attention. Finally, with 5% computers use is implemented in classroom. Contrasting the material teachers implement in their classes to materials issued by the Common European Framework in order to reach bilingualism, as it was said before, it is necessary to implement more extensively certain materials especially those related to technology in order to keep their classes updated and appealing for students who are computer savvy. If teachers use adequate materials it means that there is hope for the Colombia Bilingüe program but it is urgent that teachers are conscious about how to take

advantage of certain materials and how to implement some other material besides textbooks into their classes.

As regards to the use of computers in English classes, only 8% of teachers surveyed, have the opportunity to apply technology within the classroom provided that teachers can manage technology with an academic purpose giving to students the accurate feedback so that they can better understand the language.

**Table 2**

<b>Materials implemented in class</b>	<b>Number of Teachers</b>	<b>*Percentage (%)</b>
Computers	1	5%
Recordings	13	65%
Readings	8	40%
Flashcards	7	35%
Videos	5	25%
Games	3	15%

\* Teachers suggested that they use more than one material in their answers. That is why the percentages do not add up to 100%

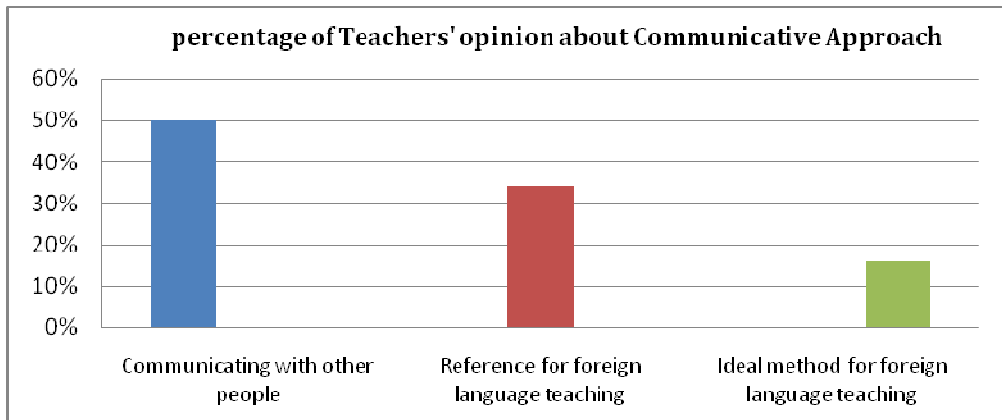
Table 3 shows that 50% of teachers surveyed consider communicative competence as communicating with people in the sense of applying short and simple conversations, emphasizing in oral production and not taking into account the different components Communicative competence involves according to

Canale and Swain (1980) quoted by Richards and Rodgers (2001).

Teachers who consider Communicative Approach as a reference for foreign language teaching is represented by 35%, although this percentage represents a small number of English teachers who use it, it is good enough that they realize how important is to implement this approach in the English teaching and learning process. However, it is important to mention that teachers surveyed are aware of needing more support and information in order to apply the communicative principles more accurately, so that the achievement of standards implications can be successful. On the other hand, as it can be seen in table 3, 15% of English teachers who participated in the survey consider the communicative approach as an ideal method for foreign language teaching, which means that they know what it is about but they do not take it into account within their classes arguing that it is impossible to develop communicative competence specially the pragmatic one, due to the English proficiency that learners display, the large number of students in each class, and the limited time for English instruction which does not allow students to practice with each other and with the teacher. These reasons explain

why they focus on traditional methodology such as GTM rather than on the communicative approach.

**Table 3**



Another specific objective stated in this descriptive study, was to determine how important teachers consider the implementation of the Common European Framework as a point of reference for language learning in our setting, 75% of teachers surveyed expressed that they do not agree with the decision the MEN made because for making this decision it would have been advisable to make an extensive research or at least to ask the opinion of English teachers and administrators. This is a very harsh statement and it shows makes evident the dissatisfaction teachers feel towards some government decisions. Teachers argue that they could have designed their own standards based on the real context and conditions they work in. Another strong reason the surveyed

teachers gave for rejecting the project is the real context where we live, the conditions under which English teachers work, that is to say large numbers of students, lack of appropriate material, and short periods of time for English Instruction. It is evident that the standards are not seen as important by teachers because they feel that they were not taken into account for making decisions and because teachers suggest that no matter how the standards are presented by the government, they cannot be applied considering current conditions in Colombia. 17% of the teachers argued that they would agree with the implementation of standards if the MEN gives enough training and material to institutions. 8% of teachers did not give an answer. It can be suggested that the standards are not seen as important by teachers because of the way they were given to them (or maybe imposed) and because there seems to be deficient information about how to bring those standards into the classroom.

Another specific objective stated at the beginning of this study had to do with the current knowledge teachers have regarding the Colombian Standards. The answers provided by teachers are described next: Three teachers answered that they have not been trained on the use of standards but they consider very important to receive more information about this kind of criteria. Three teachers argue that they have

received training and it has been useful; eleven teachers argue that in spite of having received training they need further information because they do not have any idea about how to put them in practice in our context, one teacher argues that he has received training and it has allowed him to frame the content to his context under the real conditions public schools have. Two teachers do not reply the question so it seems that they have not received training.

Maybe teachers are not informed or they do not look for information and prefer complaining about the scarce of training and information about standards. Teachers are not conscious that they are who have to look for further information about the use of standards, the earliest methods and materials for English instruction. Information about Standards implementation is available online and the government has organized some workshops to explain the standards document. Furthermore, Universities bring workshops and seminars about how to implement and change from grammar to communicative approaches, but most of the times to all those kinds of conferences teachers and directives do not attend.

Finally, the fourth specific objective of this descriptive work is to determine if condition in Colombia are adequate for implementing the Standards issued by The Ministry of



Education. As we state in the conclusions the conditions are not so favorable for implementing such a proposal of standards which demands exposure to target language, use of interactive materials and technology and an environment where students can interact among them. It is impossible to create and implement a new project if institutions do not count on the "requisites" and even though when the Ministry of Education does not think of those institutions located in rural zones, difficult access areas and socio economic repressed zones.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Conclusions*

According to Cárdenas (2006), the context for learning and teaching that the CEF established would have to be contrasted with the conditions of Colombian educational institutions, to be exact, elements such as infrastructure, curriculum organization, working hours and competences of language teachers would have to be analyzed in order to determine the influence of these factors in the implementation of standards. We want to highlight some conclusions and recommendations, which have to do with the factors mentioned, the application of standards described by the CEF and the adoption and implementation of this program in Colombia.

According to Cely (2007), it is important not only to keep the provision of didactic material, but also to pay more attention to the technical and educational requirements of the human resources needed for the implementation of standards. We share her opinion and we think that it is extremely important that the Ministry of Education is aware that implementing a new strategy for English teaching means

also to adjust to different changes in the curriculum; increasing the English hours per week, and being more concerned with training teachers if the purpose is to go for a bilingual country. Only when all the minimal conditions for the adequate implementation of standards are met teachers will be able to start modifying their teaching practices.

Cardenas (2006) states that the design of '*the Bilingual Colombia Program (BCP)*' is disregarding several learning conditions each region in Colombia has; here in Colombia there could be some areas where English is not probably a main concern for the educational system e.g. rural areas, or regions suffering socio-political conflicts. In terms of location, Colombia is a country that has not the same conditions like Europe. Colombia is far away of countries where English Language is spoken; Education is being little by little private and lower due to the poverty. On the other hand, Europe is a continent where all the countries are very close to each other, and people are freer to travel without any kind of restrictions, the government is more concerned about very good and free education for everybody. As a result, there would not be any changes between the adoption of the new standards for teaching and the old ones that teachers have been working on, because the most important

point of the CEF is the development of Communicative competence and in our setting neither teachers nor students will have the chance to practice the target language in a real context with native speakers. Consequently, the idea of standardizing education should be implemented only if the MEN does a careful analysis of the real context in Colombia. Thus the MEN would realize that a lot of changes and adjustments are needed for the implementation of the new program and that these adjustments need to be the result of discussions and consensus reached by the people involved directly in the teaching-learning process, that is, teachers, experts and administrators, not just the people who work for the government.

As regards to the knowledge about the Colombia Bilingüe project and the Estandares Basicos de Competencia para la enseñanza de Lengua Extranjera: Inglés, we can conclude that teachers who answered the survey ask for and have the desire of obtaining more precise information and training.

As it was stated by the Ministry of Education (2006, p. 3) quoted by Sánchez and Obando (2008) "... we can only achieve the set goals if we have convinced teachers who are able to help students communicate in this language". If the most essentials tools are not at hand, no commitment on the part of teachers will be enough for developing successful foreign

language programs; the goal of bilingualism looks like more a "utopia" than a feasible plan.

In public schools, it is still thought that translation and memorization are important, but the issue goes beyond the words and grammar, the answer is teacher training and in this process, there is a big responsibility on the part of universities, since they are the ones who have to change the attitude of teachers and students; they have to profit from the tools they have, such as the internet to make links with other schools in different countries - communities of practice or teaching networks-. When the new teachers go to schools and show that they have enough knowledge and training to face standards or any other challenges, some changes may take place.

Taking into account the information gathered from teachers surveyed, we can conclude that Colombian English teachers are not provided with the precise information and the training they should have in order to reach what standards calls for, the little information they have it is not enough, and teachers do not worry about looking for information on the internet or from universities. In addition, training teachers plays an important role in their performance as teachers because if they do not have a good command of the target language, a good strategy for teaching and do not take into

consideration the different material resources, teachers will not be able to implement standards adequately in their classes - what is happening nowadays in public high schools in Pasto-. A continuous process of training, or rather education is needed for experienced teachers who may not be aware that the procedures and teaching practices they are applying are not necessarily effective for new teaching scenarios.

Besides, considering the information collected from English teachers, it seems that it is difficult for them to implement something they do not really deal with at all.

Despite of having the notion of how standards should be carried out they will not apply them because they prefer the procedures and methods they were taught with to the earliest and innovating procedures and approaches, this happens for a reason: The lectures promoted by the government have been carried out in our city and teachers attended those lectures, but the information provided seems to be disconnected from what teachers need to do in real life leaving them confused and without a clear map to follow.

This does not mean that teachers complain because they do not want to change. In fact, they want to do it, but they suggest ways to improve some conditions that facilitate other changes. One idea in order to carry out and make possible the

implementation of standards is to increase the number of hours in public Institutions from 6 to 8 hours weekly, Secondly, they want the Ministry of Education to provide schools with appropriate materials so that teachers can profit from them and learners become more interested in studying a foreign language. Teachers agree that the ideal thing is to expose learners to the L2 from an early age but with a permanent exposure so that learners go through the different levels of learning. In fact, the implementation of English instruction from kinder garden is lacking to obtain good results with the new standards.

Something else to say as a conclusion is that English teachers do not consider the standards as an important issue because the design and implementation of the CEF adopted by the MEN only included private institutions like the British Council private high schools and academies.

Teachers expressed that in order to create a program like the Colombia Bilingüe program; everybody should be taken into account such as high school teachers, universities, teacher trainers, experts in linguistics, TESOL and assessment.

Another conclusion is that standards are necessary because they are a guide for teachers, administrators and students.

They set clear goals and they show where learners should be at in every stage of the learning process, but those

standards need to be the result of research, teamwork, extensive reading of academic texts that enrich the discussions and agreements between the government and the academic community. Only then standards will be perceived by teachers as valuable and useful.

Teachers are aware of the need of standards and they are willing to try to implement them because having standards would make their classes more efficient and it would be a positive change for teachers too. They think that standards are relevant and meaningful. However, they do not believe the standards created by the Colombian government are valuable because their opinions were never heard and the government has imposed standards in a very top-down way. Just telling teachers what they should do without giving them the necessary tools or accurate information to bring the theory into the real life.

According to Irby Beverly J. , Lara-Alecio R. and Morales-Aldana L., (2007), Standards are defined as a point of reference; criteria and statements of what students should know and be able to do -in this case with the language-.

Standards are the result of staff development that not only improves the learning of all students but also deepens educators' content knowledge and provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting



rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.

Standards deal with important aspects, for instance; content standards cover what students are to learn in various subject areas, such as mathematics and science. They specify what levels of learning are expected. They perform and bring the conditions and resources necessary to give all students an equal chance to learn.

Standards are paramount criteria because they allow students, teachers, directives and academic staff judge the quality of the educational programs that institutions bring, the quality of teaching- the progress of learning and teaching that promotes excellence- the system that supports teaching and learning what students need to learn.

As it can be seen, standards concern a whole educative community -teachers, students, directives and other issues like methodology- ;that is why, we include in the research project, conclusions and suggestions to improve not just the process of teaching and learning English, but even the evaluation and planning of public institutions in our region.

#### *Suggestions and Recommendations*

After having analyzed teachers answers and conclusions concerning the application of standards in English learning and teaching, we suggest that if students in some schools and

high schools have just one hour of English instruction per week, teachers become aware of this situation and take advantage of this reduced time by giving significant tasks to students throughout methodologies that allow students to learn and put into practice what they learn. For example group work, role-plays, retelling and so on.

We suggest that teachers become aware of the fact that they are the light inside the classroom and the person with whom students can practice an L2, therefore teachers should be willing to encourage students and create spaces in the classroom to keep short conversations in English with them. This simple action can enhance the conditions for the standards to be implemented or at least to bring in the classrooms elements like focusing on speaking, focusing on functions, not on grammar, encouraging interaction, giving students an environment to use the L2 communicatively, and so on.

Another suggestion for English students is that they create a bilingual environment in their schools and high schools; for instance, short communities or meetings where they can practice English with their friends and partners. Teachers play an important role in the learning process but learners need to be willing to take risks and to use the language in other instances.

If learning a foreign language occurs at later stages of life, it is important to suggest institutions of formal and not formal education to adjust standards according to the age and the cognitive level of students. For instance, some standards for beginner levels focus on activities that children do at school, but these activities might not be suitable for adults. Then teachers need to focus on the purpose of language. Beginners must focus on speech and demonstrative functions. Intermediate level looks for strengthening the management of expositive and narrative functions and finally, advanced or high level calls for a holistic management of the language.

Hence, English teachers suggest as well in their surveys, that the government should implement immersion programs for English teachers in order to provide them with real opportunities to speak English and have the chance to improve their English.

Another suggestion to take into account in order to alleviate the problem of classroom management with large classes like those found in Pasto, according to Brown, 2004 (p.197); is try to make each student feel important not only learning names and using them, but name tags or desk "plate" serve as reminders in the early days of the course, assigning students as much interactive work as possible; including

plenty of "get acquainted" activities at the beginning so that they feel a part of a community and not just lost in the crowd.

Another assumption is to do more than the usual number of listening comprehension activities, using tapes, videos and yourself, the main source of input in the class. Also, make sure students know what kind of response is expected from them and remind them constantly the purpose for the activity or the standard that you intend to achieve through that task. Through active listening comprehension, students can learn a good deal of language that transfers to reading, speaking and writing. Use feedback and evaluation in written work whenever appropriate. Set up small "learning centers" in your class where students can do individualized work as well as organizing informal conversation groups and study groups.

Sánchez & Obando (2008) suggest that if the policy makers in Colombia truly want to be successful in their current attempt, they should pay attention not only to the implementation of standards but also to the general learning conditions that are needed for the effective learning of a new language. They claim that the changes must be introduced in an academic way; otherwise, it is not possible to make language teaching conditions appropriate. Furthermore, for these authors it is necessary to have enough exposure to the

L2 by increasing the number of instruction hours devoting at least four hours a week to the development of the Communicative Competence in the L2. If this is not done, the government goals will not be achieved. As Lightbown and Spada (1999) quoted by Sánchez and Obando (2008) argue: one or two hours a week, even four seven or eight years will not produce good results, making students to feel that they have been studying "for years" without much progress. This is evidently what happens in our high schools and may continue happening if schedules are not revised.

One more suggestion for the institutions in order to create an environment that is more conducive to the implementation of standards is that they should modify their curricula taking into account every single teacher opinions about English teaching and most of all, get to an agreement to what could be the most feasible way in order to improve English learning in high schools not only in Pasto but along the country. Of course, teachers' opinions are very important, but only foreign language teachers should be considered, not geography or mathematics teachers acting as English teachers.

Appendix A

University of Nariño

This survey is intended to collect data about the procedures and methodology you use in order to teach English as a foreign language taking into account the Common European Framework, this is an anonymous survey and it will only be used for research purposes.

Survey

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

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2. How many hours a week do you teach English?

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3. Do you use any additional materials (other than the textbook) what do you use?

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4. What procedures or method(s) do you normally implement in your class?

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5. How many students do you normally work with?

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6. What do you know about the "Estandares Basicos de Competencia para la enseñanza de Lengua Extranjera: Ingles"?

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7. Have you ever been trained on the Standards use? Do you think it was effective? Why?

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8. What do you know about the communicative approach?

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9. Do you agree with the implementation of the Common European Framework (CEF) as a point of reference for language learning and teaching in Colombia? Why?

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Thank you for your valuable cooperation

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