

**FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE CEFR  
STANDARDS IN A HIGH SCHOOL LOCATED AT TÚQUERRES - NARIÑO -  
COLOMBIA**

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Submitted to the Faculty of Human Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of B.A.  
in the English and French program.

University of Nariño

September, 2016

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Nota de aceptación:

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San Juan de Pasto, Septiembre de 2016

### **Acknowledgements**

A Dios por permitirme llegar hasta este punto en mi vida, a toda mi familia base fundamental de mi crecimiento personal y profesional, en especial a mis padres, prueba fehaciente de que buenos arboles producen bueno frutos. A mi abuela que guía mi camino desde el cielo, a mi asesor y jurados por su apoyo incondicional.

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### **Abstract**

The CEFR is a document created by the council of Europe that includes the standards students need to attain to use a foreign language effectively. The CEFR has been adopted by many countries including Colombia. However when it was adopted in our country, the conditions and context could not be taken into account for the correct development of these standards. Taking into account that the main purpose of the Colombian government in the field of languages is to become our country bilingual in a few years, and considering that Colombian administrators adopted the CEFR standards to achieve this goal, the main purpose of this research is to determine what is the understanding that foreign language teachers have about CEFR standards as guidelines for the learning of foreign languages at the Institucion Educativa San Francisco de Asis in Túquerres, Nariño, Colombia. Teacher's understanding of this CEFR will be carried out through observations and interviews. This information might be valuable for researchers as well as for teachers and institutions to improve the way in which English as a foreign language is learned and taught.

Key words: *CEFR, standards, Colombia, bilingual*

### Resumen

El Marco Común Europeo de Referencia (MCER) es un documento creado por el Consejo de Europa, que incluye las normas que los estudiantes necesitan alcanzar para utilizar un idioma extranjero de manera efectiva. El MCER ha sido adoptado por muchos países, entre ellos Colombia. Sin embargo, cuando se adoptó en nuestro país, las condiciones y el contexto pudieron no tenerse en cuenta para el correcto desarrollo de estos estándares. Teniendo en cuenta que el objetivo principal del gobierno Colombiano en el ámbito de las lenguas es convertir a nuestro país en bilingüe en unos pocos años, y considerando que los administradores colombianos adoptaron las normas del MCER para lograr este propósito, el objetivo principal de esta investigación es determinar ¿cuál es el entendimiento de que los profesores de lengua extranjera tienen sobre las normas del MCER como directrices para el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras en la Institución Educativa San Francisco de Asís en Túquerres, Nariño, Colombia. El entendimiento de los profesores sobre el MCER se llevará a cabo a través de observaciones y entrevistas. Esta información podría ser valiosa para los investigadores como para los maestros y las instituciones para mejorar la forma en la que el inglés como lengua extranjera se aprende y se enseña.

Palabras clave: *MCER, estándares, Colombia, bilingüe*

## **Introduction**

### **Problem Statement**

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was developed by the Council of Europe

“to provide unity in educational and cultural topics among its Member States regarding the learning of a foreign language, to promote transparency and coherence in the learning and teaching of modern languages in Europe. The CEFR provides a general framework which indicates what standards need to be attained in the part of language learners to be able to use a foreign language effectively in practice. In this way, the framework creates a common basis for language learning curricula or guidelines, qualifications, textbooks, examinations, and syllabuses across European states”. (Council of Europe, 2001)

However, this document has been adapted and adopted by other countries beyond Europe because its components might be considered appropriate for other contexts' needs to use the English language as a means of global communication.

Coste (2007) tried to call for the contextualized use of the CEFR in a forum organized by the Language Policy Division of the council of Europe in Strasbourg. He offered observations including the fact that the CEFR should not be treated as sacred but as an instrument of reference, it should be used with other instruments taking into account contextual dimensions that the framework does not cover. “The framework becomes useful and meaningful only when it is accepted as a point of reference and not a standard” (p.7). The Council of Europe agrees

with Coste in the way that the CEFR is a meaningful tool. Nevertheless, it does not imply that it must be taken as a single uniform system but as an open and flexible framework adaptable to a certain context's conditions. (2001, p. 7). As a sample of how this CEFR has been applied in different contexts, there were some studies carried out in some countries that show the implications of this document.

In studies carried out in Australia there is often a negative opinion expressed by researchers and experts in the field of education about the use of the CEFR. Mc Namara and Elder (2010) argue that standards in general impose uniformity and globalization, and that the CEFR in particular works as a mechanism of foreign language education control disregarding the autonomy of the educational system. (p.197).

For example, in another study carried out in Japan by Nagai & O'Dwyer (2011), the results of implementing the CEFR in their country showed that the "can do" statements reflect a positive impact in how the pedagogical approach changes from teacher-centered to student-centered with a focus in communication. (p:146). In the same study these authors concluded that the CEFR had a positive effect on language curricula and courses design. Specifically, in how "can do" schemes are a good source for teachers to observe students' expected outcomes, regarding behavioural terms. Therefore, their use in a checklist allows learners to have a self-regulatory learning throughout the course (p. 150). This self-regulatory process means that students stand out from classmates by the goals they set for themselves, the accuracy of their behavioural self-monitoring and the resourcefulness of their strategic thinking. (Nagai & O'Dwyer:2011; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994)

The scenario in other countries is quite different from the Colombian context. In Colombia, the government adopted the CEFR and it is possible that the educational administrators could not take into account all the characteristics of the context and when the quality and quantity of resources in public schools might be reduced in comparison to private schools and European institutions. Gonzales and Quinchía (2003) concluded in a research that the two settings (private and public schools) need to be considered as two separate worlds. School students differ in social class and standard of living; also their work conditions are very different. That is why, we consider necessary to think about those factors that are important for the effective foreign language learning in order to obtain at least a part of the results desired by the government in next years. (p.5)

According to CEFR standards adopted by the government, and published by the MEN (2006) students in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade of high school in Colombia are supposed to have B1 as their level of competence in English. However, national examinations showed in the year of 2014 that 48% of the students in Colombian schools at 11 grade got a level of minus A (-A) (ICFES, 2014) which means that they might not know what is expected about the foreign language. (p.1)

According to Ayala and Alvarez (2005) there are some aspects that might affect the learning of a foreign language when it comes to differentiate public and private schools. Those aspects are: Laboratories, libraries and other instructional materials, technology, human resources, trained teachers, the lack of hours dedicated to teaching it, as well as crowded classrooms and governmental economical investment. (p.15).

In order to provide an effective use of the CEFR, European authorities created conditions such as teacher training programs, course designers, textbook authors, curriculum and language tests, examinations and assessment developers (Broek & Ende, 2013), conditions that are absent in Colombian settings. Ayala and Alvarez (2005) consider that English is seen just as another subject matter to learn and not as a means of communication and enrichment of their knowledge of the world. They suggest that “there should be an official policy in which the population involved in foreign language learning takes part in the construction of parameters regulating foreign language teaching and learning”. (P. 17)

There must be a conscious analysis of the current standards in order to establish how many of them are known by teachers and to what extent they can be applied in our context taking into account our conditions and resources. Also, it is necessary to propose some solutions for the correct development of at least a part of the current standards to improve the level of the students and also the way they are being taught.

### **Research question**

What is the understanding that foreign language teachers have about CEFR standards as guidelines for the learning of foreign languages at the Institucion Educativa San Francisco de Asis in Túquerres, Nariño, Colombia?

### **Research objectives**

#### **General objective**

To determine what is the understanding that foreign language teachers have about CEFR standards as guidelines for the learning of foreign languages at the Institucion Educativa San Francisco de Asis in Túquerres, Nariño, Colombia

### **Specific objectives**

- To determine how much teachers of Institución Educativa San Francisco de Asis know about the CEFR standards
- To identify what problems and challenges teachers of Institución Educativa San Francisco de Asis face up with the implementation of the CEFR standards in their classrooms.

### **Justification**

The current inquiry is important because National examinations as ICFES (2014) have shown that high school students display a low level of proficiency in English. We took into account the results of 2014 in which 42, 4% of the students in the I.E. San Francisco de Asis, a high school in Túquerres Nariño, got –A, which is considered a very low level in those examinations. These results show the necessity to improve the way in which English as a foreign language is taught and learned in that institution. In addition, when the CEFR standards were adopted in Colombia, the conditions and resources of the context might not be taken into account. Since, this topic has not been deeply investigated, the application of the CEFR in our settings might need research that aims to provide solutions for its correct development. Therefore, this project could be significant for institutions as well as for teachers to improve the quality within the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language.

### **Review of the literature**

The chapter below supports and analyzes some important aspects of the CEFR and its background by citing authors and studies about it. It is also a matter of significance to take a look at the methodology used by some teachers in language teaching. Finally, in the part of the education administrators it is also important to have an overview about the programs to learn a foreign language in Colombia, the communicative competence and some elements in the process of foreign language teaching and learning.

“On the basis of this analysis of the learning/teaching situation, it is seen as fundamentally important to define, clearly and explicitly, objectives which are at once worthwhile in terms of learner needs and realistic in terms of their characteristics and resources. Many parts are concerned with organized language learning, not only the teachers and learners in the classroom, but also educational authorities, examiners, textbook writers and publishers, etc.” (Council of Europe, 2001p,5)

If they agree on objectives, they can work coherently, even if quite separately, to create, apply, and assess those objectives encompassing them with the appropriate conditions for teaching and learning to take place. Moreover, it is essential to stand out the reality of the context in which the educational policies are adopted and applied since there is a big discussion about the implementation of standards in order to obtain the pre-established achievements, but it is also necessary to take a look at the process that involves learning and teaching to attain those expected goals.

### **Common European Framework of Reference**

The Common European Framework of Reference was designed in order to establish the achievements that the government, education administrators, teachers, students and all the educational community seek regarding foreign language learning. It was published by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe in 2001.

According to the Council of Europe (2001) learning, teaching and assessment in the CEFR are exactly what the title says: A framework of reference. It was first set up in European settings as a good option to state the guidelines concerning foreign language teaching and learning. Besides, it has been spread and progressively adopted in different countries such as Colombia. "It was designed to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency".

The Council of Europe (2001) also establishes the main goals of CEFR standards: To set up a series of achievements the learner has to reach at a certain stage of education. The first one is to address language learning needs to a real -world- communicative situations, defining levels of acquisition from common reference levels such as: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. The second one is to help educational administrators and the education community to set the parameters regarding: Goals, syllabi, assessment, materials, and so forth.

### **Description of CEFR levels**

Since CEFR standards describe the pace, progress or transition at each stage of foreign language learning depicted in letters by the *Cambridge English Scale* as: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1,

and C2. It is imperative to offer a brief description of each one of these levels created by the Council of Europe.

Level group A: In this group there are the goals that a beginner student has to reach before starting the following level. Its components are:

A1: Also known as the “*Breakthrough or beginner level*”: in this level a foreign language learner may be able to utter and understand basic everyday expressions to satisfy his/her basic needs. Furthermore, the learner might be able to introduce himself /herself providing personal information. Finally, he/she may be able to interact with other people through short talks and basic vocabulary.

A2: Also known as “*The Way Stage or Elementary level*”: The learner should be able to comprehend and express real life sentences and expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance. E.g. very basic personal and family information and description, shopping, local geography, and employment. Also, He/ she should be able to communicate in simple and routine tasks. Finally, the learner could describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, environment and basic issues.

Level group B: also known as “*The Independent Group Level*” It is the level that continues after level A. Its components comprehend basic but more challenging goals than in the first level. Its components are:

B1: Also called “*Threshold or intermediate level*” in this level the learner can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Secondly, the learner might deal with most situations likely to

arise while traveling in an area where the language is spoken. Furthermore, he/she should produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Finally, the learner could describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

B2: Also named "*Vantage or Upper Intermediate*" In this level the abilities of the learner might be significantly improved. For instance: He/she can have the capacity to read and understand more complex readings that in some cases also include technical vocabulary and complex grammar structures. On the part of speaking, the learner should be able to have a degree of fluency when speaking with native speakers, in this case the learner may feel less anxious than in previous levels. About writing skills a learner can produce a text about several contents and topics, besides he/she can also provide a set of advantages and disadvantages in order to support his/ her position.

Level group C also named as "*Proficient User Group Level*" is the highest level concerning foreign language acquisition. It is also important that this level is not required in the part of students as a compulsory level. It is rather addressed to foreign language teachers or high education foreign language students.

C1: this is one of the highest levels in the top of the ranking of the CEFR standards. This level is also known as "*Effective operational proficiency or advanced*" In this level a learner has developed the skills of communication with a high performance. Since he / she has acquired the capacity of understanding complex utterances, inferring meanings and recognize and comprehend ambiguous contents. Moreover, he/ she may also express him/herself in

several social, academic and professional situations. His/her performance when speaking would reflect a fluent register in which the use of fillers when speaking is mostly avoided. Finally, according to the writing competence, the learner might also produce clear, cohesive, coherent compositions about more complex topics.

C2: This is the highest level of foreign language learning top in relation with the CEFR standards. This level is also recognized as "*The Mastery or proficiency Level*" At this stage of acquirement the learner has developed all the communicative competences. For instance: in the matter of listening competence, the learner can easily understand whatever is uttered. It does not matter the topic or the context in which it is expressed. Secondly, in the part of reading, the learner may be able to read and comprehend any text even when it concerns a complex topic. It is also important to mention that in the matter of writing and speaking as well as in the aforementioned competences, the learner can summarize and put forward his/her ideas in a clear way, with a high range of vocabulary, grammar, fluency, cohesion and coherence devices. (Council of Europe, 2014)

### **Foreign language acquisition in the CEFR**

Talking about foreign language acquisition, the CEFR makes reference to the learners as they have to develop different competences and strategies to learn and at the same time work on the tasks, activities and processes to communicate effectively. However, teachers might find a problem here and it is that a few students learn proactively, that implies taking initiatives to plan, structure and execute their own learning process. Most of the learners learn reactively, which means following instructions and carrying out the activities prescribed for

them by teachers and textbooks. There is a call for autonomous learning when teaching stops, learners need to become aware of what they learn, to make choices in respect to objectives, materials and working methods according to their needs, motivations, characteristics and resources. (Council of Europe, 2001 p. 141-142)

Talking about educators, the CEFR shows that teachers are facilitators of learning as they are generally called upon to respect any official guidelines, use textbooks and course materials, devise and administer tests and prepare pupils and students for grading examinations. They have to make decisions about classroom activities all the time, they prepare the class but also they need to be flexible with student responses. They are expected to monitor the progress of pupils/students and find ways of recognizing, analyzing and overcoming their learning problems, as well as developing their individual learning abilities. (Council of Europe, 2001 p. 141). These aspects are all good examples of the responsibilities a teacher has in the development of a class and for being in charge of the language learning process, and all the abilities that he or she needs to have in order to make this process an effective one by considering the CEFR when making their decisions.

### **Language teaching and learning**

The CEFR recognized that it is kind of difficult to establish a methodology for teaching a foreign language correctly for teachers as well as for language policy makers. This document does not pretend to impose what to do or how to do it, neither to lay down the objectives that users should pursue or the methods they should employ, so we can deduce that the CEFR allows teachers to choose which method or approach is more convenient for them

according to the context and students' needs. However, they promote the action-oriented approach as a good practice for the implementation of the CEFR. (Council of Europe, 2001, xi-142)

### **The action-oriented approach**

The Council of Europe adopted the action-oriented approach as the model of learning, teaching and assessment of the CEFR. This approach views the individuals as social agents who have tasks to accomplish in some circumstances, a specific environment and in a particular field of action. The context, in which acts of speech occur within language activities, gives to the learners full meaning. (Council of Europe, 2001, p.9)

### **Why CEFR standards have been adapted to Colombian settings?**

The main achievement of Colombian Educational administrators has been to turn the Colombian institutions into bilingual or trilingual. Among the objectives proposed by the Ministerio de Educación Nacional MEN, law 115 established the instances to be acquired are mainly about speaking skills, reading, command and ability to speak in at least one foreign language. Therefore, all educational institutions in Colombia have adopted English as the foreign language to be taught. To obtain the aforementioned achievements, the MEN set the conditions to support the education secretaries. Moreover, MEN also promoted the involvement of all the organisms, materials, and infrastructure, in the process of teaching, learning and assessment of English as a foreign language. (Ministerio De Educación Nacional, 2005)

After a thorough study concerning about which could be the best alternative to achieve these objectives, the Colombian government and all the educational administrators found the adoption of the standards of the Common European Framework as the best option. Therefore, seeking for the empowerment and strengthen of communicative competence in English language, the Ministerio de Educación Nacional establishes the Programa Nacional de Bilinguismo 2004-2019. This educational program comprises standards from the Common European Framework to set up and obtain the expected aims. The main purpose is “(...) to improve citizens’ abilities regarding English learning through the acquisition of new technologies in times of globalization and development.” (Ministerio de Educacion Nacional, 2006)

The MEN (Ministerio de Educacion Nacional) opted to take the CEFR standards as a significant tool to overcome some drawbacks with regard to foreign language learning and teaching in basic- media education in Colombia. (Ministerio De Educación Nacional, 2005)

### **Some opinions about CEFR standards in Colombia**

It is necessary to acknowledge what the position of teachers is in regards to CEFR standards adoption, adaption, and posterior application. Thus, it is relevant to recognize not only the possible drawbacks but also the possible positive aspects that teachers might find when teaching under the CEFR standard’s guidelines throughout the design and planning the overall teaching- learning process.

The CEFR provides teachers, teacher trainers, and academic managers with a comprehensive approach that encompasses the practical applications and resources to carry out the design and performance of language courses. (Heyworth, 2003,p.12)

According to Bonilla and Tejada (2014), the main purpose of the government and the elite classes is to promote English education as a means of competitiveness in Colombia to overcome its economic and social needs. To achieve this aim, it is necessary to consider the English language as the conduct of students and workers towards the improvement of the global economy and Colombian authorities might need to invest more in educational fields.

Another relevant opinion about the implementation of CEFR standards is to acknowledge the reason for the necessity to teach English in Colombia. Moreover, there are questions about why the goals of the government and ministry of education differ from teachers, students and educative administration corpus' goals. Do all they know what the purpose of learning a foreign language is? Do they share the same objectives? Do all the educative participants take place in the decision making about what has to be done to achieve determined goals? Do they know why it is imperative to learn English in Colombia? As these kind of questions emerge, it is fundamental to clarify the reasons, goals and process to attain the same expected goals. (Sánchez & Obando, 2008. p,184)

### **How are CEFR standards tested around the world?**

It is also important to mention that there are tests used around the world. Their main goal is to measure the language learning acquisition and proficiency taking into consideration the main components regarding language acquisition. These examinations reflect

approximately the same goals that the CEFR standards have regarding overall foreign language proficiency in this case the abilities of listening, speaking, reading comprehension, and writing.

In the Colombian context, the English Language Knowledge for both public and private institutions is tested with ICFES test whose design takes into account to some extent the CEFR standards. Even though, some skills like listening, and speaking may not be taken into account. Here there is a brief description of some English language proficiency test around the world:

IELTS: The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a test that measures the language proficiency of people who want to study or work in environments where English is used as a language of communication. It is also important to mention that this test was created taking into consideration the requirements of CEFR Standards after thorough empirical analysis (IELTS, 2015. P,5)

TOEFL: is an acronym of "*Test of English as a Foreign Language*". This computer and paper based test designed to measure the main communicative skills regarding foreign language learning. It also emphasizes in other important components like writing essays, and grammar mastery. Nowadays it is recognized in more than 9, 000 colleges, universities and agencies in more than 130 countries. Its British counterpart is IELTS test. " (TOEFL, 2016)

TOEIC: this test was originally designed in Japan by the Educational Testing Service E.T.S.in 1,979. Then, its popularity has been increasing because of the components that this language proficiency test assesses. Moreover, it is necessary to mention that at the very

beginning, not all the skills were tested and some changes have been applied such as the inclusion part of listening and speaking in order to make it more effective. Nowadays this test is applied in many countries around the world. (Institute for International Business Communication (IIBC).2016)

CITY AND GUILDS: it is mainly a job related proficiency test which allows people to obtain qualifications regarding certain jobs. In this test, the students, professionals, and workers show their insights with concerns about their determined professions or occupations. The CEFR standards are taken as guidelines to determine if the examinees know about their fields in the foreign language. (City and Guilds, 2016)

CAMBRIDGE EXAM: This is another worldwide English proficiency test. This Test follows the Common European Framework guidelines as an international norm to develop the linguistic proficiency .This is one of the most recognized test around the world and has been translated to many languages across all the continents. It is necessary that this and all the test are the result of a thorough research made by several education experts from Cambridge English Language Assessment y Cambridge University Press in order to assess the students' insights regarding thorough focus on learning, teaching and assessment matters. (UCLES Cambridge University Press, 2016). In Colombia the test employed to measure the students' level of foreign language learning is the ICFES test.

ICFES: is the acronym of "*Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior*" it is essentially a test administered to eleventh graders in order to attain access to higher education.

This is a brief description of the seven components taken into account by (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2015) concerning ICFES test to measure the students' language proficiency regarding the CEFR standards. It is necessary to acknowledge that not all the language competences are assessed in the test. For example: listening and speaking. The main reason why these competences are not taken into consideration according to ICFES is that this is not a test whose only achievement is to assess foreign language learning, but also, the components of other important subjects like: mathematics, critical reading, social, citizenship and natural sciences. Furthermore, it is compulsory to inform that in Colombian settings some population of students do not have good results in this test; ICFES test has also included an A-level. This level means that the learner has less knowledge than the basic A1 level existing as the CEFR standards.

Nevertheless, there are the criteria of how the fore mentioned standards are evaluated in the next seven components of evaluation and description of the test. In each one of the points of the test the student has to show his/ her knowledge about vocabulary in context, comprehension, and grammar knowledge. Here is a brief description of the seven components of ICFES test.

1. Investigates the pragmatic knowledge of the student, which allows him to recognize the communicative purpose of an advertisement and where this may appear, according that purpose. For this, the student finds five options, and must decide where they are seen. For each question there are three options, A, B or C, one of which should mark on their Answer Sheet.

2. Evaluates the lexical knowledge of the student, which allows you to understand a number of descriptions in order to connect them with a list of words.

In this part, the student finds a list of eight (8) words classified from A to H. Each of the questions describes one of the eight (8) words and the student must find the relationship between the two and mark the correct letter (A to H) on their answer sheet. There are more words (A to H) than the student needs.

3. The third component of the test is about the comprehension about what an interlocutor says and five possible answers that the student has to choose from, in order to answer to that previous utterance.

4. In the fourth point there is a kind of cloze test in which the student has to complete the conversation according to the options given. In this point there are different parts of the speech regarding written competence. The student requires a good understanding of grammar rules, vocabulary, connectors, possessives, demonstratives, adjectives, adverbs, and other grammatical categories.

5. The fifth part is about reading comprehension. It is relevant to mention that in this part of the test not all the information of the reading is explicitly given. The student, in this case has to paraphrase, and take care of some details that may be the clue to answer. Moreover, the possible answers are also relevant to have a clearer idea.

6. In the sixth part, the reading is more complex than the previous one. This comprehends a content in which the learner has to infer about the possible answer. So there might be some details in the reading that are not clearly defined in the text. For instance: what

could be the author's opinion, what could be the purpose of the writing, what is the main idea of a certain paragraph. Etc.

7. This is the final part of the test regarding the English part of ICFES test. In this part the student will find a reading in which there are some numbered blanks. In this case, the student must select one possible option from four given in the multiple choice part. It is important to consider that in this case, the reading part can be a real context or *Realia* material which is a real context material. For example an article, an extract taken from a magazine. Etc. Another important aspect in this part is that the possible answer is given as the result of a *WH* question.

The main components evaluated and showed in the results are the test contents which are a description of what a student can do in terms of competences evaluated in the test. Each level corresponds to a performance set of competencies in which student can demonstrate the knowledge out of the assessment practice. Finally, the levels with respect to a criterion defined is fixed in time, so the results by levels can be compared between different applications and these results allow students and the educational institutions to have information for strengthening the competences whose results are not completely satisfactory.

### **Previous English reforms and guidelines regarding languages teaching and learning in Colombia**

Colombian government has been implementing language reforms since 1970. The main purpose of these laws and reforms is to promote the improvement of Colombian setting regarding teaching and learning of foreign languages with a more technical, scientific, and

efficient process. (Gomez, 1971, p.72). However, most of the implemented educational programs have not been successfully applied. The main reason could be that not all the actors involved in these programs have a clear idea about how the process should be, the expected goals, and means to carry them out.

The Colombian government and education administrators have been shifting English language programs since the political constitutional reform in 1991. The need to learn a new language (English in this case) became a priority. There was also a kind of recognition of Colombian country as a multilingual and multicultural country. Furthermore, the spread of imports from United States and Europe to Colombia also supported the creation of homogeneous language policies that could enhance English language learning. (Bonilla & Tejada, 2014)

In Colombia the General Education Act of 1994 (Ministerio de Educacion Nacional (MEN) (1994) states that the starting point to create new regulations addressed to the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Colombia should be focused on the acquisition of speaking, reading and comprehension skills in at least one foreign language. Conversely, according to Sánchez and Obando (2008), in order to achieve the expected goals participants involved in foreign language education in Colombia should state clear objectives about curricula, syllabi, schedules, learning tasks and assessment.

It is also a matter of concern how the education policies have been changed, programmed and established by the government disregarding what the main goal of education is. A good example of this can be the authority given to the MEN to regulate curricula by the

implementation of achievement indicators in the Resolución 2343 of 1996 partially replaced with Ley 715 of 2001. Also, Bonilla Carvajal and Tejada Sanchez states that "...language policy has constantly been altered due to political transitions disregarding education's ultimate goal, namely, to produce critical and resourceful citizens who might contribute to a global society." (2014. p,1)

New questions about the educational system are raised, for instance, Do government seek for an education whose goal is to enhance critical thinking? Do teachers, students, and all the actors in the educational field have the same expected goals when learning a new language? Are they taking into account the needs of students? What happen with the indigenous languages in Colombia? Learning English as a second language must be compulsory? Do all the students want to learn a foreign language? For these and some other reasons, Colombia as a developing country looks for an educational model that permits students, and, professional people to become into a more competitive staff of workers rather than independent, creative, critical, humanistic and insightful people.

### **The CEFR implementation in Colombia**

#### **Programa Nacional de Bilinguismo**

The first attempt to implement the CEFR standards in Colombia happened when the Colombian government had the purpose of making our country bilingual by the year of 2019 and that is why they designed the "*Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo*". As a strategy for improving the quality of English teaching in Colombia as well as to promote the competitiveness of Colombian citizens. As a result, they might be able to communicate in

English according to the international CEFR standards reaching at least the level B1. It is also imperative to say that for attaining the expected goals, it is necessary the assessment of competence in students, teachers, graduates and students of undergraduate programs of English to improve the training of teachers and its methodology. Furthermore, it is also necessary to imply a link among technology and the process of teaching and learning of English. (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2004)

### **Colombia “Very Well”**

The National program of bilingualism was a very ambitious project that might not work in part because the experts that designed it could not take into account all the conditions for English teaching and learning to take place in Colombian settings. All the achievements that this program expected to acquire were not completely obtained, whereas some European settings have the best conditions to enhance foreign language teaching and learning, Colombian settings differ evidently; thus, in the Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo there was more emphasis in goals than process; it could be observed that in some public institutions whose primary needs were not completely fulfilled in order to attain the expected goals. Furthermore, some other aspects such as context, economic situation, infrastructure, teachers knowledge, methodology, syllabi, curricula designing, educative organizations, students-teachers needs were in some way ignored. For those reasons the new project “Colombia very well” was created in order to imply some reforms, in every aspect regarding English teaching and learning. According to the national English program Colombia Very Well “*Strengthening teaching and learning of the language provides structural interventions which have been presented as pillars necessary to ensure the quality of the process throughout the*

*cycle (teachers with adequate levels of English, and best classroom practices, plans relevant curricula, pedagogical model, outside the classroom, technology infrastructure, culture of performance and integration and synergy of institutional initiatives”*. (2014, p. 42) This program was created and revised by the experts in the subject matter addressing the previous drawbacks. Afterwards, it was established in the Colombian education to establish some reforms, in every aspect regarding English teaching and learning. It is intended that these aspects which entail certain objectives would be achieved in an estimated period from 2015 to 2025.

According to Ministerio Nacional de Educación (MEN, 2014), Colombia's Very well program continues the strategies implemented by the Ministry, through the Project for Strengthening the Skills Development Foreign Languages, and the recent enactment of the Law on Bilingualism (Act 1651 of 2013). It also poses a structure based on three main components that achieve greater articulation between the educational, social, labor and business sectors, creating better spaces for teaching and learning the language for future generations and increased opportunities for human talent that the country has. The aforesaid refers to the adjustments to the previous English programs namely: Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo and Programa de Fortalecimiento al Desarrollo de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras (PFDCLE)

It would be necessary not only to adjust the requirements of students and teachers in Colombian settings as the new program proposes, but also to establish more realistic standards. Otherwise, it could be difficult to achieve the goal of making of Colombia a bilingual country by 2025 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2015: 25)

The current review of the literature has included some of the topics, concepts and references related to the scope in which the project of investigation is going to be developed. It was implemented a strategic categorization for the terms, taking into account the particular and also the general concepts.

It is important to stand out that the information supports in some way the topic to be investigated; this information has been taken from several sources with high fidelity.

In the next chapter we will discuss the methodology that will be used in order to develop in the best way possible this research project.

## **Methodology**

### **Design of the Study**

For the current research project a qualitative study will be done in order to comprehend in detail the understanding that foreign language teachers have about the CEFR standards as a guideline for the learning of a foreign language. Qualitative research will help us discover the type of knowledge faculty members have within the learning and teaching process of a foreign language. This study will have a social interpretive constructivist-methodology as its philosophical foundation.

### **Description of the context**

The setting where the current project of investigation will be carried out is the Institución Educativa San Francisco de Asís in the city of Tuquerres, Nariño. The institución Educativa San Francisco de Asis was funded in the decade of 1970 by the community and the Padres Capuchinos, who gave the school a religious character until the year of 2006 when it became owned by the national government. This institution is located 4 blocks from the main square, in the north of the city. It is a very quiet and natural environment for learning. In addition, the institution has around 900 students, boys and girls, aged from 5 to 17 years old. They come from medium and low social status. Also, they have classes from 7 a.m to 1 p.m and they receive their English class three hours per week. Talking about English, teachers are free to choose the methodology they apply in the classroom. They have to organize a “plan de area” at the beginning of the year to plan what to teach. We chose this institution because it brings to the project the right conditions to be carried out due to the fact that it is a public school, in which

they are supposed to work with the CEFR and the context is very similar to the rest of public schools in Colombia.

### **Rationale for Faculty Selection**

For this study, all 3 full-time faculty members from the English area at la institution educative San Francisco de Asis will be taken into account to participate in this study. All the participants will be purposefully selected; the purposeful sampling will be based on the fact that these teachers are the only ones working in the different courses of this high school.

### *General Description and demographics*

The following table outlines the general demographic information for the high school teachers who are going to be considered for this research.

Table # 1

### *Demographics of the Participants*

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<u>Faculty Members</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Years of experience</u>
Salome	F	20
Salomon	M	18
Sofia	F	25

### **Instruments of data collection**

For the current inquiry we are going to apply observations and interviews as techniques to obtain the desired information. The main reason why these instruments were chosen is that they permit to have a closer contact within the context in which the current inquiry will be

developed. Furthermore, it is necessary to use more than one instrument when carrying out the research because applying only one can lead to acquire vague or unreliable information. Thus it is relevant to use a set of tools that allow the researcher to support, compare and select from their findings. Therefore, these instruments work together in order to complement each other to obtain meaningful, relevant and well-supported information which is the main goal of qualitative research.

In qualitative observations the researcher has a more direct contact with the place in which the research is held. In order to support the gathered information he or she takes field notes in a structured or semi-structured way on the behavior and activities that are carried out giving priority to the most relevant information. It is up to the researcher to participate or not during the observation. (Creswell, 2009 p. 181) We chose observations as a technique for our research project because we need to observe the factors that can affect the process of learning a foreign language in the context in which it takes place.

According to Jorgensen (1989) Through participant observation, it is possible to describe what goes on, who or what is involved, when and where things happen, how they occur, and why—at least from the standpoint of participants—things happen as they do in particular situations. The methodology of participant observation is exceptional for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns, as well as the immediate sociocultural contexts in which human existence unfolds. (1989).

Therefore, it will allow us to understand the problem and the research question of our project as we are going to observe teachers and students in their natural setting when they are in a foreign language class. Moreover, we are going to use interviews.

Creswell in 2009 said that in interviews, the researcher includes unstructured and generally open-ended questions, few questions that intend to elicit views and opinions from the participants. We decided to apply interviews because it is necessary to know the perception of teachers for the implementation of the CEFR in order to determine the influence and the problems that they have to face when implementing it with their students in a public school of Túquerres.

### **Method of Analysis of Data**

The purpose of the data analysis will be to understand The English teachers' knowledge about the implementation of the CEFR standards as a guideline for the learning of a foreign language.

### **Data Analysis**

The overall process of data analysis will begin by identifying segments in the data set that are responsive to the research question (Merriam, 2009). Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e. text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figure, tables, or a discussion (Creswell, 2013, p. 180).

In respect of phenomenology research, Manen (1990) described data analysis as “phenomenological themes that may be understood as the *structures of experience*. So when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience” (p. 79). As soon as the data collection will commence in this study, we will start the process of analysis, reflection, and interpretation. Thus, the analysis of data during the different collection times “formed an interactive, cyclical process” interweaving data collection and analysis from the very start as suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014, p. 14). The participant interviews are going to be audiotaped and later they will be transcribed.

We are going to use a two- stage process to condense the data proposed by Miles et al. (2014) of first and second cycle coding that transfers from assigning labels to chunks of data to identifying patterns or themes. “ The first cycle coding is a way to summarize initially segments of data, and the second cycle coding is a way to group those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes or constructs” (Miles et al. 2014, p. 86). First, we will type all the raw data coming from the interviews. Then, we will use the In Vivo coding method to extract the statements considered significant with their formulated meanings in order to cluster them, the meanings, to obtain themes common to all of the transcripts of the participants. We then will integrate the results into an in- depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon. The results through the in- depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon will represent the research questions of this study. Finally, we will use member checks to validate the findings with the participants and include the remarks of the participants in the final description when necessary

**Data collection timeline**

The timeline for the data collection is indicated in Fig. 2. Phase One will start on 09/10/16, Phase Two will start 10/20/16, and Phase Three will start 12/01/2016.

Time	Participants Involved	Data to be collected	Research Questions
Phase One From: 09/10/16 To: 10/20/16	Faculty, administrative (chair, vice president of research), and Researcher	Interviews and observations	1
Phase Two From: 10/20/16 To: 12/01/16	Researcher	Written information from interviews and observations	1
Phase Three 2 months after phase Two	Review Panel	Written comments  Notes from the discussion	1

*Figure 2.* Data Collection Timeline

**Trustworthiness of this Study**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1991), the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is based on the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability considered by Lincoln and Guba (1991). The trustworthiness of this qualitative study will be mainly based on the principle of credibility. The credibility of this study will be established through the degree

“of confidence in the ‘truth’ that the findings of a particular inquiry have for the subjects (respondents) with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out” (p. 290). Three activities will be used to increase the credibility of the findings of this study are triangulation, member check, and reflexivity. According to Creswell (2013), triangulation is the process of verifying evidence from two or more data sources to increase credibility of a study. In this study, the sources of evidence will come from two different data sources, which are in the form of interviews and observations.

“Member checks, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stake holding groups from the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1991, p. 314). In this study, the interview transcripts will be given back to the participants for revision to make sure their ideas, thoughts, and beliefs have been accurately taken. According to Simons (2009), reflexivity involves researchers thinking about how their beliefs, values, biases, actions, and decision impact the process and outcomes of their studies. To Lincoln and Guba (1991), reflexivity is carried out in the form of a journal, in which the researcher includes information about self (hence the term “reflexive”) and method. This process includes the following: “1) the daily schedule and logistic of the study; 2) a personal diary that provides the opportunity for catharsis and reflection upon one’s own values and interests; and 3) a methodological log in which methodological decisions and accompanying rationales are recorded” ( Lincoln & Guba, 1991, p 327). In this study, reflexivity will be used as referred by Creswell (2013) both as information about one’s self, and as a methodological activity during data collection and in the analysis of the data as well.

**Strengths of the Methodology within the Design.**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), the triangulation of methods indicates that the data will ensure the credibility of the study. In this study, we will use the English as foreign language faculty interviews and observations to confirm the emerging findings. By using different sources of data, we will have an opportunity to compare and cross-check our data collection, to make sure our findings will be congruent with the reality of what we will investigate. We will use a second strategy for ensuring the credibility of this study called *member checks*. Member checks are a process through which the researcher takes his “preliminary analysis back to some of the participants and ask whether his/her interpretation rings true” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). Also, we are going to use another strategy for ensuring credibility called *reflexivity*. According to Lincoln and Guba (1991) reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, through which the human is the instrument of investigation. By being reflexive we will be able to explain our biases, disposition and assumptions.

**Limitations of the Methodology within the Design.**

One of the limitations of this phenomenological study will be the impossibility to generalize results because the application of the study will be specific to a unique situation, whose features will be bound to the characteristics of one specific high school, to the understanding of these particular participants, and to the setting where the investigation will be carried out. Another limitation will be due to the small sampling of the study and the purposeful sampling selection; the results are not applicable to a larger population. Consequently, this study

will not produce definitive conclusions and it might also be difficult to replicate the results for its specific features.

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