

RURALITY AND CONFLICT: ENGLISH TEACHERS' NARRATIVES ON THE  
APPROPRIATION OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICIES IN COLOMBIA

A Thesis Presented by

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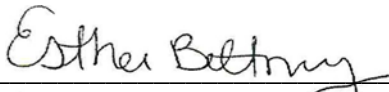
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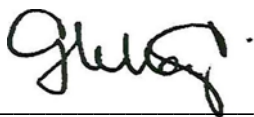
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## DEDICATION

To my family, especially my mother and father who have supported me in all my academic and life projects. To Nana who shared and suffered this experience with me. Now we have time to start new projects together.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Jaime Usma Wilches because of his motivation to enter this program and his support during the process. I also would like to thank each one of the professors in charge of the courses throughout the semesters, especially, Jose Aldemar Alvarez, Carmen Helena Guerrero and Doris Correa because I learnt a lot from their classes. Similarly, I would like to thank the participants of my study for having agreed to be part of this process and for having shared with me those experiences that enlightened this research experience.

## ABSTRACT

# RURALITY AND CONFLICT: ENGLISH TEACHERS' NARRATIVES ON THE APPROPRIATION OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICIES IN COLOMBIA

August 2019

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After the implementation of different language policies in Colombia, it seems that these policies are useless since their goals remain as a utopia for the diverse contexts in our country. Drawing on a sociocultural approach, this study explores the way teachers appropriate language policies in rural areas affected by armed conflict through a narrative perspective. Teaching English in areas controlled by guerrilla or paramilitary groups implies suffering violence and living challenging experiences. Indeed, participants' narratives unveil the harsh conditions teachers find in those rural areas when first arriving to the schools, and then teaching English. The discussion of this study debates the lack of proper strategies to guarantee a positive impact of the language policy in those rural areas, the decisions teachers make when teaching a decontextualized language policy, and their desire of working in a different place. Hence, this study could serve as a point of departure to design a language policy that takes into account the diversity of contexts in our country, as well as teachers' voices as they are the ones who execute such policy.

*Key words:* language policies, rural areas, appropriation, narratives, armed conflict

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## **Introduction**

Colombia has been shaped by more than fifty years of armed conflict involving different causes, places, and stakeholders (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, 2016; González, 2004). According to Centro Nacional the Memoria Histórica (2016), two issues remain relevant as causes of the armed conflict, the “appropriation, use and possession of land” (p. 27) and “the precariousness weakness of Colombian Democracy” (p. 28). Similarly, in our country, elites have exercised violence to acquire land as a crucial element to build their economy and as a way to avoid sharing their power with other people (CNMH, 2016; González, 2004). In Colombian armed conflict, various armed actors namely guerrilla groups, paramilitary and official forces have perpetrated violence in the form of massacres, forced detentions, torture, selective assassinations, forced disappearances, kidnappings, forced recruitment and forced displacement (CNMH, 2016). Although the whole country has been affected by the armed conflict, its impact has been stronger in rural areas whose location is far from the major cities and whose productive lands are targeted by armed actors who attempt to grab them by force (CNMH, 2016; Perfetti, 2003).

This national armed conflict has impacted rural education to the point of making it to be considered as a complex phenomenon. According to the OECD (2016), rural areas face particular challenges in terms of infrastructure, security, poverty and development. Such challenges are evident in issues related to malnutrition, teenage pregnancy, violence and insufficient infrastructure. These conditions cause that students in rural areas not have the same educational opportunities and academic achievements as peers in urban areas (J. M. Hernández, 2018; OECD & Colombia. Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016). The

critical part of rural education refers to a no ending cycle because these poor conditions are a cause and an effect of poverty in our country (Lakin & Gasperini, 2003)

Considering that armed conflict has been stronger in rural towns and hamlets located far from large cities, teachers living and working in those areas deal with the complex task of teaching English under some particular social conditions. In some cases schools are considered a place where armed groups recruit new combatants or a place where they find shelter from enemies (CNMH, 2016; Cortés, Pérez, & Guerra, 2016; J. M. Hernández, 2018; Perfetti, 2003). In addition, some teachers in conflict zones consider that they need to learn how to recognize and address students' language and learning needs in that context in order to engage them in learning activities (Nelson & Appleby, 2015). Besides, in some cases, armed groups supervise what is taught because they consider that the school can also educate enemies (Cortés et al., 2016). Furthermore, in some places, schools have been affected by violence (J. M. Hernández, 2018) making teachers and students to flee the school since it is not a safe place anymore (Ramos & Ramos, 2016).

Correspondingly, Lizarralde (2003) describes several positions taken by teachers in conflict zones. These positions refer to naturalization of the conflict, indifference towards the conflict, acting carefully, supporting armed groups, asking for a transfer, and taking actions to protect the community. According to the author, these positions respond to different teachers' ideas, circumstances, and perceptions about their role in the conflict. Some of these ideas are (a) the perception of the conflict as part of a culture that does not need to be changed; (b) the idea of not interfering in violence as a key factor to be safe; (c) the idea of acting in a hidden way in order to carefully avoid stigmatization when armed groups ask teachers to do some actions and teachers cannot reject the commands; (d) the

need to support the strongest armed groups as a way to not become a target; (e) the need to ask for a transfer to a zone in which teachers feel that their life is not in danger; and (f) the need to do something in order to take care of their community taking into account the risks it implies. These positions and reasons represent the way teachers portrayed themselves and their roles in the conflict context. Depending on the role teachers play in their context, they could become victims of the conflict as reported by Semana (2014) and Suarez (2013). According to the mentioned articles, from 1985 to 2011, more than five thousand members of FECODE<sup>1</sup> were victims of the conflict in different ways, including murders, threats, forced detentions, kidnapping, and torture. In these analyses, Antioquia stands as the Colombian department with the highest number of teachers considered as victims of the armed conflict.

Disregarding the educational context of rural areas, the national government has oriented teaching and learning foreign languages in an instrumental way; that is, the government claims that learning languages remains relevant to get better job conditions and to become more competitive in the current globalized world (Departamento Nacional de Planeacion, 2015). Therefore, the Colombian government has tried to improve the performance of foreign languages in Colombia's educational system during the last twelve years (Gómez, 2017). However, there have been some unconformities considering that, although the government refers to foreign languages, all of its efforts have focused only on English (Cárdenas, 2006; de Mejía, 2006; Departamento Nacional de Planeacion, 2015; Guerrero & Quintero, 2009; Ley 1651 de 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> Federación Colombiana de Educadores, the Colombian Teachers' Union

Responding to international globalization and competitiveness agenda, four language policies or programs represent the efforts of the government in order to improve students' English performance in the last fourteen years. In 2004, the Ministry of National Education (MEN) introduced the National Bilingual Program (NBP) (Galvis, 2014). Although the NBP was planned to be developed from 2004 to 2019, three more language programs have been implemented during that period. They include *Programa de Fortalecimiento del Desarrollo de Competencias en Lengua Extranjera* (PFDCLE) 2010-2014, *Plan Nacional de Inglés* (PNI) 2015-2025, and *Programa Colombia Bilingüe* 2014-2018. It is relevant to clarify that, in most cases, the implementation of the new programs overlapped the previous ones.

Although these programs have different names, there are not remarkable differences among them because they perceive bilingualism, foreign language, teachers and language teaching in terms of English as an instrumental tool (Correa & González, 2016). Furthermore, they represent a top-down policy making process where teachers are perceived as technicians (Guerrero, 2010b) and different educational stakeholders are not taken into account in the policy making process (Usma, 2015).

In general terms, these programs refer to language policies aiming at having students and teachers in specific language level proficiency by introducing teaching materials and other strategies. Related to the proficiency level, there is not a clear and coherent criteria to establish the goals since they have passed from 100% of high school students achieving a B2 level to 8% of high school students reaching a B1 level ( MEN, 2006; MEN, 2016). In relation to the teaching resources, throughout the implementation of the four programs, the MEN has introduced an array of resources such as *Estándares*

*Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés, English please, MY ABC English Kit, English for Colombia, Suggested Curriculum Structure, The Practical Guide for the Implementation of the Suggested Curriculum of English, Basic Learning Rights, Way to Go, English Please and English Please fast-track* (MEN, 2014; MEN, 2016; MEN, 2006).

Some of these resources are focused on primary school and some of them on high school. In respect of other strategies, the national policy includes the introduction of the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR), the approval of the *Ley 1651 de 2013* known as *Ley de Bilingüismo*, some immersion experiences for some teachers, and the implementation of *the Fellowship Program* (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2014; Ministerio de Educación Nacional & Heart for Change, 2015). The aforementioned initiatives describe the programs and the actions that represent the language policies introduced in Colombia to improve the English level of students in the last fourteen years.

Different scholars have criticized these language policies because they perpetuate power relationships which create social phenomena from the policy texts and when implementing them (Bermúdez & Fandiño, 2012; Usma, 2015). To illustrate this claim, some studies demonstrated that defining bilingualism as Spanish/English values the language of the powerful and affects the relationship among languages (de Mejía, 2006; Guerrero, 2009). Different studies stated that authorities disregard stakeholders' ideas in the making policy process (C. Bonilla & Tejada, 2016; Guerrero, 2010b; Miranda et al., 2016; Peláez & Usma, 2017; Roldán & Peláez Henao, 2017). Besides, other studies have shown that the implementation of language policies should take into account sociocultural issues in the context of the nation in order to avoid inconsistencies and incompatibilities between

the policy and the reality (Bermúdez & Fandiño, 2012; Correa, Usma, & Montoya, 2014; Roldán & Peláez Henao, 2017).

Furthermore, some scholars have stated that language policy implies different professional and work-related challenges to elementary school teachers (Correa & González, 2016). The professional challenges refer to difficulties they experience becoming prepared to be in the classroom. These challenges include teachers' lack of preparation to teach English and poor design of professional development programs proposed by local and national authorities (Correa & González, 2016). Work-related challenges refer to difficulties teachers face when they perform in the classroom. These problems comprise limited physical and technological resources, large classes, insufficient time of instruction, and students' lack of motivation to learn English (Correa & González, 2016)

In addition to the previous criticisms, Colombian scholars in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) field have identified difficulties brought by the governmental language policy in rural areas. They have found a mismatch between students' culture and the language policy which made it difficult to implement the policy in rural areas. Besides, language policies become an obstacle to teachers because in most of the rural schools there are not appropriate resources for teaching English. Furthermore, teachers' personal and professional life is affected because living and working in rural areas represent isolation, which implies more challenges in terms of professional development than English teachers in urban areas (Bonilla & Cruz, 2014; Ramos & Ramos, 2016; Roldán & Peláez Henao, 2017).

Considering the diversity of social contexts in Colombia, it is relevant to claim that language policies are texts that become relevant when they face real life situations.

According to Menken and García (2010) “Language policies cannot be truly understood without studying actual practices” (p. 2). Following this line, teachers become crucial actors because they perceive, appropriate and reconfigure policies according to their sociocultural context (Correa et al., 2014; Peláez & Usma, 2017; Roldán & Peláez Henao, 2017; Usma, 2015). That is to say that teachers remain as the final arbiters of the language policy because without teachers, policy texts are just good intentions (Shohamy, 2006).

Looking for the role of teachers, two approaches have been found for describing the way teachers have adopted active roles when experiencing language policies in specific contexts (Usma, 2015). The first approach reflects a nurturing approach focused on supporting students personally, emotionally, and behaviorally as a way to offer them something different from what their context provides. This means that teachers perceive English classes as a space where the adversities of their social problems could be neutralized. The second approach receives the name of academic because it is oriented towards the improvement of students’ academic skills that are proposed in the policy document. This means that teachers’ perceptions of English are aligned to the expectations of the policy. These two approaches remain as relevant because it reflects the perception of the teachers about the English class and establish its roles in different contexts. Usually the adoption of one of these approaches is a consequence of the social context that surrounds them because according to their background and experiences, teachers privilege one dimension over the other (Usma, 2015).

As stated before, education in rural areas affected by armed conflict implies complex conditions which makes it difficult for the EFL field to have suitable teachers, and resources. However, thanks to the changes and possibilities brought by the peace agreement

signed between the government and the guerrilla group FARC-EP during 2017, which coincided with the time this research study was being conducted, the MEN was running out a special call focused on hiring teachers who wanted to work in rural areas that have been affected by armed conflict (Decreto N° 1578 de 2017). The purpose of this special call was to guarantee that people in those areas had the possibility to have suitable teachers for each subject in the schools since teachers are selected by meritocracy. This special call implies a challenge for language policy makers as well as for English teachers because rural conflict areas have particular needs. In this line, stories about the way teachers in rural conflict areas have experienced national language policies could enlighten the English teaching and learning process that the new teachers are going to guide.

Although different studies on language policy have been carried out in our country, only some of them have been conducted in rural areas. In addition the latter ones have been focused on professional development ( Bonilla & Cruz, 2013), perceptions ( Bonilla & Cruz-Arcila, 2014; Roldán & Peláez Henao, 2017), implementation (Correa et al., 2014), and appropriation (Usma, 2015). On the contrary, this study focused on teachers' narratives to unveil how they have experienced language policy in rural conflict areas. Relying on a narrative inquiry perspective, this study intends to answer the following research question: *How have English teachers experienced English language education policies in rural conflict areas?*



## **Theoretical Framework**

This study describes how teachers have experienced language policy in rural areas affected by armed conflict. This section presents the definition of sociocultural approach to analyze language policies and the concepts of agency and appropriation as relevant factors in this approach. Finally, the Narrative Inquiry (NI) paradigm, as a way of understanding a phenomenon will be discussed.

Drawing on Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead (2009), the present study does not perceive language policy as a top-down process in which teachers become just implementers. On the contrary, this study considers policy as a social practice that is appropriated by teachers who act as autonomous agents in their specific contexts. Adopting a sociocultural approach to analyze language policies implies to recognize policies as complex social practices of rules that are culturally produced and constituted by diverse actors in different contexts (Levinson et al., 2009). Consequently, sociocultural research conceives language policies not just as an official document that stakeholders have to implement, but as a reflection process, involving issues of power along the policy process, that is impacted by the contexts (Levinson & Sutton, 2001). According to Ball et al. (2012) education policies are permeated by relations of power which are manifested by relationships in social interaction that cannot be naturalized because “to ignore issues of power is to ensure our own powerlessness” (Taylor et al. 1997, as cited in Ball, 2012, p. 9).

Following this approach, the concept of agency is crucial as it refers to the different ways teachers engage in or resist policy. According to Emirbayer and Mische (1998), agency is a “dynamic process of social engagement that is influenced by the past (schemas of social experience and internalized limits), oriented towards the future (imagined

options), and constituted in the present (judgments shaped by available social and cultural norms)” (as cited in Pease-Alvarez & Davies, 2012). Finally, by giving relevance to agency, teachers become policy makers rather than blind implementers (Menken & García, 2010), since their daily practices end up representing the policy.

The concept of appropriation emerge as a consequence of accepting that “Language policies cannot be truly understood without studying actual practices” (Menken & García, 2010, p. 2). Appropriation refers to the way in which different actors exercise agency when interpreting and adapting policies in their everyday context (Levinson et al., 2009; Sutton & Levinson, 2001). In addition, appropriation reflects the way stakeholders internalize the policy text in the real-life context. This makes visible “how the policy in practice differs from policy as conceived authoritatively” (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 16). Agency and appropriation support this research study to understand the way teachers have experienced language policies in Colombian rural areas affected by conflict.

In order to have harmony among the concepts mentioned above, the researcher used Narrative Inquiry (NI) as a way of understanding phenomena that reflects social and cultural practices. NI implies a narrative model of thought as a universal human activity and the first way in which humans make sense of experiences (Riessman, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988 as cited in Barkhuizen et al., 2014). NI is rooted in the philosophical foundations of different fields of knowledge and authors. For instance, experience, interaction and continuity are ideas taken from Dewey; while psychology offered its paradigmatic and narrative knowledge. Narrative structure and coherence of lives come from philosophy; continuity, improvisation, and uncertainties in life contexts were taken from anthropology; whereas medicine contributed with its ideas about narratives in life and

teaching practice (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Therefore, it is possible to say that NI embraces ideas from various areas of knowledge that have contributed to the construction of NI as a way of thinking and as a research methodology.

Additionally, NI refers not only to a perspective, as a way of viewing and understanding a phenomenon, but also refers to a methodology (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). NI as a perspective attempts to understand a phenomenon from three different dimensions: personal-social, temporal, and place as they represent the reality of the phenomenon (Barkhuizen, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). On the contrary, NI as a methodology implies collecting stories or narratives as they “are a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006. p. 477). This sections describes NI as a paradigm for understanding social phenomena.

Since NI stands as a paradigm for understanding social phenomena, it becomes a framework to explore issues in teaching and learning (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Bolivar & Porta, 2010; Mendieta, 2013). When giving importance to the discursive dimension of stakeholders, NI represents their experiences and understandings of issues in their teaching and learning world (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Bolivar & Porta, 2010). Accordingly, stories representing those issues are perceived as texts that are interpreted by participants and researchers to make meaning and construct knowledge about real life at schools (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Bolivar & Porta, 2010; Elbaz-Luisch, 2007 as cited in Mendieta, 2013).

Furthermore, Narrative inquiry has been used in education and different disciplines to conduct studies in different areas, without being called NI. As an illustration, in

education NI has been used for studies on curriculum, school reform, language teaching, teaching, professional development, among others (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In other fields of study, it has been used in anthropology, counseling, ethics, history, nursing, organizational theory, psychology, social work, and women's studies (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Adopting NI when carrying out studies in human sciences brings some advantages over other research perspectives. It lets researches make sense, represent, and interpret the world, or different phenomena that people experience (Sikes & Gale, 2006 as cited in Mendieta, 2013). Besides, NI allows researchers to explore stories and to get conclusions that represent the reality from the point of view of those who lived the phenomena (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Another advantage refers to the possibility of constructing knowledge that it brings to marginalized groups so that their voices can be heard (Canagarajah, 1996 as cited in Duff & Bell, 2002). Moreover, NI forces researchers to bury themselves into the stories that represent teachers' world, which facilitates the understanding of the phenomena (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). All in all, NI perspective supports researchers to understand schools and teaching practices as it explores interaction among teachers, students, parents, external actors, resources, teaching materials, and policies as well as interaction of teachers with themselves (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007 as cited in Mendieta, 2013).

Different studies using NI have been conducted in English language teaching field. For instance, a narrative study focused on teachers' knowledge of second language and curriculum was conducted in Colombia (Mendieta, 2011). The goal of this study was to explore teachers' knowledge about language teaching and learning process in relation to the

constant construction of curriculum. In this study the researcher found that the teachers' knowledge about language teaching and curriculum differs to each one as it is shaped by their learning, teaching and personal experiences. Another study was conducted in Hong Kong in order to know why two beginning teachers left their profession in the first year and then rejoin (Harfitt, 2015). The findings showed that their school contexts and personal experiences shaped their identity and encouraged them to make those decisions.

Bearing in mind that NI provides the opportunity to understand phenomena from the point of view of its participants, the present study adopted NI as the theoretical lens through which the researcher understood teachers' experiences about language policy in rural areas affected by armed conflict. For achieving this purpose, it was necessary to understand language policies in rural conflict zones from a narrative perspective. It implied to recognize that teachers' daily life decisions are influenced by different factors including their personal thoughts and feelings; past, present and future events; and their living context (Coulter, Michael, & Poynor, 2007; Mendieta, 2011). Following this line, and although narratives represented individual stories, they were understood within social, cultural and institutional narratives as they shape personal experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Accordingly, for achieving a deeper understanding of what narratives entail, it was necessary to consider three concepts that refer to three- narrative inquiry dimensions: personal-social, temporal, and place (Barkhuizen, 2008; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, Huber, Steeves, & Li, 2011; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Despite the fact that these three dimensions refer to different things, they must be explored and interpreted in an intertwined way.

According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006) The Personal-Social dimension includes two components. The first one integrates personal conditions represented by the “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions” (p. 480) of the participants and inquirer. In other words, the feelings, desires and thoughts of the participants in relation to the phenomenon under study. The second one refers to social conditions portrayed by different narratives and circumstances in which experiences or stories are developed. These conditions are informed partially by environmental, cultural, social, institutional, linguistic narratives and people surrounding the participant (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The Personal-Social dimension refers to the way participants interact with other people and how they are shaped emotionally by those relationships and by external forces. This dimension is important in NI as it reflects the internal conditions, feelings, hopes, moral dispositions of the participant as well as the relationship with other people that have their own feelings, intentions, purposes assumptions and points of view.

Temporal dimension refers to the past, present and future of people, places, things and events under study (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In other words, the time in which the experience unfolds (Barkhuizen, 2011; Clandinin & Huber, 2010) This means that issues are studied taking into account the connection with previous experiences and future expectations of the participants, and places where the phenomenon occurs. This dimension is relevant as it embraces the past, present and future of participants, and the context of experiences that could help the researcher to gain a better and deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Place dimension encompass different contexts and physical locations where experiences are lived (Barkhuizen, 2011; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). It implies to explore the actors, the environment, resources, conditions, and spatial location of those places where stories occur in order to know the impact of those places on the way participants experience the phenomenon under study. This dimension is relevant as all the stories occur in a place located in a physical setting defined by spatial boundaries with different intentions, purposes and points of view according to the character.

## **Research Methodology**

Considering that this study adopted a NI paradigm, it also followed a NI methodology in order to help the field understand how English teachers have made sense and experienced English language education policies in rural conflict areas. NI as a research methodology is the process to make meaning of stories in order to construct knowledge (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Clandinin, 2006; Creswell, 2011). This process is recognized as Narrative Knowledging and it implies “(co) constructing, collecting, analyzing, reporting findings and reading/watching/listening to reports” (Barkhuizen, 2011 p. 395). In this way, different actors contribute to the Narrative Knowledging process, the storyteller, the researcher and the reader of the report (Barkhuizen, 2011). NI includes some stages in which different participants support the construction of knowledge from narratives related to a phenomenon under study.

Every stage of the Narrative Knowledging process is relevant as they are intertwined and support the construction of knowledge. In the collection stage it is very important to be aware of the three dimensions that inform the story in order to get narratives that allow the researcher to understand the phenomenon under study (Clandinin, 2006). In this stage it is relevant to find an appropriate procedure to collect oral, written or multimodal narratives; and to think about the number of times that it is necessary to collect stories in order to make sure that it is appropriate for the study (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). The next stage implies the transcription of those narratives in order to start the analysis. By transcribing the narratives the researcher gets the field texts which embraces the information collected by researchers in a narrative study (Creswell, 2011).



For this specific method, the analysis of narratives is the unveiling of the “underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates” (Duff & Bell, 2002. p, 208). In this stage the role of the researcher is crucial as the interpretation should be done in a holistic way considering the three dimensions of the phenomenon under study. In addition, the researcher should define what the focus of attention will be. The focus could be the content of narratives, or the form of the story. The content of narratives refers to what is said, why, when, where and who said the story (Barkhuizen, 2011). On the other hand, the form of the story, which means the “structure, sequence of events, choice of words, coherence Etc.” (Barkhuizen, 2011. p. 402), refers to the narratives form. After deciding the focus of the analysis, the researcher starts the analysis process by reading the text fields and coding for finding themes. Then, themes are put into categories while patterns of association are contrasted among them in order to understand the process in a holistic way and start the writing stage.

NI as methodology includes different approaches and foci. In this study the researcher relied on studies of multiple narratives from the biographical approach as it included short stories from more than one participant, that were listened, transcribed and interpreted by the researcher (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Finally, this study focused on content of narratives as it was mainly oriented toward what narrative informs about participants and the event they narrated; and to produce paradigmatic typologies or categories (Barkhuizen, 2011; Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Polkinghorne, 1995). This means that the researcher collected, transcribed, analyzed, and reported narratives from more than one participant, giving relevance to the content of the narrative.

## **Participants**

In order to collect information about how teachers have experienced language policies in rural areas affected by armed conflict, it was necessary to follow the chain sampling criterion proposed by Patton (1990) since it was not easy to find teachers who fulfill the requirements. It means that participants in this study were contacted through people who knew people with the appropriate profile for the study. Finally, four participants, three men and one woman ranging from 36 to 58 years old, belonging to different rural conflict areas of Colombia were selected. Three of the participants experienced the language policies in different areas of Antioquia department and the other participant in Caquetá department. During the time this study was conducted, only one of the teachers continued working at the same school of his narrative.

## **Data Collection**

Considering the nature of this study, the researcher used oral narratives as well as document analysis to collect data. The process of collecting data started in February 2018 with the analysis of Language policies documents like *Colombia Bilingüe*, PFDCLE, PNI and PNB. It was necessary to have a clear idea of the language policies in Colombia. The data collection process continued from April to September 2018 with the Narrative interviews of four English teachers who had experience in teaching English in rural areas affected by armed conflict. In addition, it was necessary to look for information in different sources such as newspapers and websites in order to understand the context of the areas where the story of each teacher occurred.

### **Documentary analysis.**

The documents analyzed in this study included the national language policies like PNB, PFDCLE, PNI and *Colombia Bilingüe*. By analyzing these documents, the researcher could have a wider understanding of the policies, which means getting familiar with the official narrative of the phenomenon under study. This information was useful because it contributed to the understanding of the personal-social dimension as it represents the institutional narrative of the language policy. As stated before, while the researcher held conversations with the participants, it was necessary to look for information about the context where the teachers experienced the phenomenon under study. This search was done in different newspapers, websites, and books published by different organizations.

### **Oral narratives.**

The researcher collected narratives from four different participants who worked as English teachers in rural areas affected by the armed conflict in Colombia during the time the national government launched the mentioned language policies. To collect narratives, the researcher visited the participants where they lived or worked along a period of four months in order to hold the dialogues. It was possible to have three conversations with two of the participants, and only one conversation was held with the other two participants due to the difficulties of time and space. Oral narratives allowed to collect the field texts to understand how English teachers experimented and made sense of the language policies in these rural areas as well as of the different dimensions impacting their experiences.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In order to protect the participants of this study, it is important to remark that I designed a consent form protocol to inform them about the purpose of the study, their role

as participants, the duration of the narrative interviews, the no-reward and voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any moment without any risk. In addition, when reporting narratives and findings of this study, I used different names when referring to hamlets, towns and participants in order to keep confidentiality.

### **Data Analysis**

For the data analysis, the researcher followed an inductive approach. In this kind of approach, categories and themes emerge from the data collected, contrary to a deductive approach where explicit theories are imposed on data to test a previous hypothesis (Suter 2012). In addition, to analyze the text fields, he followed the six phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Regarding the analysis process, the researcher: 1) familiarized with the data by reading and re-reading the data, 2) coded the data to make by writing pithy label for relevant features of data related to the research question, 3) searched for themes by making relationships among the codes, 4) reviewed the themes to check that the themes reflect a holistic view of the data and that they relate in a convincing way to the data, 5) defined and named themes which means to identify the sense of the them and the story that it tells, and finally 6) wrote an integral element in which he included the vivid data and the analytic narrative.

Related to the data collection sources, the researcher: collected and analyzed around 11 hours of narrative interviews, transcribed, and familiarized with them by reading and re-reading. After that, he uploaded the transcription to N-Vivo Software in order to code the information to identify relevant topics in the narratives. Later, he wrote a profile to each participant with the aim of having a clear idea of the context and the experience of the participant. To get a more detailed understanding of the contexts, he looked for information

in different newspapers and websites. After having the profiles, the researcher repeated the familiarization step as he did not want to use just the codification done in Nvivo because in that way he would have chunks of data that may not be contextualized with the whole story. After doing the codification and having a wide understanding of the narratives, he defined some themes that reflected the participants' experiences in relation to the research question of this study in a holistic way. As a result, three themes emerged whose names refer to metaphors that represent the situations, conditions, and challenges along with the varied kinds of intra- and inter personal tensions that teachers face in rural areas affected by armed conflict. The metaphors that represent the themes refer to: *Tailoring a language policy dress that harms the users, raising a plant without enough compost to produce a wonderful crop, and Staying or leaving: A personal, professional, and emotional dilemma*. In the next section, I will present the profile of each one of the teachers who participated in this study.

### **Narratives.**

In this section, I present narratives of four teachers, Antonio, Ramiro, Moises, and Emilse, who experienced the language policy in different ways in the context of rural school areas affected by armed conflict.

#### ***Antonio.***

Antonio is a teacher who experienced different harsh situations while working in rural areas affected by armed conflict. His experiences as an English teacher occurred when he worked as a teacher of an education system specially designed for rural areas while he was studying a bachelor's degree in social studies. The program, which was implemented by a private organization using public resources, was called "Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial". Its main purpose focused on helping people in rural areas to finish high school.

Antonio visited two different rural schools during the week and he taught all subjects from 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade during two days in each school. In addition to the challenge of teaching all subjects from 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, Antonio had to teach all the grades in a single classroom at the same time, which made this experience more challenging. Furthermore, he had to follow some textbooks, chosen by the organization, to teach in each subject. In Antonio's narrative two themes become relevant to understand his narrative: getting to school, and being at school. They represent the challenges he faced as English teacher in rural conflict areas.

The context of La Esmeralda, one of the towns where Antonio's experience unfolds, encompasses difficulties to get to the schools and their precarious conditions, the presence of armed conflict, and the lack of appropriate infrastructure. These issues played a crucial role to make this experience a really harsh one. The rural area of La Esmeralda has been affected by forced displacement generated by the FARC-EP as a response to the fumigation of coca crops undertaken by the government and military forces (Semana, 2011). In addition, this town has suffered the consequences of different violent situations generated by the conflict among groups like FARC, ELN, National Army, and paramilitary forces. One story that illustrates situations that teachers could face in this area refers to two soccer balls filled with explosives that were found on the way to a school located in a hamlet. Although the bombs were installed near the school, teachers and students had to work and study during two days under these circumstances because the national government did not authorize teachers to cancel their classes (Semana, 2015). Besides, the rural area of La Esmeralda was highly affected by the installation of antipersonnel mines (El Mundo, 2013; Verdad Abierta, 2013). The graph below shows the number of victims generated by antipersonnel mines (MAP) or ammunition without detonation (MUSE) used by different

armed actors affecting civil population and teachers as they had to walk long distances through path where they could find those explosive devices. The figure 1 shows how La Esmeralda stood as the fourth municipality of Antioquia department with the highest number of victims of MAP and MUSE from 1990 to 2012.



Figure 1. 10 towns with the highest number of victims due to antipersonnel mines in Antioquia. The names of the towns were changed to keep confidentiality.

In Antonio's story, the process of getting to schools remains as a relevant issue because it portrays the difficulties rural teachers in areas affected by armed conflict experience every time they travel to their schools. As Antonio lived in the capital city of the department because he was pursuing his bachelor's degree, his trips implied to travel around 5 hours by different transportation means. In addition, every time he traveled to the

schools, he faced a risky situation because he had to deal with the painful traveling conditions, the threat of explosive artifacts, and the presence of armed groups.

Traveling conditions for many rural teachers embraces a severe adventure. Because they have to take different means of transportation which prolonged their arrival to the schools. In addition, many rural schools are located in areas where the only way to get is by walking. To arrive on time to the classes, they have to left their houses the day before the class because some of them have to travel from their family's home to the nearest town to the school. If they do not have their own means of transportation, next day they have to wake up around 4 am to take a transportation mean for traveling to the nearest place to school. Finally, they had to walk in order to get to school and teach classes. In Antonio's story, as he worked for a private organization following a particular teaching method he had a different routine during the week, he had to teach classes all day, he spent the night in a farm near the school because there was not any hotel in the surrounding area. The following day, he taught classes in the morning, and he left the school around 11:00 am because he had to walk around two hours to get to the other school that he had to visit. In the second school, he taught classes during two days and then he travelled to the capital city.

Besides the time rural teachers spend getting to schools, many of them had to avoid dangerous situations they find on the routes. These situations embrace the severe conditions of traveling by bus in rural areas, the armed groups that the find while walking, and the explosive artifacts they could find while getting to the school. In Antonio's narrative the aforementioned situations play a crucial role since as he mentioned in different conversations.



I worked in a Hamlet where I spent three hours by bus and two hours walking to get to the school. The school functioned in a family house because the previous school had fallen down and nobody had built it again. Working in that school was a challenging experience for me because I had to walk long distances [...] The first time I worked in La Esmeralda, the school that functioned in a kind of “kiosk”, I had to walk 3 hours [...] I had to be ready at 4 am in the park to take the bus. When I got into the bus, I noticed that it was loaded with gasoline. [...] I asked about the reason the bus was loaded with gasoline, and they told me that they used it to produce cocaine. [...] I was worried because it was very dangerous to travel in that bus. I thought that if somebody light a cigarette or we had an accident we would die. Then, I had to get off from the bus to walk through a path in the mountains to get to the school. Different people suggested me to follow the path and to avoid looking for shortcuts. In that line, if there was a puddle or pool, I had to pass through the puddle. If I wanted to pee or to defecate, I had to do it in the route. If I found something attractive, I did not have to touch it. All the time I was thinking about all the suggestions I received because in that area there were a lot of antipersonnel mines. I remember that one time I was walking to Bellavista with a person from the government. We found a pool and I was going to pass by a detour, the other man shoved me because I was going to step on a mine. [...] In addition, you could find different kind of people but you did not know if they were guerrillas, paramilitary forces or other kind of people, so I tried to avoid talking with them to be safe [...] The first time I met the guerrilla, I saw many people in the other side of the mountain. I had to walk and cross the river five times because I could not look for shortcuts ... suddenly, I met with only one of the people I had saw. The man called me by my name, he told me what he knew about me, he knew a lot of things about my life. it was the second time I was in that school [...] When we finish the conversation I started to walk and I thought that they were going to kill me. I was not able to look back during all the walk. (Narrative interview, March 3 and April 4, 2018, researcher’s translation).

Traveling in rural areas affected by armed conflict represent a shocking and dangerous situation because teachers are exposed to many situations in which they could die. It shows that in many teaching experiences different factors have to be considered when being a teacher in those areas. In most of the cases language policy is the least important issue to consider because in those contexts, teachers and students have to take care of their integrity since they can experience a confrontation between different armed

groups or as in Antonio's story, to be in danger due to a bombardment as he expressed in one of the conversations.

I was walking to a school in a different Hamlet when I heard the explosions. I was worried because I was alone. I started to walk faster to find a house. Then, I met some of my students. I asked them about the explosions, and they said that the army were bombing a guerrilla campsite. Fortunately, they said that the place was far from where we were. When we arrived in the school, I was worried. I wanted to look for shelter under the desk but my students were making fun of me. At that moment, I thought that it was not a good idea to work in those areas (Narrative interview, March 3, researcher's translation).

Antonio's story portrays the reality of many rural Colombian teachers who experience the difficulties to get to their schools. They have to walk long distances through paths that are not appropriate to walk, and that become worse during the raining seasons. Besides, rural teachers have to deal with the uncertainty of finding different armed groups which is dangerous because in the armed conflict context in Colombia, it is easy to become target of any armed group. Finally, teachers in rural conflict areas are exposed to the possibility of being injured by antipersonnel mines or any other explosive artifact. The aforementioned working conditions make difficult to find suitable English teachers who want to work in those areas. However, despite the difficult conditions most of the teachers in rural conflict areas do their best to contribute to the education process of people in those ignored areas.

Related to Antonio's experience being at the school, different aspects need to be considered since they represent the challenges he faced as the person in charge of teaching all the subjects to students from 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade at the same time. These challenges come from different sources including the government negligence, poor educational

infrastructure, lack of resources, and a curriculum that is inconsistent with the Colombian context.

Rural areas, especially the ones affected by armed conflict, seem to be ignored by the national government since their students do not have the opportunity of counting on teachers devoted to each one of the subjects. This issue reflects the government's negligence towards these areas because it impacts directly the perception people have about rural education since our country usually measures the quality of education in terms of students' results in a national standardized test that is applied every year to all students in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade all around the national territory. Year after year, rural schools do not get good results because they are measured in the same way as their peers in urban areas disregarding that rural schools have a particular context where they lack a lot of learning opportunities.

Teaching a class in regular classrooms that are easily found in urban schools seemed to be unrealistic in the rural areas where Antonio worked because the national government did not care about investing in appropriate school facilities. These conditions made the teaching and learning process even more difficult because people could not access basic and fundamental resources such as boards, books, labs, computers, and other ICT tools. In one of the schools where he worked, for example, he had to take advantage of the support of his students and to unleash his creativity for arranging the place that they had to use as a classroom:

The school in that area was made of four sticks and a roof. There was a bathroom but there was not water service, so it was much better not to use it. [...] There was a blackboard that two students had to hold it if I wanted to write on it because the classroom did not have walls. As a consequence, when there was a lot of fog, the textbooks got wet (Narrative interview, March 3, 2018, researcher's translation).

Inappropriate infrastructure in rural makes part of the wide array of factors that affect teachers' experiences, and their education process. How can teachers plan an English class if they have insufficient resources to call their students' attention and to enhance their motivation to learn? This question remains relevant because we are in a time in which the government measures both teachers and students in terms of the scores they get in national tests.

In rural areas affected by armed conflict, it is not very common to find teachers who focused on just one subject. Very often they have either to teach different subjects or in most of the cases they have to teach all the subjects to all of the students. That is why it is common to find teachers who studied other disciplines different to English who are in charge of teaching this language. In some cases, those teachers try to learn the subjects in which they are not strong in order to plan good lessons. However, when they have to teach the English course, they face a lot of challenges since they do not have the resources, the time, nor the support to learn it. At the end, some teachers decide to teach vocabulary while others decide not to teach English at all because they do not know how to teach it, the language policy is irrelevant in their context, and the government does not offer the appropriate conditions to do it.

I always focused my teaching practices on the basic areas. I taught all the subjects but I spent more time studying the main subjects. For example, as I was studying social sciences, I studied a lot of math and chemistry. [...] In the English class we translated the textbook because I did not know English. Consequently, My students and I used the dictionary to understand the instructions of the activities in the book. [...] From my own experience, English was not important. I had to teach it but it was not relevant in this education process (Narrative interview, March 3, 2018, researcher's translation).

In this experience, it is noticeable that although there was a top-down language policy demanding Antonio to teach English, in real life he decided not to teach it due to the circumstances of his context. In this way, it is evident that Colombian language policies remain irrelevant and unrealistic to rural areas affected by armed conflict because the policy does not take into account the lack of human capital, teaching resources, inappropriate infrastructure and other conditions that prevent its implementation in such areas. At the end, all rural teachers played their role of final arbiter, they made decisions based on the circumstances they experienced in their teaching context and based on their linguistic background. Following the same line, the language policy remains as an isolated speech disconnected from the reality of schools in rural conflict areas.

Language policy does not become relevant because there are no real conditions for teachers to have professional development courses. Colombia is not going to be bilingual because teachers are not bilingual. Consequently, I cannot teach English if I do not know the language. [...] I think that students should have better opportunities to learn the language, if we consider that during seven years that I worked in those areas, I only met 2 teachers that knew English which is disturbing. [...] Besides, in rural areas there are not enough resources to teach the foreign language. And we do not have enough English knowledge to prepare a good class (Narrative interview, April 4, 2018, researcher's translation).

All the situations experienced by Antonio during the time he worked in those rural areas become relevant to understand that teaching English in Colombian rural area do not refer just to lesson planning or to choosing the most appropriate material to teach the class. It encompasses more relevant and complex factors that stand as crucial for being alive and safe.

In Antonio's experience as an English teacher in rural areas affected by armed conflict, it is possible to identify some dimensions that help us to understand his experience

in a holistic way. Something relevant in his experience refers to his feelings about working in those areas. His stories are permeated by fear and anguish. Concerning his English teaching experience, it is evident that although there were some institutional policies or narratives, he made his own decisions in order to respond to the requirement of teaching English. In this way, I could say that Antonio was a teacher who did his best to support his students, who could not teach English because language policy was incongruous with the contexts of the schools. In the next story, I present the experience of Ramiro. His testimony helps us to picture a Spanish teacher who had to teach English in an area controlled by a guerilla group. He had to face rejection toward English due to the dominant political ideology in the area, the lack of resources, and the low motivation of his students.

***Ramiro.***

Ramiro was an English teacher who worked in rural area of Caquetá department. He taught in a primary school located in the urban area of a small town. Then, he worked as an English teacher in a high school located in a rural area of the same town. He was from Nariño department and he never planned to be a teacher nor to live in Caquetá. But he ended up teaching there for 16 years, from 1995 to 2011.

Caquetá has served as shelter of different armed group and drug traffickers who have taken advantage of the absence of the State, the precarious economic conditions, and the remote populations to create a scenario of violence, especially in rural areas (CNMH, 2013). Furthermore, Caquetá department has experienced different social conditions and stages of conflict through its history. First, it was controlled by guerrilla groups and drug traffickers. Then, paramilitary forces arrived to the area, which made violence worse in rural areas (CNMH, 2013). It was even more dangerous to circulate in the places where

different armed groups had influence and civilians became involved in the conflict since armed actors occupied houses and schools (CNMH, 2013; Semana, 2009). This armed conflict caused more than 1860 families were displaced from their homes from 2002 to 2012. Finally, teachers as relevant actors in rural areas were affected in different ways by this conflict. Teachers' union of the department reported more than 100 hundred teachers killed (CNMH, 2013). The figure 2 represents some of the members of the teachers' union of the department that had been murdered by national army, paramilitary forces, and guerrilla groups. Most of the teachers were killed due to their active role in their community or to their political beliefs. The photo was taken in one of the visits to the department.



Figure 2. Murdered teachers in Caquetá.

Ramiro arrived in Caquetá during the 80's as a random result because he never planned to travel to Caquetá, nor to be a teacher. Although he had just finished high school, there was a shortage of teachers in the department and this explains why he worked as a primary school teacher without having studied at the university. Then, he decided to study a bachelor's degree in linguistics and literature at the same time he was working because he

wanted to enjoy better job conditions. When he finished his studies, he took a test to be assigned as a permanent teacher. As Ramiro passed the test, he was assigned to work in a rural high school. His experience represents the story of many rural English teachers who teach English no matter they have studies in a different subject. In this case, Ramiro pursued his studies in Linguistic and Spanish Literature, but he had to teach a different subject which represented a defy for him:

I arrived in Caquetá without any intention of working as a teacher, I came here due to the spitefulness. When I arrived here, I had finished high school, but I did not have a diploma to work as a teacher. However, the government needed teachers, and they offered me the opportunity to work as a primary school teacher. [...] I arrived to the school as a licensed Spanish teacher; however, the principal told me that they needed an English teacher. As I studied some English levels at university, he told me that I had the profile to teach that subject. However, I was not prepared because I did not study to be an English teacher. Nevertheless, I accepted that condition because I needed the job [...] I started to teach English in 6th and 7th grade. Then, after June I had to teach English from 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>. [...] It was a difficult job. I liked English but I was not prepared to teach the language to all the students. (Ramiro, Narrative interview, June 24, 2018).

Considering that Ramiro studied to become a Spanish teacher, there is no reason to accept that he ended up teaching English. It is evident that the national government does not know the variety of contexts merging within our country, and ignores that all the language policies have been launched without a careful planning. Antonio's narrative proves that there is a mismatch among the policy, the human capital, the educational infrastructure, and the teaching resources in rural areas. However, as many rural teachers do not have another option, they have to become English teachers and learn empirically to teach English in rural areas affected by armed conflict.

During the time Ramiro worked in that high school, he experienced the difficulties faced by rural teachers to find an appropriate place to live due to the location of the schools.



In Figure 3 we can see that rural contexts do not offer many possibilities to find a place to live because schools and hamlets are surrounded by mountains where armed actors could find shelter easily. Fortunately, as the rural institution where Ramiro started to work was a boarding school, during the week days he lived at the school. On weekends, however, he traveled to the town where he had his house, the town was located one hour by a dirt road from the rural school.

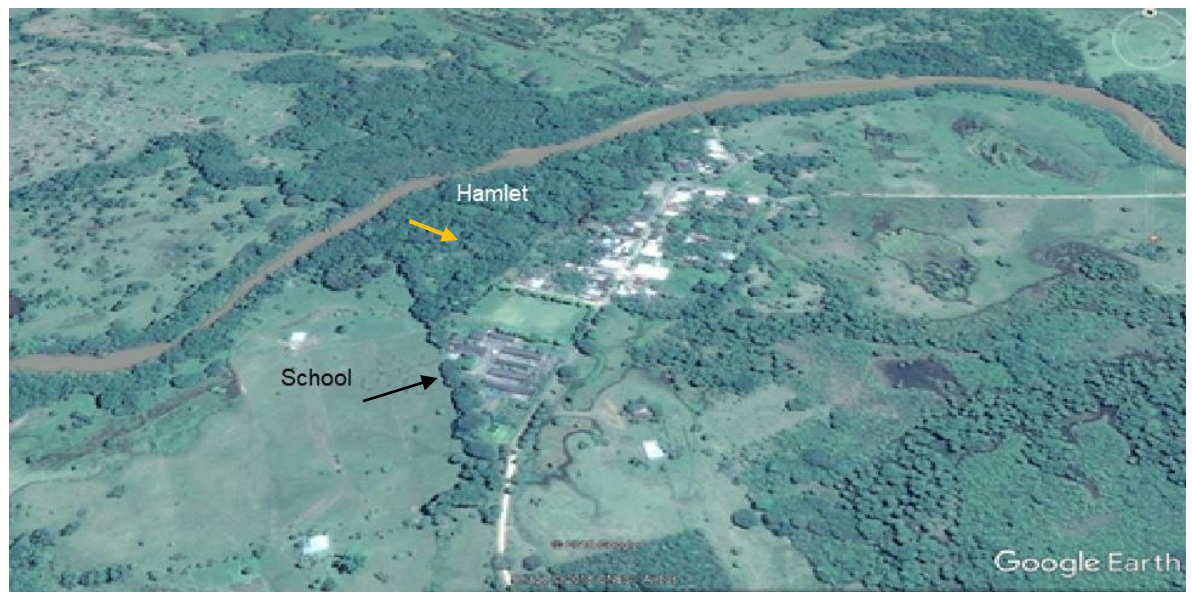


Figure 3. Photo of the school and hamlet where Ramiro worked and lived during 16 years

Teaching English in rural schools where armed actor exercise agency is not an easy job for teachers because these areas are impacted by different tensions generated by such groups. A relevant tension refers to the political ideologies surrounding the area. Teachers have to identify the ideologies in their working area in order to avoid becoming a target of

armed actors. In the case of English teachers, there are different people who reject English because they consider that it is a way of colonization that represent the language of a powerful capitalist country. In the hamlet where Ramiro worked, there was an armed group who completely controlled the area, this condition brought many challenges to Ramiro as he expressed in one of the conversations.

In that area there was not any kind of institutional authority. The authority was the people who had weapons. In this case, the authority was the armed group FARC. As it was only one group in the area, we lived in a kind of calm and people let them to have the control and manage the area [...] There was something I totally rejected, it was when guerrillas entered the school to invite the students to join their organization. However, I could not say anything against that situation because I may get involved in trouble. [...] English was not attractive in the school because people thought that learning English was directly linked to a political ideology. Besides, they considered that they were accepting that foreign countries had control over us if students learn English. That is why, I found a lot of rejection toward English among students, teachers, and the community in general (Narrative interview, June 24, 2018, researcher's translation).

Teaching English in rural areas affected by armed conflict demands to recognize that in Colombia there are different social diversities with particular needs, which require to be approached differently. In this case, while the government demanded to teach English in all the schools of the country, Ramiro had to start a campaign in order to persuade students, teachers and inhabitants about the opportunities the English language offers in a globalized world, instead of associating this with a specific political ideology.

Another factor that impacts teaching and learning practices had to do with the students' context and their project life. Most of rural students did not see the immediate application of English in their context because the content of English is not contextualized to their needs. In this way students did not consider English as a relevant class that may be useful for their life. Consequently, teachers have to look for strategies to attract his

students' attention towards the English class. English teachers, especially those in rural areas, have to deal with a decontextualized language policy that tries to homogenize the teaching and learning process of English. However, many teachers appropriate the language policy in order to contextualize it to their context and to teach English meaningfully to their rural students. Otherwise, they would be disregarding the local context by teaching an unknown culture and uncommon vocabulary to students in rural areas:

Caquetá has been impacted by the production of cocaine and at that time this phenomenon was very common in our context. People had the possibility to have money, and students from my school were used to earn and manage their own money. That is why they did not find English attractive because they were thinking about getting money by producing cocaine. [...] Accordingly, I had to prepare more engaging and attractive classes. I used crosswords, puzzles, and others attractive activities. I taught them basic things of the language because I preferred to teach them something that they could learn. [...] English is addressed to a context that they do not know because it is different from their own reality. English is like Spanish: if you do not find it familiar, it will not be relevant for you. That is why I decided to include vocabulary of tools that they used in their context (Narrative interview, June 24, 2018, researcher's translation).

Rural conflict areas are impacted by the presence of various armed groups with different ideologies and goals. The tensions generated by the presence of these groups affects the role of the teachers because they could easily become a military target since their role is considered relevant and visible. Besides, it is very common that teachers do not oppose or reject to armed groups' request because they have guns. In that way, sometimes they are label as helpers of any of the groups. Ramiro experienced this problematic situation when a different armed group arrived to the town where he lived on weekends as he mentioned in one of the conversations.

Considering that in the hamlet where the school was located there was only one armed group, FARC, I was not worried. [...] When paramilitary forces arrived to the town where I lived on weekends, they arranged a meeting but it was never

carried out. We never knew the purpose of the meeting. However, somebody told me that there was a paramilitary member who was asking about me because he thought that I was a helper of the guerrilla. Fortunately, different people told him that he was wrong (Ramiro, Narrative interview, June 24, 2018).

Teachers have to deal with the consequences brought by armed groups in conflict which in many cases create false enemies. In Ramiro's experience, he became a kind of military target to the paramilitary forces because he worked in a hamlet controlled by a guerrilla group. As armed groups consider that the school is a place where illegal groups can find new members, paramilitary forces thought that he supported the guerrilla group from his role of teacher. They do not consider that he worked in that school because he needed the job, because he did not have other option, or because he wanted to support his students rather than the armed groups.

Also, it seems noteworthy that mandating or creating a policy is not a synonym of accomplishment. Ramiro's experience shows the lack of support that rural English teachers receive to understand and to appropriate the language policy. Consequently, rural teachers work as loose wheels given that most of them do not know the language policy or they do not know what to do with it since they face harsh conditions in their contexts. Besides, they do not have appropriate resources to teach his classes. In the next paragraph I show Ramiro's experience about the lack of support by the government.

We received few support from the government in terms of professional development courses. I attended only two courses, one related to "Guía 22" and the other related to Bunny Bonita. However, after those courses we did not receive any extra support. They did not go to the school. [...] Related to the resources, I have to say that they were almost null. I only had a stereo player and some cassettes (Narrative interview, June 24, 2018, researcher's translation).

Ramiro's experience illustrates the lack of English teachers in rural areas, the rejection towards English as it was associated to a political ideology, and the impact of armed actors in the education process as well as in the life of teachers. In addition, it shows the lack of clarity and support by the government when launching the national language policies. In the next story, I will present the experience of Moises, who was an English teacher who worked in a rural high school with students who suffered the consequences of the armed conflict. This story as well as the previous are permeated by the challenges of teaching English with few resources in an area where it was not relevant. Finally, it addresses the desire of the teacher to look for a better place to work.

***Moises.***

He was an English teacher in a hamlet of the Eastern Antioquia department for twelve years. He grew up and studied a bachelor's degree in English and Spanish in Chocó department. Then, this teacher arrived in Antioquia looking for better job opportunities. His job experience took place when the national government had launched the most relevant language policies in the country. Although, he did not suffer direct violence, his experience remains relevant because he worked with students who suffered the consequences of violence. When this study was carried out, Moises was studying a master program in foreign languages teaching and he felt that it was time to look for another place to work.

The town where Moises worked passed through different stages due to the armed conflict. From the 70s to the 2000s, the town experienced armed conflict in a hard way. However, when this study was being conducted, the town was known as a very touristic place. The history of this town was marked by a hydroelectric project that implied to build a damn, and to move the town to a different place. This generated that people started a

strong civic movement as a response to problems brought by the hydroelectric projects. The main problem referred to the movement of the town to a new place, because the area (6.365 hectares) where the town was located were going to be flooded (“Historia de El Peñol,” 2015; Rendón, 2017). People had to leave their houses and move to the new town that was built by the company in charge of the dam. In addition to the civic movement, guerrilla groups arrived in the town for reinforcing people’s complaints against those hydroelectric projects. Then, guerrilla groups took control of the area during one decade. After that, paramilitary forces arrived to take back control over the region (Agencia Prensa IPC, 2009). In order to achieve that goal, the latter group started bloody practices including selective murders, forced displacement and armed confrontation (CNMH, n.d.). As it is usual in these situations, people in rural area were the most affected because many of them were killed and others had to abandon their homes and moved to big cities or to different towns (Agencia Prensa IPC, 2009).

In 2006, when Moises arrived to work in that area, the armed conflict among the guerrilla groups and paramilitary forces was ending because armed groups moved to other places due to the increase of tourist activities in this region. Moises found that most of his students were highly affected by the violence generated by the armed conflict. However, he never thought that this condition would impact his experience as English teacher in that school.

As Moises professional career focused on English or Spanish teaching, he considered that English represented an array of opportunities to prepare his students to take advantage of possibilities that life could bring them in terms of academic or sport achievements. However, he experienced what most of the teachers in rural areas affected by

armed conflict experience, inhabitants did not consider English as relevant. Most people in those areas consider that English is irrelevant because their cultural context and their life project is not attracted to academic matters. In addition, the family context of students does not encourage them to study because their parents do not consider education as relevant for their life. Therefore, at the beginning, Moises as well as in Ramiro's story conducted a motivation stage to call his students' attention.

The first part of the classes was oriented to show them that English was not just a subject. On the contrary, that it was a living language that can be used in different situations. As there were some students that practiced sport, I tried to show them that English could be useful for them because probably they would represent our country in international events in which they could need to use English. [...] The education level of the families of the students is low. Most of the parents of my students did not finish the primary school. So, they do not perceive English class as relevant for them. In addition, there is a cultural crash that impact the good intentions that you, as teacher, have because you realized that English is not important in that context. [...] In general, students' ideas for their future is to work in a factory, farm or in a store (Narrative interview, August 12, 2018, researcher's translation).

Language policies in Colombia lack real opportunities for students to learn English since they have just focused on launching standards, curriculums and textbooks but they have not taken into account the different contexts in Colombia. Following the same line of thought, all the efforts done by teachers do not materialize in students' learning because contexts do not bring possibilities to practice or to consider English as relevant. It could be said that government's efforts to produce standards, curriculums, and textbooks to homogenize the English teaching all around the country refers to a mistake because diversity of Colombian's contexts is being disregarded.

Teaching English where people do not want to learn becomes a situation that requires a holistic strategy that should be considered since the design of the language

policy. In fact, the government urgently needs to structure a plan that encompasses different aspects of the social life in which citizens have the possibility to use this other language. For example, to provide job opportunities that require the use of the language, to offer physical spaces where the language might be used, to conduct initiatives to stimulate the use of the language. However, since the government have not considered any of the aforementioned aspects, English teachers are the ones who try to contextualize and motivate students to learn English. Anyways, they find it extremely challenging because they cannot deal with such structural aspects that have to be considered by the national government. As a result, teachers try to make English classes attractive by teaching them common vocabulary in rural areas or including ICT resources, but they face the lack of teaching resources in rural areas as Moises expressed in one conversation:

I tried to teach them vocabulary related to their daily life. For example, the name of the tools they use in the farm. In that way I taught them a contextualized English class [...] Teaching resources are limited in rural areas. In my school I had some resources because we had done different activities and sacrifice [...] We have a pack of four English books, one of them is only for vocabulary. However, we only got one book per grade. So, if we wanted to use the book we had to take photocopies. I had to take the photocopies from the town to the school and students had to pay them [...] All ICT resources are important in the English class. However, I think that if we had internet access we could take more advantage of those resources. We hope that someday the government decides to invest in rural areas if they want that rural students have the same possibilities that urban students have (Narrative interview, August 12, 2018, researcher's translation).

Working in rural conflict areas implied to experience armed conflict in a direct way or to work with people who have suffered the consequences of the war. These areas should be considered in a special way because their inhabitants have suffered a lot of pain, and perceive life in a different way. Considering that rural areas affected by armed conflict have particular conditions, language policies should not be designed as a homogenization tool



between urban and rural areas, on the contrary they have to be designed by doing a real need analysis of the contexts to know students' needs and possibilities to offer a meaningful language policy that triggers students' skills and that support the community in the transformation of their context as it was mentioned in Moises' story when dealing with the shyness of his students.

When working with people who suffered armed conflict, it is relevant to consider that they can be very shy. [...] I am talking about the English class. They did not take the risk of participating in the class, they could know the answer but they preferred not to participate in the class. [...] When we arrived in the school, we noticed that it was necessary to create a project to integrate the strengths and the purpose of improving their self-confidence because as some of them had lost some family members due to the conflict. [...] We guided the project toward the self-confidence to demystify the perception that being a farmer means that they are ignorant and that they are not good students. [...] During the last twelve years, we have observed that our students have improved their academic and sport skills (Narrative interview, August 12, 2018, researcher's translation).

Besides the mismatch between the content of language policies and the social aspects of rural areas affected by armed conflict, teachers in rural areas affected by armed conflict feel exclusion from language policies because their contexts were not considered during the designing process. They feel that they were not taken into account when socializing the policies, and they did not receive appropriate resources or support to appropriate the policy. In the best scenario, they know about the existence of the language policy that asks them to teach English but they do not know what the language policy represents. This is evident in the last language policy "*Colombia Bilingüe*", since no more than 180 schools located in touristic and safe areas were chosen to participate in the policy. Considering the previous requirements to participate in the policy, no one of the schools in

rural areas affected by armed conflict could make part of this policy. During one of the conversations held with Moises, he expressed his feeling toward this issue:

Something that I consider critical refers to the lack of socialization of the language policies in the rural areas. Teachers in rural areas ignore that there is a language policy because there is not a strategy to share the policy with them. When a teacher knows something about the language policy is because of his or her curiosity, and desire to improve his/her teaching skills. [...] The problem with the language policies in Colombia is that the government has adopted foreign models without doing any adaptation or modification to use the policies in our contexts, especially in rural areas. Language policies are designed in a top-down way as a tool to homogenize English teaching in the country but authorities disregard that there are different social contexts with particular needs depending on the area. [...] When there are courses like the immersions, I consider that they do not take into account rural teachers because it seems that teachers from urban areas are preferred because they are the ones who are selected to participate in this programs (Narrative interview, August 12, 2018, researcher's translation).

During the 12 years he worked as an English teacher, he received few professional development courses promoted by Antioquia department. One of the courses was guided by native speakers who taught him to design more attractive English classes. In Moises's narrative, he seems to buy into the native-speaker discourse sold by language policies. In that discourse Colombian English teachers stand as the responsible of the failure of language policies and native speakers stand as the ones who can solve this situation. Considering Colombian contexts, it is pertinent to question if bringing a native speaker who does not know about teaching in rural conflict contexts is a pertinent way to offer professional development to English teachers in rural areas affected by armed conflict.

There were some courses guided by some native speakers in which they taught us to implement attractive activities in the class to motivate students. In that way we felt that government was supporting us. Unfortunately, we did not have more courses (Narrative interview, August 12, 2018, researcher's translation).

Another discourse that Moises and many English teachers have bought into, refers to the way they perceive themselves as English teachers apart from the role of the “experts”. Teachers conceive that the experts as the only ones who should create the language policy and tell language teachers how to do their job. The discourse about experts refers to a double-edged sword since on the one hand, it is good to have the support of different people when teachers have doubts about the policy. On the other hand, this discourse disregards the knowledge that teachers have about the practices in real life contexts because they are portrayed as non-experts. This condition does not let teachers to feel empowered to appropriate language policies in their contexts:

In the last English program, they introduced different resources like some textbooks and Bunny Bonita books [...] However in some cases you receive some materials, but you do not receive any instruction or course to understand how to use or to integrate those resources in the classes. I consider that it is important to have the support of the experts to understand some resources and take advantage of them. I am almost sure that if you asked to rural English teachers about the way they have integrated the basic learning rights, they are going to say that they do not know how to integrate them in the class. The same happens with the suggested curriculum (Narrative interview, August 12, 2018, researcher’s translation).

English teachers cannot continue naturalizing “native-speaker” and “expert” discourses because it implies to accept that we are not able to deal with the teaching of a second language in our contexts. And that we need to turn to foreign people “native-speakers” or “experts” to teach a second language in our country by following their own interests and their agendas that do not match with the conditions, needs, and reality of our contexts. Besides, those discourses bring the possibility to blame teachers for the failure of the policy and to implement some strategies that require a lot of money while disregarding areas as the ones described in this study.

As it is stated in the present study, rural areas affected by armed conflict embrace harsh conditions that demand specific strategies when teaching a foreign language. A crucial factor to consider refers to qualification of English teachers. Rural areas affected by conflict are not considered by the government when offering professional development courses. Consequently, as social conditions in these areas do not bring the possibilities for teachers to use the foreign language, and the government does not offer qualification courses to teachers, they could start a regression process in which they feel that their English as well as their teaching skills start decreasing. Considering the abovementioned, a wide number of English teachers do not consider rural conflict areas as a good place to work, and the ones who work in those areas look for urban schools to work because they consider that they would have better job conditions and they could have more opportunities to improve their English teaching practices by taking some courses or studying a postgraduate program as it emerged in Moises story:

I don't agree when they expressed that teachers are the responsible of not having good results, but they do not consider that there is a lack of opportunities for teachers to be qualified [...] It is not a secret that I have tried to look for a transfer to a different area. I considered that it is necessary to look for a better place to work if I want to continue improving my professional career [...] I need a different job that brings me more possibilities to obtain experience and to improve my English skills because I feel that in this moment I am stuck [...] In this moment, I am in a regression process. If I had not started to study the master, the regression process would be more evident now. Fortunately, I started the master, that is why I feel alive, with the desire of learning more things. This experience has been meaningful [...] Studying the master has been difficult because of my working Schedule. For example, I arrive home around 3:30 or 4:00 pm because sometimes there are extra activities to do. After that, I have to prepare my dinner and the necessary stuff for the next day, and finally I have to study. It is important to mention that if you did not study until around 2:00 am, you could not do all the activities demanded by the master program, then I had to wake up at 5:30 am to go to work. For me, it has been an odyssey. However, I think that the sacrifice that I have done has been necessary and useful. One of the things that I desired is to find a school where I can work in one of the two shifts, in the morning or in the afternoon because in that way I will

have time to do other things like taking courses to improve my teaching and English skills because this is the field that I decided to focus on. (Narrative interview, August 12, 2018, researcher's translation).

Moises experience shows the challenges and difficulties teachers face when a decontextualized language policy arrives at a school where students who have suffered the consequences of the armed conflict have to study English. Besides it shows the lack of support that rural English teachers experience from the government. In addition, it reflects that some English teachers repeat the discourses that language policies have brought to our field, in which, Colombian English teachers are portrayed as the non-experts and guilty of the language policies failure. Finally, it reflects the desire of many English teachers for finding a better place to work due to the challenges they face in those areas. In the next story, I present Emilse. She was an English teacher in a rural primary school who suffered armed conflict directly. At the end she had to move to a different area because of some threats.

***Emilse.***

She is a retired English teacher. She worked as a primary school teacher during 10 years in a hamlet in Antioquia department. Both the hamlet and town were highly affected by armed conflict. Then she had to change her working place because of threats from one of the armed groups. She was a very sensible teacher who cared about problems and conditions her students experienced in rural areas affected by conflict. When she worked in the rural school where this story occurred, she faced different challenges related to the English teaching, the social context and the armed conflict.

The town where Emilse experienced the conflict and the language policies portrays a dangerous but usual mix of armed groups. On one hand, it had strong presence of paramilitary forces in the urban area because it was near to the highway to an important city. On the other hand, guerrilla groups had strong presence of in rural area. Having two different armed groups fighting for controlling the urban and rural area of the town (CCEEU-Nodo Antioquia, 2017), generated that violent actions such as extortions, kidnapping, selected murders, and armed confrontation became common in both rural and urban areas.

As rural areas affected by armed conflict do not stand as an appealing place to work, many teachers work in those areas because they really need the job and they do not have any other opportunity. For most of the teachers, working in rural conflict areas encompasses an array of changes that in some cases highly impact them since they have to leave their families, and to start a new life in an unknown place where they face harsh conditions. In most cases, they have to live alone in the school. Consequently, they have to deal with the difficulties to get to schools, the solitude, and the anguish of living surrounded by armed groups.

I started to work in that hamlet because there was a school without a teacher. So, a friend of my family, who had some kind of power on the area, asked me if I wanted to work in that school, and I accepted because I needed the job. [...] I had to live at the school due to the distance and the lack of a good means of transportation to travel every day to my home. [...] It was difficult because I did not know where I had arrived. I was alone, and faraway of my family [...] On Mondays, I have to get up early and travel to the town. Then, I had to take the bus to the hamlet. The journey took about 1:20 and 1:40 hours. I arrived to the school around 6:30 am. (Narrative interview, July 14, 2018, researcher's translation).

Colombian Rural education follows a different methodology than education in urban areas. However, many rural English teachers familiarize with this methodology, only when they start to work in rural areas because they do not have previous possibilities to do it since people usually do not consider rural schools an appealing place to work. That is why, the teaching methodology in rural areas becomes a challenge. Following this methodology, rural teachers had to teach all the subjects to students from pre-school to fifth grade simultaneously, which is very demanding because it means to teach six different classes at the same time in the same classroom. Another difficulty teachers face refers to the conditions to teach the English class because they find really difficult to prepare engaging classes due to the lack of appropriate resources as Emilse's story shows.

In that school I had to use the New School methodology, which is very different to the traditional school. I had to teach all the subjects to all the courses. It was challenging but it was a beautiful experience [...] In the same classroom you could have students from preschool to fifth grade [...] There are students who learn and finish the textbook faster than others. So, the education has to be more flexible [...] Although I knew the language, it was difficult to teach English because we did not have a syllabus nor resources for the classes. That is why in most of the cases I prepared something very simple for the English class. For the other subjects, I had text books. (Narrative interview, July 14, 2018, researcher's translation).

Living and working in rural areas affected by armed conflict could represent a challenging and traumatic experience for teachers due to conditions in these areas. Some teachers have to live under inappropriate conditions because they have to live in a room of the school that is adapted to have a bed, a stove and a bath. However, rural conflict areas do not have this room in good conditions since they are ignored areas and people are focused in different topics. Consequently, it is common that rural teachers live in schools where

they cannot communicate with their families since there is not computers, technology or any mobile signal; schools without energy, without doors or other basic services.

The school was very ugly. The first time I saw the school, I wondered... how am I going to live there? It was not in appropriate conditions to live. It was full of damp, it smelt bad and the roof was in bad conditions. Besides, the school was located in a mountain and it was surrounded by precipices (Narrative interview, July 14, 2018, researcher's translation).

In addition to the conditions of the place where teachers live while working in rural conflict areas, armed groups play a relevant role in such contexts. Teachers have to deal with the presence and power that armed groups exert in those areas. Most of the time teachers feel uncomfortable, and in danger because armed groups, who have their own interest, kidnap, kill, and threaten people who are not in agreement to them because they are perceived as enemies. This factor makes that most of teachers feel anguish and desire of fleeing the area. At the end, some teachers could become military targets for the reason that armed groups sometimes used the school as shelter. Or because teachers take part in the conflict to protect the community. As a result, armed groups threaten the teacher because they want to control every aspect in the area.

At different moments paramilitary forces stopped the bus and ask us, passengers, to show them our Ids. Many times I had to see how they killed people because they considered that they were helpers of the guerrilla group. Although I did not take part on any of the groups, I was worried because somebody could invent something about me and I could be killed. [...] At the end, the situation in the hamlet was more complex. On the one hand the paramilitary forces trying to take control of the hamlet and by on the other hand the guerrilla resisting that attacks. Considering that situation, I had to see many dead people. Sometimes me and my students had to protect ourselves under the desks because the armed groups had confrontations near to the school. Sometimes on of the groups entered to the school looking for shelter. Finally, one day the guerrilla group gave a pamphlet to different members of the community in which they expressed that I was supporting paramilitary forces because I let them to enter the school or let them to cook near to the school. Somethings they were saying were true, I let them to enter the school because they



had guns. Imagine what could happen if I did not do whatever they asked me to do. So I felt that they threatened me and I asked for a transfer (Narrative interview, July 21, 2018, researcher's translation).

In this story language policy again is considered as a decontextualized and irrelevant policy that disregards diversity of contexts in rural areas affected by armed conflict since its designing process. Contents in the language policy are not relevant in the context of rural conflict areas because students have a different lifestyle, they do not have possibilities to apply what the teacher explain them in the English class, and they consider English as irrelevant factor for their life. In addition, teachers do not receive any kind of resources or qualification support from the government. At the end, teachers who were not taken into account when designing the policy, are the ones who execute and experience the language policy in real life contexts.

I think that English does not receive the attention it demands. All the time they are talking about English, bilingualism but I do not know how we are going to be a bilingual country, they told me that I had to teach English but they did not give me a training course or resources to teach English under the new school methodology. [...] However, we have to teach English from preschool. But, what do we have to teach?... at the end, English class depend on each teacher. Although I knew the subject, it was difficult to teach English because I did not have the appropriate resources for the class which affected the class [...] I tried to show them different lifestyles. However, I tried to do it in a careful way because I did not know the reaction of the armed groups if they noticed what I was talking with my students. I share with them different ideas about life because I felt ashamed knowing that they did not have a different project life. I told them about the importance of the study [...] It was difficult because the context of the family was oriented towards a different thing. So, for them is easy to continue the same path of their parents (Narrative interview, July 14, 2018, researcher's translation).

In Emilse's story, we can notice the defy of being a rural teacher because in most cases they have to leave their families, they do not have appropriate job conditions, they face dangerous situations, and they have to deal with an irrelevant language policy that disregards their contexts. Furthermore, teachers have to abide the government blaming

them for the failure of the language policy while ignoring that the results are the consequence of adopting foreign models without doing a pertinent need analysis of the diverse contexts we have in Colombia, and launching language policies without a pertinent strategy.

In this study I try to answer the question about how English teachers in rural areas affected by armed conflict have experienced language policies. To answer the question, I have presented the narratives of four teachers: Antonio, Ramiro, Moises, and Emilse. The narratives show that they share similar issues, like the irrelevant and decontextualized language policy, the lack of support, precarious resources, and the dangerous situations teachers face in those areas. However, their narratives show that they experience the armed conflict in a different way depending on their contexts and personal backgrounds.

In Antonio's experience different issues emerged and remain relevant. They include the challenges to get to the school, and the challenges at the school. However, in Antonio's narrative we cannot notice fear about working in those areas since he was not a permanent teacher, he could be moved to a different town in any moment. In Ramiro's experience, we notice the consequences of an unplanned language policy since it disregards some relevant aspects when implementing a language policy. Besides, he experienced the tensions of teaching English in an area where an armed group with a strong political ideology had the power. In Moises' experience, I present the challenges of working with students who have suffered armed conflict directly. Besides, the feelings about working in a school where it seems to be difficult to improve in the professional career. Finally, in Emilse's story we can recognize the anguish she experienced for leaving her family in order to live, and to work in

an unfurnishing school surrounded by armed groups in conflict which made her to face many shocking situations.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the four narratives shows three themes: the first theme *tailoring a language policy dress that harms the users* refers to the challenges and difficulties the language policies have become in rural areas. The second theme *raising a plant without enough compost to produce a wonderful crop* refers to the government's requirement for having good English results in standardized test while disregarding the lack of investment in rural conflict areas. The third theme *staying or leaving: a personal, professional, and emotional dilemma* embraces the feelings that teachers experience when working in rural conflict areas. Unfortunately, these feelings are marked by their desire of finding a better place to teach.

### **Tailoring a Language Policy Dress that Harms the Users**

During the last twelve years, the Colombian government has launched different education policies that ended up being just text in paper because they do not achieve their goals due to the unawareness of the diverse contexts. For example, Colombian language policies that have tried to improve English level of Colombian students as a response of certain demands that other countries and international organizations have imposed on Colombia (Usma, 2015). Besides, due to the harsh situations that armed conflict brings to education, the Colombian National Ministry of Education launched a education policy represented by a text book called *Lineamientos de formación docente para la atención diferencial y pertinente de niños, niñas y adolescentes en condición de vulnerabilidad, situación de desplazamiento y en contextos de violencia* (Colombia. Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2011). The purpose of this policy focuses on offering teachers who work with vulnerable population, some orientations, tools, and concepts that support them

in the inclusion of teaching practices that promote human rights in order to create a school where vulnerable population finds protection.

Although there is a policy focused to support the vulnerable population, and narratives show that teachers concern about supporting their students, narratives also portray the dilemma they face because language policy is decontextualized and irrelevant in their working area and it does not support them to help their students. Besides, teachers consider that supporting their students implies to talk not only about the tools, places, animal or vocabulary from the farms but also to talk about the conflict and possibilities to change their context or to have a different life project. However, teachers feel afraid about including those topics in their classes because they do not want to be targeted by either armed group.

The lack of a well-planned language policy becomes more evident since the government launches different booklets to guide education in rural areas affected by armed conflict, but authorities have not designed a pertinent strategy to offer real possibilities to make policies function in the diverse contexts where teachers work every day. On the contrary, the government assumes and promotes the discourse that all English teachers have access to basic services, that they do not face risky situations or harsh conditions to carry out their job. Promoting that discourse the government disregards that working under harsh conditions of rural conflict areas possess a lot of stress on teachers who end up experiencing a shocking experience.

Considering the aforementioned issues, this study expands what Correa and Usma (2013), and Correa's et al., (2014) claim in their studies. They expressed that the language policy designed followed in Colombia fits into a bureaucratic model that disregard different

stakeholders. This research study shows that Colombian language policies not only disregard different stakeholders but also disregard different social contexts. It makes that language policies become irrelevant in rural areas affected by armed conflict where teachers risk their lives while trying to teach meaningful content to their students.

Following this line, English teachers in rural conflict areas recognize the challenges they face. Most of them do not know the language, do not receive appropriate professional development courses, and do not have appropriate resources to teach an English class (Correa & González, 2016). In addition, they have to deal with the risky task of working in areas where becoming a victim of war is easy. Considering their working conditions, rural English teachers work like loose wheels. They experience language policies according to their beliefs, and possibilities. Nevertheless, they do their best effort to teach English in the contexts where they work.

This study expands what Cárdenas and Chaves (2013) reported about the lack of well-prepared English teachers in a big city, which remains as a serious issue that affects the language policy appropriation process in public schools. Considering that the present study focuses on rural areas affected by conflict, the landscape is even worse than the one found in the study mentioned before. In rural conflict areas, the lack of suitable planning for the language policy becomes evident since in these areas there is a lack of human capital because English teachers do not find attractive to work there. Besides, the policies do not bring them possibilities to improve their English teaching skills. At the end, English teachers in these areas have to make sense of a language policy that is non-sense for their contexts. As an illustration, in Antonio's narrative, he stated that it is not possible for him to teach English, or to develop some English skills in his students because he did not know

the language. Considering the previous example, it is alarming that only after 12 years of different language policies, and thanks to the peace agreement between FARC-EP and the national government, the government is taking some actions to guarantee that students in rural areas affected by armed conflict have a suitable teacher focused on teaching English.

In rural conflict areas, students have to wear a language policy dress that does not suit them because it was not tailored considering their needs. The armed conflict affecting rural areas shapes social dynamics and determine inhabitants' life projects, which usually differ from the goals set by the language policies. Findings of this research study show that there is a mismatch between the language policy and the socio-cultural realities of rural conflict areas because students consider that English is fruitless in their context due to the lack of possibilities to apply and practice the language. They do not care about those goals of being able to communicate in English with people from other countries to make Colombia become a more competitive country under the lenses of globalization, because it does not represent their daily context life. All the previous findings reinforce what Bonilla and Cruz (2014) express about the mismatches between the language policy and the socio-cultural realities in the classroom. In their study, the authors found that students in rural areas consider English as unimportant for their life because they are focused on farming. This situation sets the need to understand those social dynamics before designing a language policy in order to avoid the mismatching between the language policy and the diverse contexts.

Teachers in rural conflict areas consider that their role should be oriented towards the support of their students in terms of values and moral education instead of academic achievements because most of the students do not have in mind to study a professional

career. This finding reinforces Usma's (2015) idea about how socio-cultural conditions influence teachers to adopt a nurturing approach to support their student's needs. Indeed, teachers' experiences show that there is a gap between their perception about their role as English teachers and the one set by the language policy. From the language policy, English and teachers are perceived in an instrumental way in which the most important is to teach vocabulary or grammar (Guerrero, 2010b). On the contrary, teachers in rural conflict areas demand a contextualized language policy that let them to teach English in a way they can support their students in a nurturing process to help them to overcome the violence generated by the armed conflict.

As a conclusion to this theme, this study reinforces Guerrero's (2010a) idea about the difficulties of implementing the language policy all around the country. According to Guerrero, the government does not consider different conditions such as armed conflict and poverty of some areas when designing the language policy, which makes almost impossible to implement the language policy in the way it is designed. Narratives in this study suggest that Colombian language policies cannot continue ignoring the armed conflict and the voices of teachers who experience that conflict in rural areas. It cannot continue being homogenization policies that impose English as the language that assures better job conditions. Furthermore, English in rural conflict areas should not be measured following the same parameters of urban areas because it is unfair. Language policy results are measured by numbers taken from a national standardized test that students have to take at eleven grade. The results of that test determine how much students learnt during the school process and the possibilities they have to get some benefits to continue tertiary education. Analyzing the rational of the Colombian education system, the national language policies



contribute to the increase of the gap between rural and urban areas since students in rural conflict areas have less opportunities to learn than their peers in urban areas.

### **Raising a Plant Without Enough Compost to Produce a Wonderful Crop**

In rural areas affected by armed conflict, national language policies have been experienced as a poor attempt to improve students' English skills since policies do not tackle basic requirements of diverse Colombian contexts, and do not offer appropriate resources for teachers and students. The lack of an appropriate communication channel with teachers, a clear plan, a wide offer of professional development courses, and the inequity of the actions taken to benefit some areas while disregarding others, configure the scenery of fruitless language policies.

The lack of communication with English teachers stands as a simple, but dangerous mistake because teachers will do nothing to respond to the language policy if they do not know the policy, and its implications. This situation is not new since Correa et al. (2014) found that in the implementation of the language policy in Antioquia department, teachers did not receive clear information about language policies. Although teachers do not receive clear information, it is very common that the government blames them for the low students' English performance in the national test since teachers are considered as the technicians responsible for the learning no matter the conditions of their working context (Guerrero, 2010b). However, this affirmation is refutable because teachers cannot be responsible of the English learning since there is a clear mess in the design and implementation process of the language policy. Besides, is visible that they were not taken into account in the socialization of the policy as they expressed that they did not received clear information about the different language policies that the government has launched in the country. On

the contrary, in most of the cases teachers are just demanded to teach English (Correa & Usma, 2013).

However, teaching experiences in this research study show that English teachers in rural areas affected by armed conflict without being aware of that, they adopt a post-method condition (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) since they do not follow a particular method or what the policy incoherently demands in those contexts. On the contrary, they make decisions to deal with the social, academic and administrative constraints in order to bring their students relevant content for their reality. It is to say that those teachers try to build a bridge among the policy, the reality of their students, and their own circumstances.

Considering the previous issue, this study expands what Hernández and Faustino (2006) expressed about how methodologies used by teachers are affected by factors like the large classes, the number of hours for the class, and the conditions of the equipment. Taking this into consideration, English teachers in rural conflict areas demand a pertinent language policy that support them in their teaching practices by considering the conditions and needs in their contexts since a language policy become words in paper (Shohamy, 2006) if teachers, who are the final arbiters (Menken & García, 2010) do not know it, understand it, or do not have the appropriate resources to appropriate it.

This study reinforces what Guerrero (2010a) reported in a premonitory action concerning the increase of the gap between rural and urban areas through the implementation of an English-Spanish language policy. Consequently, findings in this study reveal that Colombian language policies have contributed to the increase of the gap between rural and urban areas through the unequitable distribution of resources and strategies to improve English around the country. English teachers in rural areas affected by

armed conflict feel that they are not included in the language policy because all the resources, professional development courses, and efforts brought by the language policies are focused on urban areas (Bastidas & Muñoz, 2011; S. Bonilla & Cruz-Arcila, 2014).

Inequality generated by the language policies becomes evident when the policies are analyzed in the real life practices. In the last language policy *Colombia Bilingüe 2014-2018*, the target focused on a group of schools located in urban touristic areas since one of the requirements the schools have to achieve to be selected was to be in a safe area. Some of the benefits received by those Schools include the accompaniment of a native speaker from the fellowship program, the receipt of all the resources introduced by the government, the professional development courses, and all the support from the government. On the contrary, rural schools affected by armed conflict that clearly do not fulfil the requirements to be part of the focus group did not receive support. Or as in Ramiro's story who worked 16 years in a rural high school, he received unappropriated support since he could attend two usefulness courses for his context. This situation is reiterative as Correa et al (2014) claim that the professional development courses offered by local authorities were not appropriate for the teachers contexts. According to Moises' experience, working in a rural area is a factor that determine the quantity and quality of resources or benefits from the English program teachers can receive. Considering this, it remains evident that through the implementation of the language policies, rural areas affected by armed conflict have experienced discrimination as they are not perceived as valuable places to invest efforts in order to improve the English teaching, which implies to the enhance of the gap between these and urban areas.

Another issue that highly affects language policy appropriation in rural conflict areas refers to the information and communication technologies (ICT's), and infrastructure. This finding reinforces what Bonilla and Cruz (2014) reported about how the lack of technological resources negatively impacts the achieving of the language policy goals. In the last national language policies, ICTs play a relevant role in the learning process since technologies have positively impacted education, and there are new possibilities every day for integrating ICTs in the English class. However, in most rural areas, especially the ones affected by the armed conflict, the integration of ICTs in the English class is a remote possibility because teachers do not have enough resources to achieve with this goal. This situation impacts students' learning process given that teachers suffer the absence of devices to expose their students to attractive input for learning the target language.

The national government owes a debt to rural areas affected by the armed conflict since they have been historically ignored. Such areas lack basic services, facilities, professional development courses, proper need analysis of the context and an accurate improvement plan. In fact, the three participants went under harsh conditions because they did not have electricity, well-built and furnished classrooms, appropriate bathrooms, internet connection, pedagogical material, and government support. Accordingly, it becomes relevant that the official policy makers consider the real contexts of the schools in our country when designing the language policy.

In summary, language policies in rural areas affected by armed conflict are experienced in a challenging, distressing, and hopeless way. The lack of: an accurate language policy design, government support, teaching resources, human capital, and possibilities to have pertinent professional development courses makes that language

policies remain as a poor effort to improve English in our country. On the contrary, policies bring obstacles and inequality, which contribute to the increase of the gap between rural conflict areas and urban areas.

### **Staying or Leaving: A Personal, Professional, and Emotional Dilemma**

When working in rural conflict areas, a mix of emotions and experiences easily emerge and they end up impacting teachers in different dimensions of their life. Teachers deal with the predicament of staying or leaving. They want to stay in those areas due to their desire of supporting students who live in places where education, health and other basic services are not common. However, they also want to leave due to their desire of being in a different place where they do not suffer the conditions and challenges that language policies and rural conflict contexts bring to them.

The present study expands Bonilla and Cruz-Arcila's (2014) study since they address the socio-cultural complex features of teaching a foreign language in rural areas of Colombia, but they do not address issues of armed conflict. On the contrary, this study focuses on socio-cultural features of rural areas, particularly the direct violence suffered by these regions. Going beyond general characteristics of the socio-cultural contexts allows to find that English teachers in rural conflict areas risk their lives on their daily basis since they have to live in a school surrounded by armed actors. Lastly, some teachers have to live alone at school, which generates feelings like solitude, insecurity and repentance because they have to leave their family and live in a place where they do not feel safe due to those harsh conditions.

Narratives in this study reflect that being isolated in a rural area where there are few possibilities of attending professional development courses forces teachers to leave the

area. Actually, teachers consider that working in those areas does not represent a valuable opportunity to achieve professional development. Their testimonies show that many teachers working in rural areas experience a regression in terms of linguistic skills since their working contexts do not offer possibilities to use the language. Last but not least, some people suggest the creation of some teachers' network to practice the language, share pedagogical strategies and develop collaborative projects with their students. Nevertheless, geographical conditions stand again as the main obstacle to materialize this endeavor (Bonilla & Cruz, 2013).

This study contradicts Bonilla and Cruz's (2014) study in terms of the need of professional development courses as a way to improve teaching practices. These authors found that English teachers in rural areas prefer to gain knowledge from their direct work within the community rather than attending decontextualized formal training courses offered by the government. In contrast, narratives collected in this study show that English teachers demand formal training and professional development courses as a way to avoid a regression process or to stuck their professional career.

In spite of all the difficulties teachers find when experiencing the language policy in rural areas affected by armed conflict, they consider that working in areas where people lack different basic services is a vocational and an enriching experience. They feel that supporting those students is the proper way to focus education in rural conflict areas, which clearly positions them as advocates of the nurturing approach mentioned by Usma (2015) even if they do it unconsciously. For example, the narratives in this study display the varied actions expressing self-sacrifice, vocation and engagement form the part of teachers towards their students. These educators talk about commitment, happiness, and satisfaction

they experience when supporting their students to learn and to build a life project apart from the violent legacy of their context.

This research study reinforces Correa and Usma's (2013) ideas expressing that language policy design fits into a bureaucratic model, in which the voices of different stakeholders as well as the real needs of rural areas affected by armed conflict are disregarded. Consequently, this study suggests that language policies are not relevant in rural areas affected by armed conflict because the real need of different contexts where the policies arrive are ignored. This issue was challenged by Roldán and Peláez (2017) when they question if language policies proposed by the government are designed considering the rural areas, or if they are just a poor attempt to show that the government is trying to improve English. At the end, it seems that language policies in rural areas of Colombia end up just being dead letter rather than being the gate opener promised by the government.

Considering previous ideas, this study confirms the demand of a critical socio-cultural approach to design language policies in Colombia as Bonilla and Cruz (2013), Bonilla and Cruz, (2014), Correa & Usma (2013), and Usma (2015) have claimed. Narratives in this study reveal that teachers in rural conflict areas demand commitment to their contexts. Besides, they request a language policy that supports them to address their own and their students' needs. Adopting a critical sociocultural approach to design language policies allows to create a pertinent language policy for real life contexts. Consequently, having suitable conditions in rural areas affected by armed conflict, teachers would not need to look for a better place to work; on the contrary, more teachers would be willing to do their best in such marginalized areas.

Finally, including a sociocultural approach to design a language policy would contribute to avoid the creation of irrelevant language policies. Language policies cannot continue being more of the same stuff that the government has introduced since they have become an obstacle for most rural teachers as they do not know how to appropriate them and the National Ministry of Education has not got the expected results. As an illustration, booklets like *Guía 22*, *Basic Learning Rights*, and *Suggested Curriculum* are available for teachers but they do not know how to interact with them. Therefore, teachers ask for appropriate resources and appropriate professional development experiences for improving their language skills and possibilities to teach English in a pertinent way for the contexts where they work.



## **Final Thoughts**

Despite the relevant findings of this study, it has one limitation related to the distance and time to collect more narratives, to visit different regions and to establish a more confidential relationship with some participants. Bearing in mind that the participants in this study lived in different areas of the country, it was not possible for me to have more than two talks because I had to travel from 2 to 18 hours to visit them. In addition, I tried to hold some conversations by cellphone and internet but it was not possible to conduct an enriching conversation because the kind of interaction with the participants did not allow us to engage in an interesting dialogue and they ended up postponing the conversation.

Related to the implications of this research study, during the time it was being conducted, the national government was running out a special call to hire English teachers in rural areas affected by armed conflict. Drawing on the findings of this study, it is remarkably necessary to think about different possibilities to avoid mismatches among the contexts and the language policy in rural conflict areas. Therefore, this special call sets the need to conduct further research about how the policies are being experienced by all stakeholders in the mentioned areas. The peace process between the FARC-EP and the government requires to pay special attention to educational processes in violent regions. Besides, it is relevant to explore possibilities on promoting and supporting teachers to begin a process in which they recognize themselves as policy makers and final arbiters of the language policy to positively impact their contexts.

Recommendations resulting from this research study embraces that national education authorities recognize the diversity of contexts and their needs as well as the role teachers have as policy makers and final arbiters of the policy. Giving importance to the

wide array of contexts implies that our local knowledge regains its importance since borrowing foreign models on how to teach, learn and assess English has not worked so far in our country. At the end, it would imply that teachers' voices should be heard and taken into account throughout the policy design process given that they are the ones knowing first-hand their own contexts.

In conclusion, English teachers in rural conflict areas have experienced language policies as an obstacle since they disregard the harsh conditions brought by the sociocultural contexts. It is necessary to include the voices of different stakeholders, to conduct an appropriate need analysis, to offer contextualized professional development courses, to provide schools with pertinent pedagogical resources, to furnish accurate educational facilities, and to create a pertinent strategy to make English teaching relevant in those areas. In other words, this sets the need to embrace a critical sociocultural approach when designing a language policy that suits rural areas affected by armed conflict.

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## APPENDIX A: COVER LETTER

Medellín, \_\_\_\_\_

Cordial saludo,

Mi nombre es Carlos Danilo Restrepo Méndez, soy docente de cátedra de inglés de la Universidad de Antioquia y estudiante de la Maestría en Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de las Lenguas Extranjeras de la misma universidad.

Como parte de los requisitos de la maestría, debo realizar un estudio de investigación sobre cómo los docentes en el área rural que ha sido afectada por el conflicto armado en el departamento de Antioquia han vivido la política nacional de inglés propuesta por el Ministerio de Educación Nacional. Dicho estudio hace parte de los requisitos de la Maestría.

El proyecto incluirá como participantes profesores que hayan tenido la oportunidad de enseñar inglés en zonas rurales afectadas por el conflicto armado. La selección de participantes y contextos se hizo teniendo en cuenta que son ustedes quienes nos pueden brindar la información necesaria para responder al propósito de esta investigación.

La realización de este estudio incluirá recolección de información a través de entrevistas. Es importante aclarar que la identidad de los participantes se mantendrá anónima y que la información recolectada será leída únicamente por mí y por mi asesor, el

PhD. Jaime Alonso Usma Wilches. Sin embargo, los hallazgos de dicho estudio podrán ser publicados en revistas nacionales o internacionales y en conferencias relacionadas con el estudio de políticas lingüísticas.

Su participación en este proyecto no implica ningún riesgo. Por el contrario, usted recibirá el beneficio de manifestar su opinión frente al tema, lo cual puede ayudar a pensar en estrategias que mejoren la planeación de políticas lingüísticas en los diferentes contextos.

Si desea recibir mayor información sobre este proyecto puede contactarme al correo [danilo.restrepo@udea.edu.co](mailto:danilo.restrepo@udea.edu.co) o al celular 322-2174018

Si desea participar en el proyecto, por favor lea y firme el formato de consentimiento adjunto a esta carta.

Atentamente,

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CARLOS DANILO RESTREPO MENDEZ

## **APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMAT**

UNIVERSIDAD DE ANTIOQUIA

Escuela de Idiomas

Maestría en Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras

Formato de Consentimiento de los participantes y código de ética

Usted ha sido invitado (a) a participar en un proyecto de investigación sobre la manera en que los y las docentes de inglés han vivido la política nacional de inglés en zonas rurales afectada por el conflicto en el departamento de Antioquia. Dicho proyecto tendrá una duración de aproximadamente 4 meses e incluirá recolección de datos a través de entrevistas que tendrán una duración de aproximadamente 1 hora.

Es importante precisar que su identidad y la de su institución serán protegidas con el uso de seudónimos y que la información recolectada será usada únicamente por los investigadores. Sin embargo, si un participante en particular desea que su contribución sea destacada y, por lo tanto, se use su nombre en citas textuales o agradecimientos, le solicitamos muy comedidamente escribir las iniciales del primer nombre y del primer apellido al final de este formato. Además, los resultados se emplearán con fines académicos y podrán ser publicados en revistas nacionales o internacionales y en conferencias relacionadas con el estudio de políticas lingüísticas.

Su participación es voluntaria y en cualquier momento podrá retirarse del proyecto sin que ello implique ningún tipo de sanciones hacia usted.

No se espera que esta investigación le implique ningún riesgo. Por el contrario, su participación le permitirá manifestar su opinión frente al tema, lo cual puede favorecer el proceso de diseño e implementación de las políticas lingüísticas.

En caso de preguntas, por favor contactarme al correo [danilo.restrepo@udea.edu.co](mailto:danilo.restrepo@udea.edu.co) o al celular 3222174018

Con su firma entendemos que voluntariamente acepta participar de este proyecto.

Nombre del participante:

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Firma:

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Fecha:

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\_\_\_\_\_ autorizo a ser citado (a) directamente en publicaciones haciendo uso de mi nombre.