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Teachers' Stories about English Language Teaching in a Public Primary School

By

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Abstract

This biographical-narrative study (Benson, 2005; Bolivar, 2012; Corman, 2013; Rivas, J. I., Hernández, F., Sancho, J. M., Núñez, C., 2012; and Rivas, 2014) addresses the conversations between nineteen female preschool and primary homeroom teachers of a public school located in Ciudad Bolívar in the southern part of Bogotá, Colombia and me, as the coordinator and main researcher. From now on, I will use the pronoun *we* in italics when referring to my companions and me. *We* discussed childhood, teenage, education, and work having as a main topic English, its learning, and its teaching. *We* had pair conversations, which were video recorded, transcribed, converted into stories, and compiled to make a book called *¡El inglés entre nos…!* Through grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin,1990), I grouped emerging, emotive, and recurrent events reported in *our* stories to comprehend what these stories revealed about *our* ways of teaching English. Thus, the interpretation focused on the stories' content (Barkhuizen, 2011; Bolívar, 2012) and what *we* shared about English. *Our* stories served as a metaphor for a walking path to access a hypogeum[1]; and in this sense, these stories represent both the source of data and the sites of co-theorization where thinking other-wise (Dussel, 2012; Fals Borda, 2017; Guerrero Arias, 2010; Meyer, 2013; Palermo, 2015; Suárez, 2011) were the lenses of interpretation. A decolonial option (Mignolo, 2011) was adopted to conduct this research to trace back *our* learning and working trajectories related to English to understand *our* being, knowing, and doing of the teaching of the language in *our* school. *We* share multiple ways of knowing that coexist (Santos, 2010). Therefore, the theoretical pillars to comprehend *our* stories rely on the coloniality in primary public schools' quotidian lives, neoliberalism that denies *the other* in public schools, coloniality, and neoliberalism that institutionalizes the subjugation of public kindergarten and primary school teachers. Then, I use the hypogeum called *our* stories, as a metaphor to depict how *our* learning and working trajectories regarding English intertwine to generate epistemologies about English teaching in a public school. *Our* stories unveiled that having English lessons in primary school was a privilege; memorizing and cheating to pass exams were common practices in high school; English subject was a requirement in tertiary education; and English tests became barriers to continuing graduate studies. Similarly, *our* employment trajectories had three moments: firstly, it was found that some institutions pretended to offer bilingual

[1] The subterranean area in ancient buildings. Please refer to annex 1.

education; secondly, prior to the schools' merge, when teachers' pleas were ignored and classes were distributed keeping in mind friendship and teachers' talents, instead of working loads; the third moment showed that the teaching of this language provokes fear of making pronunciation mistakes, teaching poorly, and/or not being excellent teachers. The analysis evinced how *we* teach English to preschoolers, first and second graders, but *we* tend to avoid third, fourth, and fifth grades. *Our* learning and teaching trajectories allowed *us* to share *our* own epistemologies at five different levels: (i) *we* know *our* needs to teach and learn this language; (ii) *we* highlight the teachers' qualities who are dedicated to teaching English to children; (iii) *we* question the state policies regarding teaching methodologies despite *our own* doubts about the matter; (iv) *we* recognize the barrier of language proficiency exams for accessing to graduate courses or transfers; (v) *we* could review the curriculum, design lessons together and create meaningful spaces to practice listening and speaking in English. Finally, I advocate for policy makers and educators in B.Ed. or graduated programs targeted at teachers of children to broaden their views about English teaching in preschool and primary education of the public sector.

Key words: Coloniality, neoliberalism, personal epistemologies, public primary schools, teachers' stories, teaching English language to children.

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Dedicatoria

¡A la memoria de mi papi!

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Introduction

Aura Aleida Jiménez Sánchez, Caro, Celmira Torres, Claudia Patricia Rodríguez Sánchez, Emary, Enny Johanna Chaves Enciso, Jeimmy Gómez Chaparro, Jenny Viviana Téllez Vargas, Lulú, María Emma Gómez Ramírez, Maispin, Marlen Galvis Fraile, Maru, Nidia Inés Barbosa Silva, Otilia, Rubiela Hernández Mesa, Sandra Milena Camargo, Sandra Patricia Rincón Vargas, Yami[2], who are homeroom teachers from preschool and primary of the morning shift, and I[3] met for the first time a decade ago in a public school with two branches: UE School and MC School[4]. These schools are situated in two low-socio-economic-status neighborhoods of Ciudad Bolívar in the southern part of Bogotá, Colombia. All of them accepted the invitation to accompany me (coordinator-researcher) in this fascinating and intricate journey to charting *our* personal, academic, and professional lives concerning English teaching.

This is a biographical-narrative study (Benson, 2005; Bolivar, 2012; Corman, 2013; Rivas, J. I., Hernández, F., Sancho, J. M., Núñez, C., 2012; and Rivas, 2014). Thus, *we* conversed in pairs[5], and some of *us* wrote autobiographies, and shared photographs, through the Microsoft Teams conference tool because of the pandemic. Every conversation was video and audio recorded, transcribed, and transformed into twenty stories. María Emma Gómez motivated me to create and publish a book. Upon reading a draft of her own story, she took pictures of the pages and asked my permission to use them. She explained somewhat shamed, that she wanted the Spanish version because she knew I would translate it into English for this thesis. Then, *our* stories were compiled, and two beloved friends[6] of mine reviewed and provided feedback to refine the texts. The edition process was followed until *¡El inglés entre nos…! - English among us!* was published and launched in a special event to honor

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[2] Most of the names of homeroom teachers, my companions, are their real full names.
[3] I use the pronoun *we* in italics, and its possessive forms when referring to *us.*
[4] I did not write the real names or full name of the schools by the thesis director's advice.
[5] *Our* conversations were in Spanish. Hence, all the contributions are my translation. To keep the flow of the reading I will not use the phrase *my translation* next to excerpts of the stories.
[6] Jimmy Leonardo Rodríguez Rivera holds a B.Ed. in Modern Languages (Spanish-English), and a MA in English Didactics; and Carmen Elvira Rodríguez Flores is retired and worked for public schools as a head for three decades.

companions involved in this journey. Each story is a piece of *our* existence, which is why *we* can appreciate *our* ways of being, knowing, and doing concerning English teaching.

The title of each story compresses the most relevant event or idea concerning English, its learning, and its teaching. It can be said that through story writing the resulting texts became avenues of self-interpretation (Bolívar, 2012, p. 18). These stories revealed how *we* have experienced the learning of English and its teaching. They are arranged chronologically, and the interpretation process was done by reading the stories multiple times, paying attention to life stages such as childhood to identify convergences and divergences. Primarily, the focus was on finding recurrent and emotive narrated events, which were impressive, memorable, and meaningful to *us* concerning the learning and teaching of English. These events were grouped following some procedures of the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin,1990). Interpretation focused on the content of the stories (Barkhuizen, 2011; Bolivar, 2012) and what was discussed about English learning and teaching throughout phases of *our* lives. This is to say that; *our* stories are households of co-theorization about learning and English teaching. When *we* co-narrated *our* stories, theories about the learning and teaching of English are situated within them, as suggested by Mignolo (2011, p. 251) who posited that "theories are where you can find them." According to Maturana (2007), everyone engages in theory creation as an expression of intelligence. This research journey is compared to the walking road to access the hypogeum, where I explored in detail each story by constant reading to identify the hidden layers interwoven on what they portrayed about English teaching.

In Colombia, elementary school teachers are not required to have a degree specifically for teaching English; however, they are required to teach this language. According to the Law of 1994, within article 23 (7), the teaching of a foreign language is mandatory in the country. English is the most commonly taught language within the national scope. In schools and universities where I have worked, discussions about policies regarding English teaching, or the underlying ideas behind these policies are seldom initiated due to being considered taboo. Questioning policies or simply discussing them often triggers concerns associated with socialism or communist. Furthermore, education has propagated the idea that the only valid knowledge regarding science and technology is rooted in Europe and the USA (Dussel, 2018; Maldonado Torres, 2007). Even more, Guerrero-Nieto and Quintero (2021) posit that “the adoption of neoliberal models in education are here to stay. Day by day, those discourses and

practices become more and more naturalized which makes it harder to problematize" (p. 38). In other words, "neoliberalism has succeeded in colonizing the habitus of many people, including those of educators and educationalists" (Van der Walt, 2017, p. 6). These ideas marginalize *the other* as schools and universities promote beliefs in progress and the benefits of neoliberalism (Mignolo, 2014).

Moreover, the English language curriculum predominantly centers around the global north and inner circle countries such as the USA and Great Britain, which has allowed that the voices of teachers who experience English teaching in public primary schools are perceived as subalterns because, "the subject does not occupy a discursive position from where s/he can speak or respond to. […] Being silenced does not mean that s/he does not exist" (Spivak, 2003, p. 298 – my translation). In contrast, *we* advocate for a paradigm shift where a construction of epistemologies in constant growth (Santos, 2010) takes place to make possible that *our* "stories help us understand our commonalities and bonds with others as well as our differences. Stories foster a sense of community" (Atkinson, 2002, p. 122). In this research journey, *our* hearts, brains, and spirits are complementary (Maturana, 2017; Fals Borda, 2017; Guerrero Arias 2010; Meyer 2013; Ocaña, 2017) to reflect about the teaching and the learning of English at a daily basis. Accordingly, throughout this document, *our* voices are prominently represented. The quoted excerpts include *our* names or pseudonymous, allowing readers to cite them accordingly. *We* were also the first ones to know about the findings of this study (Rivas, 2014, p. 53 -my interpretation) as *we* actively participated in understanding *our* narratives. *We* had the autonomy to share while providing feedback or revising the document prior to any oral presentation or written publication.

When co-narrating stories about the learning and English teaching in *our* public school, *our* contexts were explored to multi-signify *our* teaching of English practices; *we* also mapped out *our* academic and working trajectories regarding English learning and teaching; and *we* narrated together how *we* have coped with the task of teaching English. Findings are presented in the form of a hypogeum called *our* stories where the conjunction of *our* learning and teaching paths create *our* epistemologies about how English is taught. This language has shaped *our* ways of knowing, being, and doing when playing *our* roles initially as English learners and subsequently as teachers in preschool and primary. On the one hand, when tracing back *our* trajectories as learners *we* found that during primary school, having English classes

was a privilege reserved for students attending private institutions; in high school, *we* resorted to cheating, studied diligently to pass or face remedial exams, memorized the conjugation of the verb 'be', and engaged in arts and crafts. Some of *us* were not good at English, but others excelled and could get the monitor's place. On the other hand, as English teachers at school, *we* felt nervous, embarrassed, and incapable of learning; outside the classrooms, *we* felt powerless and afraid. In *our* postgraduate pursuits, English became a requirement that posed a barrier if *we* wanted to continue studying with the government's support. Similarly, *we* have struggled to learn English, despite several language courses *we* have enrolled many of *us* felt there has not been any advance. Some of *us* pointed out that while English classes were enjoyable, tests often undermined the confidence and joy for learning that had been built in those classes. Thus, *we* have invested time and money in learning English aiming to make the dream of sounding like native speakers come true, though we have not achieved this goal yet.

There are three distinct moments in *our* employment trajectories: initially, some of *us* worked for simulated bilingual schools; in the second moment, class distribution at the smaller school was based on informal agreements, while at the larger school, teachers' suggestions went often unheard; in the third moment, teaching English can be likened to the 'boogey man' who frights children. *We* fear mispronunciation, teaching mistakenly to pupils, and/or not being exemplary role models for *our* students. Most of *us*, have taught English lessons to preschoolers, first and second graders, but *we* have tended to avoid teaching this language to third, fourth, and fifth graders. Despite *our* fears, all of *us* have taken the responsibility, often construed as a burden, of teaching English. *We* have resorted to using strategies such as searching in Google, which is often considered the all-knowing saint; exploring YouTube videos; following *our* secondary school teachers' model; enrolling in language courses; studying autonomously with apps; and seeking assistance from friends.

Our ways of knowing, being, and doing when teaching English are conveyed in *our* epistemologies: *we* identify *our* needs to make it possible the teaching and the learning of English. *We* have some recommendations regarding English language teachers' profiles for policymakers, teacher educators, and other professionals involved in school administration. Moreover, *we* express uncertainties about the methodologies to teach this language in *our* context. Thus, policies regarding English language teaching to children are questioned and

challenged. Finally, there are actions *we* can implement to improve *our* teaching such as reviewing curricular units, designing lessons together, and creating meaningful spaces to practice listening and speaking skills in English.

This journey is documented through six chapters. The first chapter describes my own motivations as a researcher for starting this research path. These lines introduce the statement of the problem, the questions, and the objectives of this research endeavor. The second chapter explains the path followed to profile the field. In this vein, three theoretical branches were proposed namely (i) Trends in Studies about English Language Teaching in Primary Education; (ii) Researchers' Proposals to Address Challenges in Classrooms; and (iii) Colombian Studies about the Teaching of English in Public Primary Settings. The first branch reviews some of the most relevant studies conducted by scholars worldwide that focus on English Language Teaching (ELT henceforth) in elementary education. The second branch contains some proposals given by scholars to face the complex task of teaching English. Subsequently, the last branch presents Colombian studies, organized chronologically, whose main foci are on elementary public-school teachers.

The third chapter outlines the framework, beginning with a brief introduction to the concept of coloniality of knowledge. It then discusses the theories supporting this study which include: the impact of coloniality in primary public schools' quotidian lives; the neoliberalism that denies *the other* in public schools; and how coloniality and neoliberalism institutionalize the subordination of public kindergarten and primary school teachers. This chapter also covers some of the historical events that facilitated the introduction of ELT in schools, various approaches to ELT for young learners, and the legislation that mandates English as a compulsory subject in public primary schools. These elements collectively help to comprehend this hypogeum called *our* stories, which serve as sites of being, thinking, and doing regarding the learning and teaching of English.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the methodology used to walk this research path. It displays the research approach, the histories of *our* school, the principles, the ways to invite my companions to be part of this journey, the itinerary, an introduction to the profile of each of *us* represented through some excerpts of *our* stories, a description of the steps to bring

together *our* stories in a book, issues related to soundness and trustworthiness, and the interpretation of the multiple ways *we* have experienced the learning and English teaching.

The fifth chapter presents the findings organized in three interconnected sections. The first section provides an account of *our* trajectories as learners of English in primary, secondary, tertiary, and graduate education. The second section traces *our* working trajectories around English teaching, narrated through three distinct moments: firstly, the period before *we* first met, when some of *us* worked in schools that pretended to be bilingual; secondly, at MC and UE schools before they merged, where class distribution at MC was enriched by teachers' talents and school administrators friendship, while primary school teachers' voices regarding English teaching were ignored at UE; the third moment, which describes *our* current lives in these schools, where English is perceived as the boogey man, with *us* taking charge of ELT or avoiding it. The third section links *our* paths as learners, as English teachers, and *our* personal lives regarding English, which is titled: Making Public *Our* Personal Epistemologies about the Teaching of English to Children. The last chapter contains the conclusions and perspectives for future research in this area. *We* share the uncertainties and possible paths to continue exploring this field. Hope you enjoy this reading.

CHAPTER 1: A Journey Inside the Teaching of English at School

"All thought is only a perspective.
I am part of the world,
but I am not the world."
Angela Calvo (2019)

Statement of the Problem

This research journey is influenced by my views, my academic and professional life, my roles as a coordinator in preschool and primary sections in a public school, and as a doctoral student. After engaging in readings, discussions, and reflections during seminars at the university with peers and tutors, I realized that I had not taken the time to get to know my own realities at school concerning English teaching. If I wanted to begin exploring and finding ways to comprehend how the teaching of this language is experienced in the school, I would need at least the itinerary to get the destination, and to get in touch with the personas[7] who teach English to children - my companions - the preschool and primary homeroom school teachers who are the truly experienced trekkers, in the journey I wanted to start. They know the shortcuts, detours, and barriers. Thus, I needed my companions throughout the process, without their voices this research endeavor would have been unfeasible.

As part of this educational community, I would like to share some motives that encouraged me to walk this research journey. To begin with, the school where this research journey takes place is located in Ciudad Bolívar District (Bogotá, Colombia). There are twenty-one public kindergarten and primary school teachers in this school, divided into twenty females and one male in the morning shift. Although most of the teachers hold graduate degrees in the field of education, and despite none of them holds a degree in English teaching, they are still expected and required by law to teach English to children. Since 1994, the educational law mandates the teaching of a foreign language in the country. In 2013, the National Bilingual Law made ELT compulsory in primary school. Consequently, public primary school teachers must teach the English language with scarce academic preparation to do so. Recognizing this situation, Clavijo (2000 and 2016) has argued that the state should hire

[7] From a philosophical standpoint a *persona* "plays a role in the world, in society, and has voice" (Concepto de persona - Definición, Significado y Qué es (edu.lat)

well-qualified English language teachers for public primary schools, and has challenged the narrow vision that learning another language can be achieved by memorizing words out of context, or that ELT is possible just by making some curricular adaptations.

Furthermore, several pre-service teachers studying for a Bachelor's in Education developed their pedagogical practicum at the school. During welcoming meetings, when asked whether they liked to teach English, most hesitated, and just two out of twelve shamefacedly raised their hands in affirmative response. Conversely, the rest of the pre-service teachers expressed that they did not speak English, or did not want to teach this language. In other words, considering that these future preschool and primary school teachers will likely have to teach this language to children, one wonders about the education universities provide to prepare student-teachers in this area. This inquiry motivated me to research [8] information on B.Ed. programs in Bogotá targeted to pedagogy in teaching children. Out of the nineteen programs found, six are offered by public universities, whilst private institutions organize the remaining thirteen. The options for preparing future teachers vary widely, ranging from programs that offer a B2 level of English proficiency to online programs. Notably, only one of these programs explicitly includes "English for Children" as a specific subject in their syllabus. It should be noted that since 2009, through Law 1324 and Decree 3963, all undergraduate students are required to do a national exam[9], which includes an English proficiency test to get the degree.

From another perspective, after almost a decade of being a coordinator, I found myself handing in reports and conducting statistical analysis, which set me aside from my pedagogical work. Oftentimes, people do not question these administrative tasks at school since they have become naturalized "some of the strategies that regulate the task of school directors (coordinators) are related to the requirements of the market" (Yelicich, 2019, p. 237-my translation). At this point, I wanted to engage in postgraduate education to return to what I consider lies at the center of individuals whose lives have been devoted to education, it is the fact that we are social workers, we are in the schools to transform lives.

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[8] https://www.educaedu-colombia.com/carreras-universitarias/pedagogia/bogota

[9] In Colombia, the National Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education (ICFES by its initials in Spanish) administers different tests to ensure the quality of education in the country. Students in universities must take the Saber *Pro* exam at the end of their education. The exam includes components of mathematical reasoning, text analysis, social sciences, and English.

In this quest for a boost in my intellectual career, I came across some of the actions taken by the government, which are limited to producing and distributing among the various educational actors and stakeholders the "so-called" Pedagogical Principles and Guidelines for Pre-K and elementary (MEN, 2016) to guarantee children's successful English Language Learning:

> Coordinators, as a support for the principal, should accompany teachers in the planning and implementation of bilingualism projects. Besides, their job will include following up on the observance of the established number of hours for English teaching and learning, so that a minimum weekly dedication can be ensured at schools (MEN, 2016, p. 49).

In this vein, Nuñez (2020) argues that "it is not a suggested curriculum but rather an imposed one, since the MEN is constantly sending managers to 'train' teachers on what should be taught and how it should be taught" (p. 118). It was not until 2019 that after reviewing this so-called suggested curriculum, I began to pay attention to teachers' voices about English teaching. I recall one evaluation committee meeting when a teacher revealed that nobody had failed English in her class because she did not know this language, thus, she could not grade her students' performance. Conversely, the Spanish teacher was disappointed because some students had passed the Humanities Area[10] due to their apparent good grades in English, despite their poor job in the Spanish classes. This situation was controversial at the end of the academic year.

Additionally, during my time as an English language teacher in public high schools, it seemed natural to me that sixth graders had a low command of the English language, were ashamed of speaking, were surprised when I spoke to them in English and often told me that they could not understand. Subsequently, teaching these children constituted a challenge for me, but I did not question it in depth. I took for granted that students did not get any English lessons in primary school and wondered whether this was a normalized situation or if I had normalized the discourse that primary public-school students did not have English classes.

[10] Humanities Area is composed by Spanish and English languages, each of these two school subjects have 50% each of the total grade.

Moreover, during the process of profiling this area of study, I found that little has been said about public school teachers' perspectives of ELT even though most of them do not hold a professional degree to be English language teachers. In contrast, I found that most studies focus on ELT at a higher level. Additionally, the research has been mostly based on what teachers know in terms of methodology and language in ELT, whether from a deficient perspective or from a training perspective aimed at fostering teachers' and students' language skills.

Finally, but not less important, we as teachers rarely discuss our emotions within our teaching scenarios, often relegating this dimension to the background. However, as Benesch (2007) points out "English language teaching connects affect and intellect, body and work, passion and rationality, and that it is intimately and intricately influenced by power relations" (p. 12). Consequently, it is paramount to engage in dialogue with my fellow English language teachers to explore *our* connection with the English language, its learning and teaching processes. The following lines expand on the emerging research questions from the aforementioned phenomena that construct this research path.

Research Questions

The following questions were posed to recover and comprehend *our* relationship with English language in terms of pedagogical strategies, challenges and coping mechanisms when teaching English in a public primary school where there is not any licensed teacher of English:

Main Question

What do *our* stories tell about the teaching of English language in a public primary school?

1. What have *our* academic and professional trajectories as English language teachers been?
2. How have *we* coped with English Language Teaching?

Objectives

The teaching of English to children has spread throughout the world without much criticism or resistance, so creating spaces to talk, reflect upon, and make public *our* stories regarding the English language in *our* personal, academic, and professional lives could make

us aware of how English teaching works in this public primary school. Thus, I embarked upon this study to learn from/with/among *our* stories about English language, its learning, and its teaching. As previously noted, there has been a limited discussion concerning the daily experiences of teachers at primary school while teaching English even though most of them are educated to teach children but lack formal qualifications as English language teachers. Thus, the general aim of this study was to co-narrate stories about English teaching to children in *our* public school. To achieve this purpose and supported by *our* stories, *we* explored *our* contexts to multi-signify English teaching; *we* mapped out *our* academic and professional trajectories regarding English and its teaching; and *we* narrated together how *we* have coped with the teaching of this language in the school. Consequently, *we* engaged in listening, co-interpretation, understanding, reinterpreting *our* experiences, and making public *our* voices as primary sources of insight into English teaching at *our* school. Accordingly, it was essential to discuss with those personas who are directly involved in the act of teaching and to reflect upon these experiences to comprehend how English is taught in *our* 'second home'. Ultimately, by acknowledging and understanding the senses and meanings of *our* collective stories about English teaching to students, *we* could transform *our* teaching practices for the wellbeing of *our* school community.

CHAPTER 2: Footprints of English Language Teaching[11]

"The knowledge of life always surpasses
the knowledge of the institutions"
(Mignolo, 2014, p. 65)[12]

This chapter aims to profile studies regarding English teaching in primary schools. The panorama of studies and reflections on this fascinating theme was organized into three major sections: 1) Trends in Studies about ELT in Primary Education, 2) Researchers' Proposals to Address Challenges in Classrooms, and 3) Colombian Studies about the Teaching of English in Public Primary Settings. Planning this journey was a demanding but fruitful endeavor, as data bases offer a vast and constant expanding array of information that is updated all the time. This endless stream of new data has significantly enhanced my understanding of this field of study; however, it also presents a major disadvantage due to the huge amount of information worldwide that remains inaccessible. This research journey into the preceding studies begins with the first section, where I shortlist the most relevant and meaningful studies for this purpose including pieces found up until 2023.

Trends in Studies about ELT in Primary Education

During this intricate yet exciting path to uncover tracks regarding English teaching in public primary schools, I began by searching for articles using the phrase "*early-public-EFL-schooling"*, which yielded a substantial number of articles. Moreover, I considered the Spanish phrase "*Enseñanza del inglés para niños en colegios públicos*" (Teaching English to children in public schools). To further refine my search, I selected the phrase "*EFL policies in public schools"* to continue reviewing relevant literature. Thus, fifty-seven articles were revised, nine of them were written in Spanish, and the remaining 48 were written in English[13]. The earliest manuscript was published in 2000, whereas the most recent one was published in 2021. There are two specialized journals, which published six articles each. They are EPAA/AAPE[14] from Mexico and PROFILE: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development

[11] Parts of the contents of this chapter were published in an article and in a book chapter in 2019. The article called Research on English Teaching Policies for Public Schools: From Past to Future Paths. *ENLETAWA Journal,* 12(2), 11-41. The book chapter was published in 2021. It is titled "The Influence of EFL Policies on the Work of Teachers in a Public Primary School" in the book *ELT Local Research Agendas II (pp. 115-140)*
[12] My translation and interpretation.
[13] See Annex 2 with a graph displaying journals' names.
[14] Education Policy Analysis Archives / Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas

from Colombia. The Mexican journal had a special issue in 2016, on English Language Teaching in Public Primary Schools in Latin America. Figure 1 illustrates the number (as indicated inside each star) of journals or articles from each country that were reviewed for this section.

Figure 1 *Journals / Articles reviewed*

I found it especially relevant to review studies from the following countries: Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Oman, Pakistan, Puerto Rico, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, South Korea, the USA, Tanzania, The UAE, Turkey, and Venezuela. Table 1 (see below) titled "Trends in Studies about ELT" presents the names of the authors, publication year of their studies, countries of origin, and five identified trends.

The first trend is the disconnection perceived by school teachers between the school environment and students' lives. The subsequent trend tackles the phenomenon of homogenizing diversity. The third trend highlights the inequitable competition between public school teachers and those affiliated with language centers, juxtaposed with available resources for ELT. The fourth trend delves into the discourse on educational quality in ELT and the governmental initiatives to dismantle public education. The final trend examines the

challenges encountered by some English language teachers in public schools when implementing ELT policies, along with the managerial strategies employed by school administrators in resource allocation. In what follows, I will delve into each one of these trends.

Authors/years	Countries	Trends
Anyiendah (2017) Dutta, U. and Bala, N. (2012) López d'Amico, et al. (2018) Benson (2004)	Kenya India Venezuela Bolivia - Mozambique	Teachers face disconnection between students' lives and school.
Chang (2016) Lo Bianco & Slaughter (2009) García & Curry-Rodríguez (2000)	China Australia The USA	Homogenization processes because diversity is not considered in schools.
Tuñón & Halperin (2010) De Mejía (2009) Correa & González (2016) Dutta, U. and Bala, N. (2012) Panezai, S. G., & Channa, L. A. (2017) Fragozo, C. S., & Monawar, M. D. S. (2012	Argentina Colombia India Pakistan Brazil	Resource administration and the imbalanced competition between private and public schools caused a gap in the fair access to resources for ELT, and educational opportunities.
Dávila-Pérez (2013). Valencia (2013) Tuñón & Halperin (2010) Tekin (2015) Sayer (2015) Fallon & Rubik (2012) Maldonado-Valentin (2016) Almeida (2016)	Colombia Argentina Oman Mexico Canada Puerto Rico Brazil	Imposition of English over other languages that are spoken within the countries, teachers' beliefs about the English language instruction, and policies convey the perception that the State is powerless to provide quality education.
De Mejía & Fonseca (2009) Cadavid-Múnera, et al. (2004) Martínez (2009) Li (2010) Lin *(2015)* Mody, A. (2015) Gholami, et al. (2016) Görsev İnceçay (2012) Abrar (2016)	Colombia El Salvador C*hina* Taiwan India Iran Turkey	Teachers' experiences when they must teach English regarding lack of resources, large classes, very heterogeneous groups, varying levels of teacher qualification, methodological considerations, and administrative complexities, among others.

Intriago (2017) Hayes (2017) Quintero & Guerrero-Nieto (2013). Maturana (2011) Bastidas & Muñoz (2011) Mendoza-Vallares & Puón-Castro (2013) Ramírez-Romero and Sayer (2016) Machida and Walsh (2015) Garton, et al. (2011)	Indonesia Ecuador Asia Colombia Mexico Japan Colombia, Italy, South Korea, Tanzania, The UAE (Abu Dhabi)	

Table 1 *Trends in studies about ELT*
Source: *Adapted from Castañeda, M. E. (2019)*

Facing disconnection between students' lives and school

Teachers experience disconnection between school and students' lives, this trend is exemplified by studies from Kenya, India, Bolivia, Mozambique, and Venezuela. In Anyiendah's work (2017), teachers from Kenya noticed that textbooks and materials to teach English neglect learners' sociocultural world. Additionally, there are scarce opportunities to practice English language inside and outside classrooms. When we discuss teaching and the challenges that this profession entails daily, we cannot sideline children's real-life outside schools. Anyiendah (2017) works in a Kenyan primary school characterized by high absenteeism rates among students. Most of the families belong to deprived socioeconomic conditions, leading parents to struggle to meet basic needs. Consequently, children often do petty jobs to contribute to family income or care for their younger siblings while their parents are at work.

In India, Dutta and Bala (2012) argued that in-service training programs are not organized according to teachers' needs, and methodology courses are restricted to lectures. In this line, Benson (2004) argues that English language teachers in Mozambique and Bolivia "must bridge the linguistic and cultural gap between home and school, become respected members of the community, and manage any opposition to educational use of the mother tongue" (p. 204). The author recommends that teachers' training should encourage teachers to incorporate students' languages and cultures in their lessons to meet students' actual needs. In

the case of Venezuela, López d'Amico, et al. (2018) highlights significant concerns regarding political tensions that impact the implementation of programs aimed at increasing the number of English lessons hours in secondary public schools and introducing English as a compulsory school subject in primary public education.

Homogenization processes in schools

The second trend involves the homogenization processes that occur as diversity is not considered in schools, because teachers overlook students' diversity. This trend is informed by researchers such as Chang (2016) who problematizes English language teachers' education in Hong Kong. The author contends that teachers are challenged with students' diversity in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, social class, and disabilities, among others. Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2009) acknowledge the linguistic richness of Australian diversity. With at least seven native languages with their own culture and history, the author emphasized that "Every effort to redress persisting underperformance in language education is amply justified" (p. 64). If schooling is compulsory, "Bilingualism can foster more reflective and imaginatively dispositions in citizens, and the principles of democratic discourse, participation, and opportunity" (p. 64). In addition, Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2009) discuss:

> how the odds are stacked against the successful teaching of additional languages in an English-dominated world. He vividly illustrates the many differences between most contexts for a child's successful acquisition of their first language in the home and local community and their often much less successful acquisition of an additional language in a more formal educational setting (p. iii).

In the same line, García & Curry-Rodríguez (2000) explain that Proposition 227 ruled that the instruction for "Limited English Proficient" students in public schools in California was mainly in English. Additionally, the government allocated substantial funds to support these classes. However, the implementation of this policy does not reveal a significant improvement in the standard test results for children enrolled under Proposition 227. Therefore, the diversity in schools resulting from immigration requires bilingual programs that facilitate students' retention within the educational system. Consequently, policies in ELT along with the education of English language teachers should address the diversity stemming from migration. The latter aims to broaden the understanding of the wide variety of cultures

worldwide, starting with those present locally. This means, to include local languages and cultures in English language classrooms.

Imbalanced competition in access to educational opportunities

The third trend evidences how resource management in ELT has resulted in unequal access to educational opportunities. In Argentina, through a longitudinal study, Tuñón & Halperin (2010) explain how the majority of underprivileged children (in primary schools) do not have specialized teachers for arts, dances, physical education, technology, or languages. Inequality in this context pertains to disparities in access to resources, which are often influenced by students' socioeconomic status. Dutta and Bala (2012) acknowledge that most Indian schools allocated funds to purchasing charts and colors, which were stored under lock and key. Even more, according to De Mejía (2009), in the Colombian public sector, resources invested in the National Bilingual Program are targeted at improving English teaching only in the tenth and eleventh grades, which are the last years of high school.

Concerning textbooks as resources, Correa & González (2016) claimed that texts are foreign-based and display decontextualized discourses and content that do not address local needs. Dutta and Bala (2012) from India argued that the state textbooks at the primary level 1 (classes I & II) place insufficient emphasis on listening and speaking failing to build familiarity with the language. Additionally, a print-rich environment was not evident in the schools. Consequently, children did not get the opportunity to listen or speak in English. Therefore, they were not able to narrate experiences, exchange ideas, and carry out brief conversations in the target language. Furthermore, teacher training was focused on "The Textbook Trap" as classes were grammar-centered. In addition, libraries in schools were found to be inadequately equipped and sparsely furnished, or even nonexistent. Besides, from Pakistan, Panezai and Channa (2017) contain that textbooks are the only available source/s for English teaching and learning within the public education system. Moreover, the assessment of the textbooks' effectiveness for grades 1–5 is conducted by the teachers' lenses who use them in their teaching contexts. Since teachers are the implementers of textbooks, their perceptions, perspectives, and voices are crucial in the ongoing debate concerning how to provide quality education.

Finally, Fragozo and Monawar (2012), from Brazil, examined the differences between teaching English in regular schools and language schools. They found that heavy workloads,

large classes, lack of resources, and emphasis on reading and writing make it less effective learning English in regular schools than in language schools. Similarly, Correa and González (2016) highlight that English language teachers prefer working at universities or private schools over public schools, mainly due to better salaries, availability of resources for ELT, and more motivated students. I would add more opportunities to practice the spoken English language.

Quality of Education in ELT and Dismantling Public Education

The fourth trend covers the topic of quality education in ELT, and the governments' intentions to dismantle public education, because policies on the teaching of English convey the perception that the State is powerless to provide quality education. Tuñón & Halperin (2010) evidence that the quality of public education is assessed based on the parents' level of education. The more educated the parent, the lower their perception of public education quality. Dávila-Pérez (2013) from Colombia contrasted two public schools in Bogota and found that belonging to a low socio-economic class is not the only factor influencing inequality in linguistic capital in English or poor results in standardized tests (p. 231 – my translation). Some people reckon that students in public schools are unable to learn English and do not need this language because of the low inherited aspirations from their parents. Similarly, the authors contend that teachers should encourage their students to learn outside classrooms (p. 232- my translation).

In Oman, Tekin (2015) established that parents are well aware of the benefits, and challenges of early EFL education. Furthermore, the Colombian scholar Valencia (2013) carried out a discourse analysis that revealed that political discourses tend to dismantle public education by disdaining its capability to offer quality education. Likewise, Maldonado-Valentin (2016) stated that in Puerto Rico, the role of English depended on the political party in power and its relationship with the USA. Nowadays, in Puerto Rican public education, English is just a school subject. In the same way, Almeida (2016) declared that in Brazil, public primary schools involved in ELT programs seem to serve the interests of private institutions, language courses, and publishing houses. Thus, poor working and learning conditions in public contexts favor unsatisfactory results on English language tests, as well as the perceived notion that the government cannot offer good quality language education.

Teaching English, a Complex Task

In the last trend, teachers face multiple challenges in the classrooms when they must teach English. Some scholars have explored issues such as, lack of resources, large classes, very heterogeneous groups, varying levels of teacher qualification, methodological considerations, and administrative complexities, among others. Thus, I depict a panorama of some research studies regarding English teaching in several countries. De Mejía & Fonseca (2009) acknowledged the absence of bilingual or multilingual guidelines for foreign languages in Colombia. However, they argue that the standards based on the Common European Framework of Reference constitute a common ground to feature the achievements and aims of ELT. On the other hand, Cadavid-Múnera, et al. (2004) remarked that in Colombian public primary schools, English teaching is restricted to basic vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation due to teachers' low proficiency level. Moreover, teachers use translation as the primary method for teaching, so students are more exposed to Spanish than they are to English (p. 45). Consequently, there is a need to inquire about educational needs regarding ELT in public primary schools that would result in more appropriate policies for these contexts.

In the same line of thought, I would like to highlight the findings of a cross-sectional observational case study carried out with five primary school English teachers in Colombia, Italy, South Korea, Tanzania, and The UAE (Abu Dhabi). Half of these teachers had an advanced English level. Garton, et al. (2011) reported the need for smaller classes, teacher training in renewed methodologies, better access to new technologies, and more hours of English lessons per week to improve learning and teaching in these contexts. The main problem teachers experienced was misbehavior due to large-mixed level classes involving students with short attention spans, learning problems, disabilities, and lack of motivation, as well as teachers' doubts regarding how to teach grammar in a meaningful way. The authors provided some recommendations to improve ELT to young learners including the strengthening of teachers' training, creating local and international spaces to share experiences, language development courses, easy-access material, and an informed educational policy for English curriculum development.

Similarly, the following researchers agree on the multiple factors that make ELT a complex task. İnceçay (2012) in Turkey claimed that challenges when implementing English

in primary schools are related to "the crowded classroom and lack of necessary equipment, support from policy makers, administration and colleagues" (p. 53). Martínez (2009) declared that Salvadoran students do not effectively learn English in public schools due to several reasons: teachers lacking proficiency in the language and effective teaching methodologies, students' disinterest in learning English, the predominant use of the translation method, and unclear objectives in the official program for language learning. Mody (2015) pointed out that most teachers teaching English in India can do little more than reading from a textbook. The author asserts that teachers in the primary section of the school are all properly qualified and have approximately 10 and 20 years of teaching experience, they all teach English as a subject to their students, but none of them can speak a sentence of grammatically correct English.

Moreover, the most striking barriers hindering the implementation of English teaching to children in Puebla, Mexico, are associated with "teachers' lack of payment, the lack of proper conditions in terms of the facilities, resources and, equipment, and the lack of prior specialization in the field" (Mendoza-Vallares & Puón-Castro, 2013, p. 4). Furthermore, teachers expressed their struggles managing children of different ages simultaneously in large groups. Moreover, English teachers must contend with homeroom teachers' beliefs about EFL instruction, which assert that starting English instruction at an early age not only distracts students from "important" classes such as Math, Science, and Spanish but also constitutes a waste of time. Homeroom teachers often perceive English classes as mere playtime for students. Additionally, homeroom teachers who graduated from Normal[15] schools often discriminate against university teachers. This rivalry underscores their belief that homeroom teachers are superior within the school environment. Mendoza-Vallares & Puón-Castro (2013) also observed that school principals and parents oppose English classes for their children as English is deemed unnecessary since children are unlikely to travel abroad. Conversely, for Ramírez-Romero and Sayer (2016) despite challenging working conditions, English language teachers in Mexico struggle to provide their best efforts to the most disadvantaged students, particularly those who had not previously received English classes. This effort is aimed at

[15] Normal schools according to the Law 115 of 1994, article 112, are public high schools that offer teachers' programs aiming at preparing teachers who can work in preschool and primary level.

reducing the disparity in access to English language learning between privileged and deprived children.

Additionally, Gholami, et al. (2016) carried out a study with Iranian public secondary EFL teachers. The authors found that teachers who had previously worked with private language institutions "subscribe more closely to the tenets of communicative language teaching and thus can act as powerful agents of sustainable language teaching in Iranian public schools" (p. 16). Moreover, Lin *(2015*) from Taiwan discovered that English teaching methodologies in primary and secondary schools are disconnected. Whereas the former is based on games and communicative competence, the latter favors a more complex cognitive process. Thus, when students transition from primary to secondary school, often learners feel lost or are unprepared. Additionally, Li (2010) conducted a study in China on how English teachers deal with policies in ELT. The study concluded that teachers did not follow guidelines provided by the government because they perceived them as decontextualized. Accordingly, Hayes' study (2017) suggested that ELT in the early years should be implemented only after analyzing carefully educational issues.

The five trends in studies regarding ELT emerged from the research articles reviewed. The analysis revealed that teachers find a disconnection between their student's realities and school settings. Similarly, as a result of migration processes worldwide, which has created pluricultural classrooms, often teachers and policies disregard the vast array of diversity as a central axis in language education at schools. Furthermore, there is an unequitable competition between public and private education concerning, among others, access to resources, class sizes, teachers' qualifications, and the number of hours devoted to ELT. Finally, teachers' perceptions concerning English teaching and language policies often replicate discourses concerning the governments' inability to offer quality education. The latter results in the perpetuation of practices and discourses concerning teachers experiencing a lack of resources, large classes, heterogeneous groups, lack of qualifications, methodological imbalances, administrative concerns, and other particularities.

In the second major section of this chapter, I would like to acknowledge researchers who, based on contextual studies, have initiated proposals aimed at improving English teaching in public settings.

Researchers' Proposals to Address Challenges in Classrooms

Many scholars have devised different approaches to help English language teachers navigate through the various challenges in the language classroom. Figure 2 (below) categorizes researchers' proposals for addressing the multiple challenges when teaching English into three groups. This graphic was designed to associate renowned scholars with the countries where their proposals were implemented and the year of publication of their works.

In the first group, researchers advocate for creating horizontal dialogues between stakeholders and in-service teachers when designing policies for ELT. The second group emphasizes the urgency of contextualizing programs for pre-service and in-service teachers, ensuring that they contribute to the transformation of teaching practices, curricula, methodologies, and ultimately teaching realities. The last group includes the proposals of some Colombian scholars, who believe that educational projects should incorporate locally grounded perspectives of thinking, doing, and living to build a more equitable and fair society.

Dialoguing about policymaking for ELT considering local knowledge, context, and needs

The first group of proposals posits that policy makers need to engage teachers as dialogic partners when designing policies for ELT considering local knowledge, context, and needs. In Japan, Ng (2016) asserts that stake holders did not sufficiently consider the challenges faced by local government, schools, and teachers when implementing primary school English programs. Apparently, policies were made in haste. Accordingly, Basurto and Weathers (2016) from Mexico recognize that teachers are the ones who truly understand classroom realities. Therefore, stakeholders should incorporate teachers' insights when planning and establishing educational changes. Furthermore, Peláez and Usma (2017) declared that English language educational policies in the Colombian context are deemed as decontextualized, they are distant from the priorities of communities especially rural ones. The scholars assert that "the ideal of English is separated from people's real existence" (Peláez & Usma, 2017, p. 130). Consequently, language policies should consider all the levels -national, regional, local, and even the individual demands of teachers who are commonly conceived as mere implementers of these policies. In the same fashion, Correa and González (2016) suggested that language policymaking should pay attention to the expertise of those who implement policies namely teachers and teacher educators.

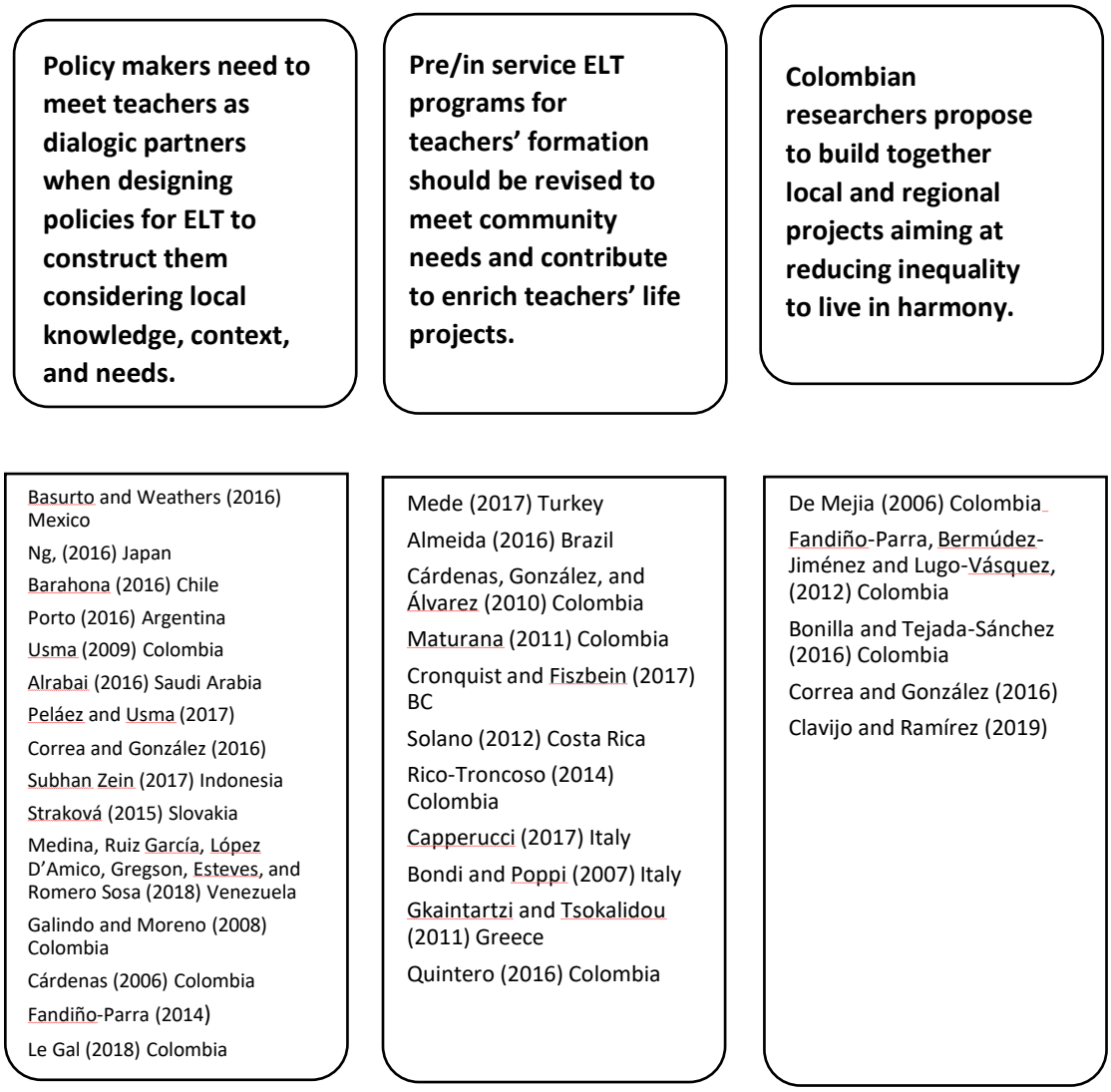

Figure 2 *Researchers' Proposals for ELT Programs*
Source: Adapted from Castañeda, ME. (2019).

Regarding school settings, Straková (2015) from Slovakia emphasized that the introduction of English as a foreign language in the early years should be tailored to each school's specific context. The author underscores the importance of teacher qualification and ensuring students' exposure to English. Alrabai's study (2016) in Saudi Arabia advocates for English education as a driver of economic development. However, he provides advice concerning challenges identified in ELT such as budgetary constraints and governmental

decisions, which rest with the state's policies and funding priorities. Additionally, Usma (2009) claimed that current policies often disregard local knowledge, and categorize students and teachers based on test scores and/or institutional affiliations, which contribute to a commodification of language teaching and certification.

Connected to the previous discussion, in Chile, Barahona (2016) identified a mismatch between policy aspirations and their actual implementation in real contexts. Meanwhile, in Argentina, Porto (2016) contemplates limitations regarding the implementation of language policies, but highlights a shared perspective on teaching English that emphasizes intercultural citizenship through task-based, project-based, and Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodologies.

From another perspective, Galindo & Moreno's (2008) proposal consists of considering other languages to be included in the foreign language curriculum such as Mandarin, French, Portuguese, Italian, and Dutch which also constitute international languages. One reason to propose Portuguese is that the south of Colombia shares borders with Brazil, where this language is spoken. Accordingly, Cárdenas (2006) emphasized the importance of considering regional diversity, local expertise, and flexible approaches to teaching and assessing. In the same line of thought, Fandiño-Parra (2014) suggested adopting a critical socio-cultural model to change the school's reality according to its needs.

From this initial group of research articles, it can be concluded that ELT programs should foster intercultural citizenship, integrate teachers' insights and experience in planning educational transformations, include national, regional, and local cultures, adopt flexible evaluation methods, and implement a critical socio-cultural model tailored to the needs of the school community.

Contextualized ELT programs for pre-service an in-service teachers' formation

The second group of research manuscripts deals with the proposals to contextualize the academic teacher education programs to meet community needs and contribute to enriching teachers' life projects to both pre-service and in-service teachers. In Turkey, Mede (2017) recommended that programs for prospective language teachers should focus on developing skills specifically for implementation with young learners in schools. Almeida (2016) from Brazil encourages universities to analyze their ELT programs for pre-service and in-service

teachers to ensure educational priorities are not overshadowed by commercial interests, because based on research “it is fair to suppose that most projects for ELT at primary public schools involve private interests of publishing houses and language courses”. Similarly, the author emphasizes the necessity for the State to empower primary teachers’ autonomy for making decisions in their own surroundings (p. 16).

In Colombia, Cárdenas, et al. (2010) strongly suggest that teacher education programs for English teachers should consider a development-centered perspective rather than a purely training-oriented approach. Similarly, the authors propose that the programs should embrace a socio-cultural perspective, be sensitive to individual and contextual needs, advocate for a post-method theory, encourage reflection and research on teachers’ environments, and acknowledge teachers as knowledge constructors (p. 64). Furthermore, Maturana (2011) also proposed that teacher development programs should improve both communicative and pedagogical competences as they are complementary.

Cronquist and Fiszbein (2017) suggested English language teachers should organize learning communities to benefit from their neighbors’ satisfactory experiences, engage in immersion programs domestically by spending time with native speakers and experts from the countries, who could contribute to the improvement of language teachers’ competences, as well as using distance learning to enhance their competences (p. 72 –my translation). Similarly, in Costa Rica, Solano (2012) proposed that English teachers employ three strategies: critical historical thinking, transdisciplinary, and comparative perspectives of social justice in their lessons. This could contribute to creating their own language-critical pedagogy, which in turn could transform their practices (p. 52). These proposals underscored the importance of sharing knowledge and experiences to foster transformative educational practices.

Rico-Troncoso (2014) analyzed innovative projects of English language teachers and found that most of the experiences are carried out in urban areas, mainly in public secondary schools in Bogota. The author remarked that “It is unknown what English teachers assess and how they do it" (P.4 –my translation). Consequently, “It is necessary to consider the evaluation within the training programs of in-service teachers in order to articulate it and integrate it into their pedagogical practices and thus close the gap between teaching and

evaluation" (p. 4-my translation). The author also suggested that “the programs respond to this felt need of language teachers in terms of providing spaces in which they reflect and share experiences concerning strategies, techniques and methodologies inherent to the design of pedagogical materials” (p. 5- my translation). Additionally, Capperucci (2017), from Italy, encouraged paying attention to curriculum design, subject knowledge, and the ability to use teaching and learning strategies in teacher education programs (p. 217). Similarly, Bondi and Poppi (2007) developed a certificate for English language teachers in primary school, which considers connections between three main components: language, pedagogy, and language awareness (p154). They also designed an instrument to measure the effectiveness of these processes.

In the same line, Gkaintartzi and Tsokalidou (2011) from Greece argued that teacher education programs should raise awareness of diversity, interculturality, and the impact of ideologies in teaching to prevent the perpetuation of inequities. In summary, most of the researchers agreed on the necessity of revising teacher education programs to better align them with the actual needs of students and the life projects of future teachers.

Finally, Quintero-Polo (2016) showed how a pedagogical intervention using stories written by pre-service teachers of English “developed a critical view and social sensibility in order to project themselves as transformative educators, who acknowledge the value of education and research to become agents of change” (p.118); if future teachers had the chance to narrate their lives and reflect upon them inside classrooms language education programs could beneficiate of an innovative way of thinking, which can transform teachers of English ways of thinking and doing, in this case.

The following section presents further scholarly suggestions specifically targeted at the teaching of English in the Colombian context.

Colombian proposals for the teaching of English

In the last group, Colombian researchers propose collaborative efforts to develop local and regional projects aimed at reducing inequality and fostering harmony. Fandiño-Parra, et al. (2012) identified bilingual education for Colombian high-school students and bilingual education for young children as the primary challenges since the inception of the National Bilingual program (NBP henceforth) in 2004. They emphasize that MEN should analyze how the NBP can help students appreciate the linguistic and cultural diversity around the world,

fostering respect for others and valuing the differences and particularities of various languages and cultures. The implementation should be directed to inter and multicultural competences that allow educational communities to organize their local and regional projects (my interpretation).

Additionally, De Mejía (2006) encouraged policymakers to value the linguistic and cultural diversity within Colombia. Bonilla Carvajal and Tejada-Sánchez (2016) argued that Colombian teachers must move beyond mechanical English teaching to foster critical thinking, adopting a critical literacy perspective that encourages students to read and think in diverse formats. They stressed our main goal as a nation is to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, and live in peace. Finally, Clavijo and Ramirez (2019) proposed a situated teaching approach centered on students' realities that potentialize students' knowledge of themselves and their communities. The following major section of this chapter aims to recognize relevant Colombian researchers' works on the teaching of English for children in public schools.

Colombian Studies about the Teaching of English in Public Primary Settings

From the review of some relevant Colombian studies about the teaching of English in public primary settings, three categories emerged: policies, the transformation of realities, and teachers' agency.

Firstly, regarding policies, Usma (2009) highlighted the scarcity of studies on teachers' implementation of policies and the unknown impact of these policies on transforming teachers' lives and practices. Maturana (2011) pointed out that the government does not consider public primary school teachers in terms of qualification to face the challenges of teaching English as a mandatory subject. This is significant as there is a gap in studies on how public primary and preschool teachers conduct English classes within their specific teaching landscapes. Recently, Guerrero-Nieto and Quintero (2021) shared public elementary school teachers' perspectives and their actions vis-à-vis public policies, and the mistreatment they face from the government. These two researchers concluded that elementary school teachers are aware of the intrusion of neoliberalism in schools, and strive to adapt those policies for the benefit of their students, yet they questioned the way these policies are formulated and imposed.

Secondly, in 2004, Cadavid-Múnera, et al. reported a study about primary school teachers' methodology to ELT in an urban area in Medellin, Colombia. They observed that teachers had a limited proficiency in English, and proposed a professional development course to enhance teachers' practices. The researchers advocated for policymakers should carefully analyze schools' contexts and teachers' and students' needs before launching ELT programs for children. In the same vein, Aguirre-Garzón (2018) carried out a study with four English language teachers in a public primary school, whose major was not English teaching and their proficiency in the language ranged between A2 to B1[16]. The main point is that these teachers co-constructed knowledge regarding ELT and transformed the institutional English language curriculum contents and language teaching objectives trough collaborative-reflective inquiry. He also remarked on the importance of collaboration for community learning, noting that transformative change can originate from the bottom up. In this case, teachers worked together to transform the reality of ELT in their school considering their students' contexts, and the resources available.

Furthermore, Córdoba-Mosquera (2018) shared a reflective paper highlighting that "in-service primary teachers from Chocó lacked the knowledge they needed to teach English to young children as they were trained neither from a linguistic nor from a methodological point of view" (p. 58). The researcher used a mix-method, observed classes, and interviewed teachers and administrative staff. In addition, two Colombian researchers[17] Chavarro, in Huila and Diaz in Córdoba (2020) conducted studies, whose focus was on how rural teachers dealt with ELT despite lacking formal certification.

In their research, Guerrero and Quintero (2021b), have extensively explored various dimensions of language policies and emphasized the importance of teachers' agency in language education. Their contributions to the ELT field in Colombia deal with "two main themes: (1) Dimensions of Language Policies: A Political Discourse perspective, and (2) Making Teachers' Agency Relevant: Bottom-up Approaches to the Study of Language Education Policies". In the earlier work, Guerrero-Nieto and Quintero (2013) discussed that:

[16] *The Common European Framework for languages: learning, teaching, assessment*, determines six levels of proficiency in English language: A1 and A2 corresponds to basic user or basic level, B1 and B2 to independent user or intermediate level, and C1 and C2 to proficient user or advanced level.
[17] ASOCOPI Congress 2020. (See reference)

> when teachers speak from their knowledge, discursively they ascribe to an identity that presents them as suitable and competent professionals, meaning that they do know their field and do know how to teach it and how to make their students become involved and learn. They are in control and make decisions based on their expertise; that is, they have agency. On the other hand, when they talk about their role in relationship to policies, their discourse positions themselves as powerless individuals who can do or say very little or nothing about the way policies are designed. (p. 202).

In another study, Quintero, et al. (2021) conducted an action-research study with fourth-grade students at a Colombian public elementary school. The study integrated English teaching and the natural sciences through cross-disciplinary lessons following the principles of content-based instruction. They found:

> that the cross-disciplinary lessons were appropriate and useful to connect the foreign language learning with other school subjects. Beginner students of English demonstrated an enhancement in the communicative skills and developed contextualized learning strategies, which proved the importance of integrating English with scientific contents as a contribution to curriculum innovations. A. Cross-disciplinary lessons in an elementary public institution. (p. 87)

To clarify, teachers who participate in some studies are qualified and certified in English as well as in other subjects such as Science, enabling them to teach these subjects using English as the language of instruction. It is observed that each school varies significantly in spatial, economic, social, and cultural contexts. To summarize, I found Colombian studies closely related to my research interests, significantly broadening my understanding of English Language Teaching in public elementary schools. Particularly influential works include those by Guerrero and Quintero (2013, 2021), who have extensively published on this topic. Both of them, have incorporated the voices of teachers in their studies. Correa and González (2016) noted the prevalent practice in Colombia where many public primary schools assign English teaching to homeroom teachers licensed to teach general subjects, not specifically English. Following this thread, De Mejía (2009) encouraged to "value the voices of elementary school teachers in processes of decision taking to improve teaching of English to their young

learners" (p. 103). Accordingly, kindergarten and elementary school teachers' voices constitute the heart of this study. In other words, the studies above took place in public primary institutions with teachers who have faced the act of teaching English to children in their context. However, these previous studies do not answer the question itself. As a member of this educational community and as a researcher my goal is to engage in dialogue with my fellow teachers and build *our* stories to comprehend this multi-layered world of English Language Teaching in *our* public primary school.

CHAPTER 3: Exploring *our* contexts to multi-signify ELT

We were Gods and we became slaves
We were children of the Sun and they comforted us with tin medals
We were poets and they made us recite beggar prayers
We were happy and they civilized us
Who will refresh the memory of the tribe?
Who will revive our Gods?
May the wild hope always be yours
Dear indomitable soul
"La Salvaje Esperanza"
Gonzalo Arango (1974)

This path was planned to explore the hypogeum, which is called *our* stories. This shared space contains three chambers that form the hypogeum – a metaphorical underground space where *our* life-stories unfold as sites of being, thinking, feeling, and doing regarding English, its learning, and its teaching. The first one named "Coloniality in Primary Public Schools' Quotidian Lives" centers on how the historical legacies of colonialism have shaped teachers' everyday experiences and practices within the field of ELT. The second chamber called "Neoliberalism that Denies *the Other* in Public Schools" focuses on the ways neoliberalism, represented in policies and ideologies, marginalize and exclude certain voices and perspectives within public education. The third chamber titled "Coloniality and Neoliberalism that Institutionalize Subordination of Public Primary and Preschool Teachers" explores historical and contemporary instances where colonial and neoliberal forces intersect to subordinate primary and preschool teachers by influencing their roles, praxis, and professional identities within the field of ELT. Accordingly, life-stories encapsulate how coloniality and neoliberalism influence teachers' personal and professional trajectories in ELT.

These chambers collectively depict historical moments when ELT permeated primary schools' curricula, various approaches to teaching the English language to young learners, and some educational policies that made English a mandatory school subject in primary schools.

Coloniality in Primary Public Schools' Quotidian Lives

We were educated in schools where the contents of the subjects ignored culture, ancestral knowledge, the relationships among people, and the connection of human beings with nature. Dussel (2018, 2'and 04") declared that what is not European is considered mere anecdotes or just 'unimportant information'. In a way, I am aware that this is a risky option,

but this is the path where *we* can share *our* stories, truths, emotions, epistemologies, and so on. Accordingly, Maldonado-Torres (2007) explains that coloniality

> refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and every day (p. 243).

Similarly, Guerrero Arias (2010) argues that the coloniality of knowledge has made possible the homogenization and universalization of reason. Therefore, science and technology became the valid discourses accepted to discuss the world and the truth. In modern epistemology, other ways of thinking, cultures, and wisdom are often relegated, members of those communities are seen as subjects of study and not as individuals who think, have a voice, act, feel autonomously, and can produce knowledge. Similarly, "one of the most serious consequences of the coloniality of knowledge is the denial of affectivity in knowledge, the absence of tenderness in academy" (Guerrero-Arias, 2010, p. 109-110, my translation). Since the beginning of this journey, one of my primary objectives has been to embrace affectivity in this framework. Fortunately, Guerrero Arias (2010) explains his decolonial option by joining two words '*corazón'* (heart) and '*razonar'* (reasoning) to emphasize that "the heart does not exclude or does not make reason invisible but rather nourishes reason with affectivity" (p. 115, my translation). Therefore, both elements mutually constitute what the author considers as *corazonar* (reason-heart). From this epistemology, heart, and reason are inseparable. This perspective resonates with Fals Borda's concept of '*Sentipensante',* which emerged from his interactions and observations with Colombian communities from the coast known as *amphibious culture.* These communities integrate the heart and feeling with the head and reasoning to navigate life's challenges and adversities while respecting nature's rhythms and times (2017, 5'10"-5'24", my translation).

In the same vein, Maturana (2001) defines love as "the emotion that constitutes the actions of accepting the other as a legitimate *other* in coexistence, therefore, to love is to open a space of recurrent interactions with another in which her/his presence is legitimate without

constrains" (p. 32, my translation). Thus, the coloniality of knowledge has found ways to objectify people, affection is denied, and a singular scientific mode of knowing centered in European and North American epistemologies prevails. Furthermore, in this rather adverse panorama language plays a significant role, where English has become the language to access and produce knowledge. Dussel (2012) wonders: "Will English be the only classical language that will prevail over humanity, who will be fed up and would forget own traditions?" (Dussel, 2012, p. 45, my translation). In this sense, Jordao (2016) warned that English has become "the language of internationalization – it's in the papers, in academic research, on TV, in the social mind…. inescapable" (p. 191). Thus, English has permeated people´s lifestyles shaping what Dussel (2012) refers to as the cultural world[18].

In the same vein, Fandiño-Parra (2021) explains how coloniality is manifested in diverse ways in ELT thanks to accepted practices supported by the global north.

> Initially, there is a generalized approval of the notion that English is the language to teach and learn over other languages. On the other hand, there is an unquestionable acceptance of the importance of using teaching methods and materials produced by western academia. Similarly, there is a problematic tolerance of exclusion and inequality represented by teacher certification and foreign language marketization (p. 178).

In conclusion, since English has been incorporated into the curriculum especially in primary schools, due to parents' desires for bilingual children, this subject has become a commodity. Private schools, capitalizing on this demand, have engaged in a competition to attract more students to their institutions by promising effective English language education. This competition wiped out the schools that could not implement a bilingual model or hire English teachers. This competitive environment has perpetuated disparities in access based on economic means by offering bilingual education at any price.

The subsequent discussion delves into the political and economic views of English language education.

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[18]Culture is the organic set of behaviors predetermined by attitudes towards the instruments of civilization, whose teleological content is constituted by values and symbols of the group, that is, lifestyles that are manifested in works of culture and that transform the physical-animal environment into a world, a cultural world. (Dussel, 2012, p. 153, my translation)

Neoliberalism that Denies *the Other* in Public Schools

To begin with, it seems of paramount importance to acknowledge the complexities in defining neoliberalism in education and understanding its implications. Although the term has been present in our context for some time, it remains challenging to define it as it has gone unnoticed in our lives as teachers within the public system. Firstly, this difficulty arises since discussions about legislation are seldom addressed in *our* school. Secondly, the topic of politics or neoliberalism was rarely discussed in the undergraduate and graduate programs I had studied. Thirdly, talking about politics or neoliberalism in my school contexts is taboo and people hesitate to express their insights that could be perceived as left-leaning. These factors contribute to a situation where neoliberalism's influence on educational dynamics and policies is often hidden and under-discussed within the professional and academic spheres at schools.

For Van der Walt, Neoliberalism,

> has stealthily crept onto the scene and has since infiltrated every nook and cranny of our existence. Neoliberalism and its relatively unsophisticated "philosophy of education" have therefore had a great impact on modern life and particularly on education at all levels (2017, p. 2).

Neoliberalism has significantly impacted people's lifestyles or cultural worlds, particularly through educational programs that perpetuate and replicate a domination system based on memory and mechanized teaching. This approach tends to foster people who prioritize their personal wellbeing, consume instead of producing, and exhibit limited interest in social issues. Essentially, this kind of education makes possible "the fragmentation of knowledge, of subject, society and culture" (Colectivo Pedagógico Región Zamora, 2016, paragraph 3, my translation).

Several scholars have conducted research and shared their thoughts about neoliberalism in education. Figure 3 illustrates some of the relevant work developed in this field, which centers on the ways neoliberalism in the form of both discourses/narratives has defined the world as an enterprise of profit-making. Thus, education becomes commodified and a commodity, which ultimately turns the assessment of the educational system into measurable outcomes leading to schools being rewarded or penalized based on their performance.

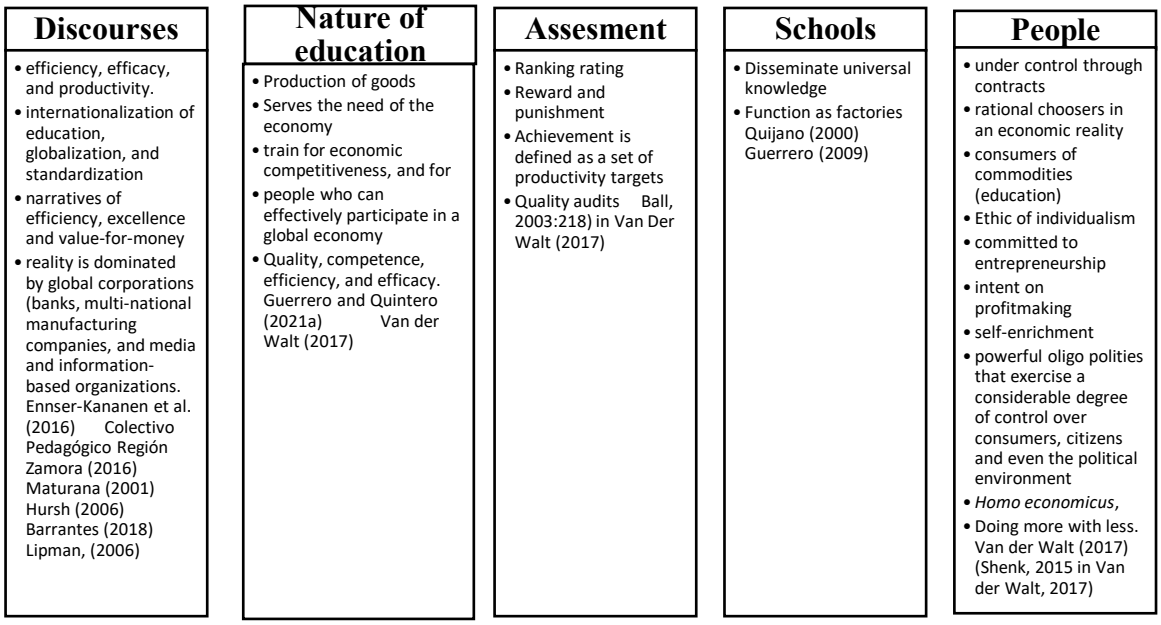

Figure 3 *Neoliberal ideas in education*

In regards to how neoliberalism has permeated the field of ELT, Table 2 presents the notions of scholarly work done in this area. Consequently, academic scholarship has made efforts to study the effects of neoliberalism on ELT and teacher's lives.

Policies	The government creates the need for English language through discourses and contracts with "experts" to back up those policies. A chimerical, acontextual, homogenizing approach that does not respond to the needs either of the society or students.	Guerrero and Quintero (2021)
English Language	A tool of colonization of minds and mouths. Language of internationalization (inescapable) everywhere. The best to teach and to learn. Marketization. A good.	Jordao (2016) Fandiño-Parra (2021) Guerrero (2008)
Curriculum for ELT Content	Imposed by the State through teachers' training on what and how to teach. A regulation and control tool on designing and implementation of ELT in primary. Business acumen and business vocational and occupational create expertise to be able to supply market needs. Commodification of knowledge	Nuñez (2020) Barrantes (2018) Welch, 1998:160-164) in Van der Walt ,2017.

ELT in primary schools	Discourse of the development of a country's human capital to support global competitiveness and economic development. On the individual level, the discourse is similarly cast in terms of "opening doors" and "creating opportunities" for employment and social mobility.	Sayer (2015)
Implementation of ELT programs	Produces inequality in the access to learning.	Guerrero (2010)
Frameworks	Common European Framework of Reference Levels of language domain: A1, B1, C1, etc. Exclusion and inequality are represented by teacher certification.	MEN (2016) Ayala-Zárate & Álvarez (2005) Fandiño-Parra (2021)
Primary school teachers	Consumers of knowledge. Are supervised and monitored. Do research with their own time and money, on their own. Technicians/marketers Invisible Under suspicion by tests and exams.	Quintero and Guerrero (2013) Guerrero (2009) Guerrero and Quintero (2021)

Table 2 *Neoliberal ideas in schools*

Scholars have extensively explored the influence of neoliberal ideologies on policies, language, curriculum, contents, institutions, and public primary school teachers. Their research underscores that English has become commodified, exacerbating the inequity between students who have access to language education and those who do not. Accordingly, Guerrero (2010) claims that in Colombia "the conditions in which the L2 [English] is being taught and used puts the population which does not have the material, economic, or human resources to access the L2 at a disadvantage." (pp.175-176). Yet, public primary schools, where specialized English teachers are absent, remain relegated or silenced in the overall discussion.

Guerrero and Quintero (2021a) argued that:

> Neoliberalism in education takes a toll, not only on the quality of education per se, but on the personal and professional lives of teachers who feel despair more and more about their role in the implementation of policies, but who also find the strength to keep fighting for their ideals (p. 38).

Therefore, the core of this study lies in examining how *we* have experienced these neoliberal policies for ELT inside *our* classrooms as English teachers and learners. Understanding the impact of these policies on *our* dynamics at work is the initial step toward transforming *our* educational practices.

A family compensation fund[19] recently introduced the Centros de Interés (Interest Centers) such as Bilinguart. This is a combination of arts and English classes that only caters to six percent of primary school students. Thus, this phenomenon reifies what Hursh (2006) proposes regarding how "Education is transformed into a market in which schools compete with one another […] for the students and teachers to fill the school, students and teachers become commodities with some students and teachers valued over others" (Hursh, 2006, p. 22). Subsequently, competition "as a human phenomenon constitutes the negation of the other" (Maturana, 2001, p. 6 – my translation); and has taken up its role in education when schools are ranked using based on state exam scores. According to this system, schools outside the top one hundred designated by the MEN are relegated to a perceived state of insignificance, perpetuating the notion that they are in a constant state of improvement known as the 'not- yet zone'. In the same fashion, Barrantes (2018) also affirms that neoliberalism endorses the idea that "the other" is the enemy promoting barriers based on perceived differences among individuals. This environment sponsors a single thought and stimulates the formation of obedient people who live in a comfort zone.

Institutionalized Subordination of Public Primary and Preschool teachers

ELT in schools has disseminated quickly around the world, bringing with itself the idea of subalternity to Latin American countries. For instance, in Colombia, we follow imported models, approaches, and textbooks for ELT brought from Europe, the UK, and the USA. In addition, "the normative, colonial ideologies of English language teaching have othered nonwhite learners as inferior, and the knowledge traditions from these communities have also been historically marginalized" (Hsu, 2017, p. 118). Fortunately, Colombian scholars such as Cardenas (2000), Clavijo (2000), Fandiño (2020), González (2009), Granados-Beltran (2018), Guerrero (2010, 2018), Nuñez (2020), Usma (2009), Valencia (2013), among many others (See Figure 4) have been working on uncovering and dismantling what lies behind those

[19] Family compensation funds are private, non-profit entities which provide health and education services.

models for ELT. These academics have strived for English teachers to counteract the subordination effects of some ELT narratives and discourses. Accordingly, Maturana (2017) claims that human beings prefer collaborating to obeying. Similarly, scholarly work disseminated through webinars such as the ones held by the Colombian Association of English Teachers (ASOCOPI by its initials in Spanish) has motivated English language teachers to thwart ELT practices that subordinate own cultures, to combat the inertia of our daily life by creating alternatives to let our voices heard (Fandiño, 2020). He also remarks that:

> the Colombian ELT community requires an epistemic turn that allows it to deconstruct discourses and practices that not only impose the thought and culture of the global north, but that, above all, mobilize the knowledge and the culture of teachers, students, and institutions of the global south (Fandiño, 2021, pp.168-169).

In this train of thought, local proposals such as the COFE[20] Project have been reported as main achievements:

> the increase of hours of English instruction devoted to develop language proficiency, the introduction of curricular changes regarding the inclusion of practicum semesters and the emphasis on research in teacher preparation programs and the organization of resource centers in major cities. It is clear that the project had an impact on the quality of teacher education in the country because it set up the basis for local research (González, 2010, p. 339).

The proposals have targeted future English language teachers sidelining public primary and preschool teachers whose major is not English and who do not benefit from these local initiatives. Furthermore, educational settings have assumed responsibility for instilling the notion that neoliberalism brings profits (Mignolo, 2014). Hence, schooling has played a crucial role in disseminating universal perspectives, that often overshadow the diverse differences that define us (Quijano, 2000; López-Gopar 2009; Palermo, 2015). In this regard, Palermo (2015) proposes a pedagogy "Other-Wise" that considers the cultural richness of our communities. The initial step in this decolonial path involves to "assume ourselves as

[20] A proposal for the Colombian Framework for English (COFE project) in the B.A. University licenciatura programmes: English as a foreign language. (Working and discussion document) Learning to teach to learn (1995). Blanca Aparicio de Escorcia from Universidad del Valle, Jorge Benavides from Universidad de Nariño –Pasto, Melba Libia Cárdenas from Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Juan Ochoa from Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, Carlos Ospina from Universidad de Caldas, and Oscar Zuluaga from Universidad del Cauca. For more information: https://www.academia.edu/30070138/Learning_To_Teach_Teaching_to_Learn_COFE_Project

colonized, by disarticulating the knowledge acquired in the cumulative and reproductive order that is believed to be unique, valid and true" (Palermo, 2015, p. 2 – my translation). Similarly, Walsh (2017) agrees that the first duty is to decolonize our minds. However, this turns out to be a difficult endeavor due to the educational and cultural backgrounds where we grew up, and that often tends to be replicated and reified by ourselves.

Figure 4 depicts a hierarchical representation of knowledge(s) position depending on the people's role in the educational setting regarding English language teaching or learning.

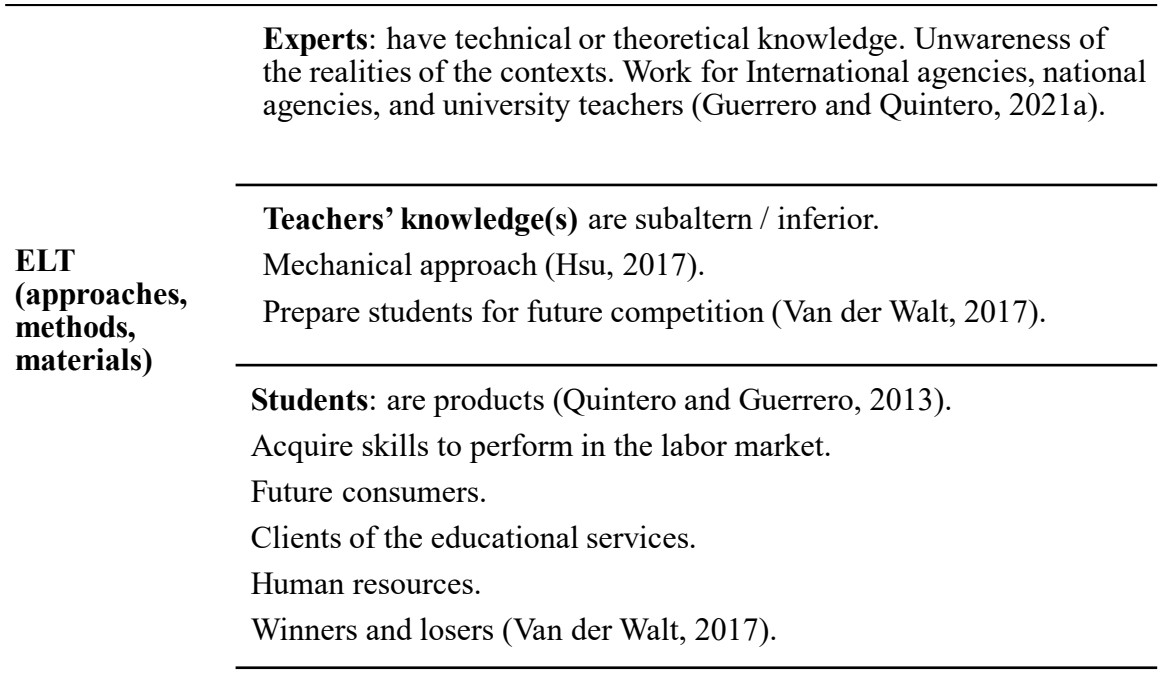

Figure 4 *Knowledge Hierarchies in ELT*

From a Eurocentric viewpoint, experts hold the highest authority, followed by teachers who are portrayed as consumers of textbooks, lacking the autonomy to create their own teaching materials, and expected to conform to the requirements set by these experts. Their primary task is seen as preparing students to compete effectively in the marketplace. Within this hierarchy, educational coordinators are tasked with adhering to government guidelines, including planning educational strategies and ensuring a specified number of weekly hours dedicated to English Language Teaching (ELT) for children (MEN, 2016). From this perspective, students are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge, who attend school primarily to learn how to consume and compete with the rest of their peers while neglecting the other. In other words, this perspective runs contrary to the fundamental goals of education.

Suárez (2005) summarized how subalternity has affected people involved in education. Teachers are considered as the variable that must be adjusted so that the innovation of teaching is carried out according to the guidelines of technical and expert knowledge. Centralized curriculum, training on the deficit, and quantified evaluation of learning outcomes are the central strategies of the school knowledge policy. This framework positions teachers and teacher educators in a subordinate place, subjected, and supposedly unexperienced and with a lack of knowledge and pedagogical value. Even more, Suárez (2011) describes how subalternation has erased knowledge produced in school communities:

> Strikingly, the experiences that give life to teaching and the pedagogical knowledge that thinks and recreates them in their development are confined to a marginal, disdained place in the personal or "semi-professional" history of teachers. A considerable part of the practical and reflective knowledge accumulated in these school experiences is naturalized and vanishes in school daily life or degrades into recurrent naïve anecdotes and hasty comments (Suárez, 2011, p. 394, my translation).

Thus, pedagogical knowledge that is shared in formal meetings such as an academic council, teachers' assemblies, and informal chats is dismissed and does not constitute valuable knowledge. Conversely, in this study teachers' voices mirrored in *our* voices, *our* experiences, and *our* stories are positioned as central to communicating *our* ways of being, knowing, feeling, and doing concerning how *we* have experienced learning and English teaching.

To summarize, Méndez (2018) makes evident that the "English teacher subject has been objectified to fulfill the requirements of policies, the standards of an idealization of being or to explain the failure of a state's goal and even the lack of success of a bilingual program" (p. 203). Overall, neoliberalism seeks to dismantle the State's authority, significantly impacting education in the process. This ideological shift has influenced language pedagogy, which has not escaped from the neoliberal system, but this "has an ethical goal that goes into the construction of intersubjective meanings that help us both to understand ourselves and others in the interest of better societies" (Granados-Beltrán, 2018, p. 175). Hence, public primary school teachers are silenced and invisibilized when policymakers develop public guidelines in ELT. In the same vein, I initially did not consider my colleagues to be English language teachers, yet they indeed teach English. This seems rather contradictory, but speaking from a southern perspective, *we* share *our* voices to identify the traits of coloniality

in *our* everyday lives as manifested through neoliberal ideas, discourses, and practices. It is crucial to understand what *we* think, feel, and value when teaching English to become conscious of these neoliberal influences and to make informed decisions regarding English Language Teaching (ELT), at least within our context. Are we truly aware of this situation?

From the existence of coloniality in people's lives and those practices brought from the global north, an exploration of the past in terms of the introduction of ELT in schools, approaches to teaching English to young learners, and policies that made possible the emerging of English as a compulsory elementary school subject are revisited in the following section.

Tracing Back an Early Start to ELT

Colombia is a country with a wide diversity of cultures. According to the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia[21] (ONIC by its initials in Spanish) nowadays, around 65 indigenous languages are spoken by their native communities. Similarly, within the national territory, two Creole languages are spoken, one in San Andrés archipelago and the other in San Basilio de Palenque. There are also languages such as Romani, the Colombian signal language, and Spanish, which is recognized as the official language. Keeping in mind that this rich cultural variety is at risk of disappearing due to educational policies that privilege European languages and cultures, the following lines offer a review of some historical events in language teaching in Colombia taking as a reference the work developed by Gómez (1971).

In Colombia, between the 15th and 17th centuries, Latin was the official language in schooling in La Nueva Granada. Ironically, the Decree 27 of April of 1554 mandated that priests learn indigenous languages to teach Spanish with indigenous people serving as their teachers. Later, between 1739 and 1777 Spain and England engaged in various wars and signed several treaties. As a result, English settlers were accepted to live in Belize and also to settle in San Andrés and Providence islands[22] between 1782 and 1783. Subsequently, through a decree signed on July 5, 1820, by Simón Bolívar, Latin and Spanish (Castilian) grammar, French, and English languages, geography, drawing, chronology, and history were the school

[21] The ONIC is composed of fifty (50) zonal and regional organizations that are affiliated and are widespread across 29 of the 32 departments of the country. For more information visit: ONIC - 65 Lenguas Nativas de las 69 en Colombia son Indígenas

[22] The Archipielago of San Andres Island are part of the Colombian territory.

subjects in secondary schools. Then, through the Law of March of 1826, Spanish became the official language while English, French, German, and Italian started to be taught in Colombia with educational reforms issued by Bolívar and Santander. In 1825, *La Sociedad Bíblica Colombiana* was founded and directed by Diego Thomson in Bogotá, who disseminated protestant principles, and in 1863, reverend Thomas F. Wallace and his wife taught English language courses and founded an American male school in Bogotá. Afterwards, in 1868 an American female school was founded with the arrival of teacher Kate Mc Faren. Consequently, the beginning of ELT was connected to the teaching of Catholic and Protestant creeds.

A new commercial activity, navigation along the Magdalena River started in 1823 with ships brought from England and the USA. Many captains spoke English and oil companies hired English speakers to teach the language to their children and employees. Two British teachers also contributed to the spread of the language. While Thomas Jones Stevens was a private English language teacher for prominent individuals in Bogotá such as Mr. Miguel Antonio Caro, Samuel Start Bond taught in Antioquia.

The aforementioned description briefly outlines how several languages including English began to be taught in what is now known as Colombia. Children received private English language lessons with the same teachers who taught to their fathers; no mothers are mentioned to have been students, and only a female was highlighted as a language teacher. The following section reviews the introduction of English language teaching in schools.

González (2010) grounded on the works of García et al. (2007) describe those two Colombo American centers that were founded, in 1942 and 1947 in Bogotá and Medellin respectively. Similarly, the Colombian British Cultural Center was founded in Medellin in 1941. “Both institutions had, as a major aim, cultural and economic support for the development of the country and the promotion of the English language and culture” (pp., 338-339), this occurred in cooperation with the American and British governments.

Furthermore, concerning the field of ELT towards children two main researchers, namely Gómez (1971) and Enever (2016) stand out as significant scholarly work. The initial trace concerning materials for young language learners in Colombia was documented by Gómez (1971), who explained that in 1880, Mr. José Rivas Groot published a book for teaching English to children. He devised signs to represent the most challenging sounds of the

English language and annotated these signs within the sentences. Students would then translate these sentences orally. The method combined translation from Spanish to English and vice versa, but students were required to answer exclusively in English. Following this path, Gómez (1971) also mentioned a book published in 1934 to teach English to children using the Berlitz method. This language was incorporated as part of the curriculum for junior and high schools with the Ministry of Education of Colombia recommending the Berlitz method for English teaching.

Multiple events in history have influenced the appearance of English in primary schools, as described by Enever (2016). Between 1960 and 1970 Europeans included English in their primary schools. As there was no evidence of the benefits of studying English at an early age, this subject was dismissed in 1974. The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1980 triggered political transformations in countries of Eastern Europe including some of the former Soviet bloc such as Yugoslavia. Following these changes, English started to be taught in these primary schools as a mandatory subject despite the absence of clear language policies.

In the same vein, Enever (2016) mentions that:

> The Critical Period Hypothesis, which supports that a language is better learned during childhood and teenage, and some empirical studies with not enough evidence of the success of including ELT at an early stage, were motives for policy makers and parents to be convinced that ELT should be introduced from the very earliest phase of schooling. This socio-political rationale has been driven mainly by a concern for future economic security both at individual levels for the next generation and at the national level of engagement in what we can be loosely termed as the global "marketplace" (p. 355).

Furthermore, in India (Tamil Nadu), some politicians included ELT in primary public schools to increase their popularity in elections because they realized that parents preferred to enroll their children in private schools that offered English as a means of instruction. Politicians claimed this as "modernization of the curriculum" (Enever, 2016, p. 355). Currently, the English language has become a commodity with parents increasingly requesting the introduction of ELT in pre-school/kindergarten. Many parents are even willing to pay for private English lessons for their children.

Overall, the introduction of English as a subject in primary schools is the result of parents' desire for their children to learn the language and economic opportunities seized by private institutions to attract more young learners by offering English language lessons. The following section will examine how ELT has been approached since its introduction in the educational curriculum.

ELT Approaches in Primary Schools

Plenty of methods to ELT have colonized not only the way to learn a language but also the role of English language teachers assumed within the field. While this journey does not center around exploring *our* linguistic competence in English or *our* domain of approaches or methodologies, this section describes briefly some historical moments detailing how English has been taught. Please refer to Annex 3 for a time line of ELT approaches.

One of the methods to teach children how to read and write is Phonics. In 1783, Noah Webster expressed dissatisfaction with children's books that overlooked American culture. His first step to promote education for Americans was publishing the American Spelling Book. In 1997, the USA national reading panel convened to review research done on reading instruction, and in 2000 they issued a report on reading methods. However, there is a debate between advocates of teaching reading using phonics or whole-word methods. In this regard, Cothran (2014) asserts:

> Most reading instruction today, although couched in rhetoric about "balanced" and "mixed" approaches, at least reflects an acknowledgment that early training in letter-sound correspondences and the basic patterns of English spelling are essential to good reading instruction. Major education publishers have now aligned their programs to the Reading Panel's basic recommendations (partly because states such as California and Texas, the largest purchasers of school textbooks, now require phonics instruction) (Cothran, 2014, paragraph 14).

This aspect of history led me to mention that in 2000, I began using Phonics to teach preschoolers how to read. This was a new approach for me, and I needed to study the book that my parents had purchased to teach in this manner.

In Communicative Language Teaching (1970), repetition and competitiveness during classes were considered necessary. Within the socio-cognitive approach, there is a strong emphasis on memorizing lexical lists to succeed in tests such as the Young Learners English test (YLE)[23]. Under the umbrella term for communicative approaches, various methods include the natural approach, cooperative language learning, content-based instruction, and task-based language learning.

In the post-methods era, the educational landscape has seen a notable rise in the use of platforms, apps, games, and computer-based pedagogies designed for language learning. For example, "Flip [24](formerly Flipgrid) is a free web and mobile app from Microsoft that schools around the world have been using for more than a decade to record, edit, and share video assignments" (Microsoft, 2024). Additionally, in remote learning, Uruguayan teachers and students received computers to learn from so-called 'experts' native English-speaking teachers. In Japan, empirical studies have shown that educational games have not significantly contributed to improving students' English language test scores. This raises pertinent questions about the potential implications of digital autonomy in language learning, both within and beyond formal educational settings.

According to data bases, in the 21st century, communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration are deemed as the primary skills to be developed. Accordingly, López-Gopar (2009, 2011, 2013, 2014, and 2016) in his book *Decolonizing Primary English Language Teaching,* along with several articles from his research team advocates for multilingual practices in teaching English to children. The author emphasizes the promotion of social justice by supporting indigenous languages and developing respect for linguistic human rights. The CEAR project is particularly noteworthy as it has been embraced by teachers' educators, teachers, and prospective English teachers who seek to transform teachers' practicum into critical teaching praxis (López Gopar, 2013).

To illustrate various ELT approaches for young learners, Table 3 was designed by drawing mainly from Enever (2016) and López-Gopar (2009). This table includes the

[23] These exams are administered by the University of Cambridge: ESOL examination. Pre-A1 Starters- A1 Movers – A2 Flyers.
[24] flip. info.com

approach to ELT, key principles underpinning the approach, relevant countries, and associate findings, or phenomena.

Approach	Principles	Year – Countries
Phonics	A method of teaching how to read that emphasizes the relationship between letters and sounds.	1783 – the USA
Language Experience Approach -LEA	Use the student's own vocabulary, language patterns, and background of experiences to create reading texts.	1964 New Zealand
Communicative Language Teaching-CLT	Activity-focused classroom Curiosity as a sense of inquiry A sense of imitation **Love of repetition for its own sake** A sense of fun A lack of inhibitions about speaking Willingness to make errors. A predisposition for kinesthetic learning mode **A Sense of competitiveness**	1980 (Council of Europe)
Socio-Cognitive Approach (Vygotsky)	Create an appropriated social context within the school environment where children engage in effective learning. Use of songs, rhymes, drama, stories, role-plays. Share of stories Language games Drawing and painting activities Cookery tasks Science experiments Include 4 skills (L, R, W, S) **Strong emphasis on learning key lexis**	1978 (Europe, North America, Latin America)
Whole Language	Teaching emphasizes the ability of oral expression, the ability of communication, the ability of thinking, and the ability of analysing (Goodman, 1991, p. 123). Places students in the center of the learning process.	1980 -1990
Remote Teaching	Blended Learning Cheap laptops for teachers and students to **meet the need for expert teachers in ELT**	2003 (Uruguay)
Gaming Practices	Online games in English for children between 4 and 12 years old. Educational games online do not	2014 (Japan)

	accomplish the goal of ELT because **players do not improve scores on tests scores**.	
Online Learning	**Learning can take place in and out of school.**	Croatia, England, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and Sweden. Boys between 10- and 11 years old play "World Warcraft" to socialize.
CEAR Project: Transformative multiliteracies pedagogy and Critical pedagogy and language learning.	Translanguaging practices as the tenet. Children's identity negotiation through the creation and enactment of identity texts. **Teachers as learners and children as teachers.**	Since 2007 (Mexico-Oaxaca) Teaching English critically to Mexican children

Table 3 *Trends to ELT approaches in Primary Schools*
Source: *Own based on Enever (2016) and López-Gopar (2009) mainly.*

The following section revolves around the policies that have established English as a compulsory subject in primary school in some countries around the world, with a specific focus in Colombia, and Bogotá. The latter is essential as this research journey has its heart, mind, and soul in this city.

English as a Mandatory School Subject in Primary

Table 4 was designed to illustrate the polices that have mandated English teaching in primary schools. The chart contains the year, the name of the country, and the law, act, decree, or agreement that enforced the mandatory teaching of English in primary schools. In the last column, I present some interpretations based on research articles found about this theme.

Year	Country	Some characteristics
1898 1917 1949	Puerto Rico	As there were three political Parties: *Popular Democrático* (pro-commonwealth) *Nuevo Progresista* (PNP, pro-statehood), and *Independestista Puertorriqueño* the role of English language in schools depended on their own ideological, political positions and connections with the USA. In 1898, English was the primary means, in 1917, there was a bilingual incorporation of English – Spanish.

		From 1949 up to now, Spanish became the means of instruction, and English as a school subject, (Maldonado-Valentin, 2016).
1944	Costa Rica	English has been a compulsory subject in primary school since 1944, and in 1949 for secondary school as well, due to the economic development of the country, (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
1994 2013	Colombia	The introduction of a foreign language in the curriculum was promulgated in 1994. English as a compulsory school subject since 2013 through Law 1651, (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
1996 2013	Chile	It has been mandatory to teach English from fifth grade since 1996. Some schools have started to teach English voluntarily from first grade since 2013 (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017). This implementation has to do with the desire to become a bilingual country (Barahona, 2016).
1997	Turkey	English must be taught from fourth grade since 1997 through act 4306 (İnceçay, 2012).
2001 2003	Taiwan	English has been mandatory from fifth grade since 2001. Then, in 2003 English became compulsory from third grade. The main reason to include English in the curriculum is to position the country in the global economy (Lin, 2015).
2003	Panama	English has been a compulsory school subject for primary and secondary in both private and public schools since 2003 through Law 2 (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
2006	Argentina	Teaching English is compulsory for students from fourth grade since 2006 through Law 26. Reactions regarding TEFL have to do with the importance of English in Argentinean lives and with the Americanization and Europeanization of Argentina (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
2009 2012 2016	Uruguay	In 2009 schools could choose a foreign language. Since 2012 in the urban areas, English has been taught from fourth grade. In 2016, they had to choose between Portuguese and English. Portuguese is taught in three districts out of nineteen; these are bilingual places (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
2011	Mexico	Students have had compulsory classes of English from pre-school to ninth grade since 2011 through agreement 592 (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016; Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).

2011	Japan	The Ministry of Education of Japan made English a mandatory school subject in primary school. Fourth and fifth graders have English classes once a week (Ng, 2016).
2014	Peru	A foreign language must be taught as a primary school subject since 2014, through Resolution 2060, but each province can choose a language (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
2014	Ecuador	The requirement to teach English as a compulsory subject began in 2014 through Agreement 0052-14. This implementation started with geographical zones: *Sierra* (mountain range) between 2016 and 2017 and *Costa* (Coast) between 2017 and 2018 (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).
2016	Canada - Quebec	English is the international language that must be taught from the first and second grades. However, some scholars argue that public education has to promote French to maintain their culture (Fallon & Rubik, 2011).
2018	Brazil	After much debate, English started to be a compulsory school subject in 2017 through Law 13415, and its implementation took place in 2018 (Almeida, 2016).
2005 2021	Saudi Arabia	The Ministry of Education made the teaching of English compulsory in public Saudi primary schools in 2005, and in 2021 this subject became obligatory since the first grade to improve students' language proficiency. (Manar et al., 2024).

Table 4 *English as a mandatory school subject in primary*
Source: *Taken and adapted from (Castañeda Usaquen, M., 2020)*

Policies regarding ELT in primary school were mainly issued between 1999 and 2021. This is a result of the close relationship established between some countries and the USA. Therefore, this dynamic has reflected a significant shift towards prioritizing English as an important area of study in primary schools in the mid-1990s. In this sense, Sayer (2015) elucidated that Primary English Language Teaching programs are framed at the national level through the discourse of the development of a country's human capital to support global competitiveness and economic development. At the individual level, the discourse is similarly cast in terms of "opening doors" and "creating opportunities" for employment and social mobility (p. 53). This aligns with the aspiration of learning English to achieve better living conditions. Similarly, after some discussions, English teaching has recently become compulsory in Brazil and Ecuador along with its implementation. Something similar is

happening in Peru and in Saudi Arabia, in the last, where the teaching of English begins in the first grade with the purpose of enhancing global competitiveness. Undesirably, the introduction of English as a school subject corresponds to economic-driven ideas rather than pedagogical ones that aim to broaden learners' worldviews.

Colombian public primary school teachers face an incongruous position as they are required by the Colombian education authorities to teach English, while most of them have not been educated to do so. These policies for ELT require preschool and primary school teachers to teach a language they are not fully familiar with and for which they have not received sufficient preparation. At this stage of the journey, it is pivotal to understand the normativity of the English language as a school subject. I have brought to this section *our* stories on how *we* have experienced some of these policies, plans, programs, and/or norms for ELT. Accordingly, rather than addressing every single regulation, I will focus on the ones *we* discussed in *our* meetings. These stories reveal the tangible effects of these policies on *our* daily teaching experiences. The following lines illustrate the influence in *our* lives of some of the national policies on education, English programs, and the strategies that the government of Bogotá used to implement the policies in public primary schools. Thus, Table 5 depicts the national policies, the sectoral education plans or normativity, and the actions implemented by Bogotá's District Board of Education (SED by its initials in Spanish) for English teaching in public kindergarten and primary schools.

National Policies	**Programs of the mayoralty**	**Ways of implementation**
President: César Gaviria (1990-1994) **Political Doctrine:** Liberal **Program:** Pacific Revolution **Educational program:** Plan de apertura educativa 1991-1994 **Law 1994** Article 21: Objective (m) to learn a foreign language for primary school. Article 23 (7) A foreign language was a mandatory school subject. *Most schools chose English as a foreign language.	Memorandum of association 2001: Bogota is a bilingual region. Voluntary Agreement 2003: Bilingual Bogota and Cundinamarca in ten years.	Introducing English as a foreign language in public primary and secondary schools.

President: Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) **Political Doctrine**: Nueva Fuerza Democrática **Program:** Cambio para construir la paz **Educational Program:** Educación, Cultura y Formación para el Trabajo	SED Bogota and British Council Agreement 2004 – 2019.	
President: Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) **Political Doctrine**: Primero Colombia **Program:** Seguridad Democrática- Hacía un Estado Comunitario **Educational Program:** La Revolución Educativa **National Program of Bilingualism 2005- 2008** **Basic Standards of Foreign Language Competence English: 2006** These standards are based on the Common European Framework of Reference – CEFR. Level A1 for students in first and third grade. Level A2 for students in fourth and seventh grade.	Sectoral Education Plan 2004 -2008 Bogotá una gran Escuela (Bogotá a great School) Agreement 253, 2006: Bilingual Bogota, issued by the Council of Bogota. Sectoral Education Plan 2008 – 2012 Calidad de la Educación para una Bogotá Positiva (Quality of Education for a Bogotá Positiva) Sectoral Education Plan 2012 – 2016 Bogotá Humana Human Bogotá	Program 8: Strengthening a second language. Three bilingual schools in District 9. Language Resource Centers- CRI for teachers of preschool and primary who are not English teachers. Use the program English Discovery. Teachers who have B2 can teach to teachers of primary schools. Language centers. Extended school day.
President: Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) **Political Doctrine**: Partido Social de Unidad Nacional **Program:** Solidaridad, Emprendimiento y Paz **Educational Program:** Colombia, la mejor educada en el 2025 **Law of Bilingualism 1651**	Sectoral Education Plan 2016 – 2020 Bogota Better for Everyone (Bogotá Mejor para Todos)	Second Language District Plan Converging Grounds is an extracurricular strategy and transmedia that creates a cultural and

2013 **National Plan of Education 2006 – 2016** Objective 1 and goal 1: Guidelines for the teaching of English from preschool to eleventh grade. **Bilingual Colombia** **2014 - 2018** One of the strategies is to promote English learning, especially in fourth and fifth grade. **Suggested Curriculum for English 2016** **Basic Learning Rights of English: Transition to Fifth Grade** **Collection Bunny Bonita** is a resource for children between four and eight years old. This contains videos, posters, and pedagogical guides in PDF to develop communicative skills in English.		communicative in English using different sources. Language centers. Spelling Bee contest.
President: Iván Duque (2018-2022) **Political Doctrine**: Centro Democrático **Program:** Pacto por Colombia, Pacto por la Equidad. **Educational Program:** Pacto por la Equidad, pacto por la Educación. **President:** Gustavo Petro (2022-2026) **Political Doctrine**: Pacto Histórico **Program:** Colombia potencia mundial de la Vida **Educational Program:** Ruta del cambio	Sectoral Education Plan 2020 -2024 La Educación en Primer Lugar (Education in the First Place)	Complementary activities once a week in extended school day. Arte para el bilingüismo. (Bilinguart) BI Diploma Program

Table 5 *ELT Policies in Colombia and Bogotá*
Source*: Adapted from Castañeda Usaquén, M. 2021*

The National Development Plan for Colombia between 1990 and 1994 discusses in its chapter V, how the State offered grants for new low-income students to enroll in private institutions that demonstrate quality and efficacy (p. 2 – my translation). In the same document, chapter VI addresses how the National Council of Economic and Social Policy on March 19 1990 approved this program with some recommendations. Firstly, the council requested the Ministry of Education to create grade "zero" (the first grade of preschool level) and integrate public primary and secondary schools (p. 3-4 –my translation). Thus, President Gaviria with his educational Opening Plan reduced educational funds by merging public primary schools with public high schools. These neoliberal ideas in public elementary schools constituted efforts "to reduce educational costs, often through economies of scale. Closing school libraries, reducing the number of special needs teachers, increasing class size, and expanding online learning programs" (Ross & Gibson, 2006, p. 4). This merging initiative from the government represented some significant changes in *our* schools. Before 2000, UE School and MC School were independent institutions, the former offered basic primary and secondary levels, namely pre-school to ninth grade, while the latter offered solely basic primary from first to fifth grade.

In the same line, neoliberalism has been altering schools' dynamics because not only it "has been introduced into the life and existence of both teachers and their students" (Van der Walt, 2017, p. 9) but also in institutional lives. Through agreement 2208 of July 30, 2002, the integration of MC school with UE school began. Since the unification, MC School, now located at Headquarters B, offers classes from kindergarten through fourth grade. However, students are required to transition to Headquarters A to complete their primary school or look for another school. The distance between MC (Headquarters B) and UE (Headquarters A) is almost one kilometer, the roads that connect them are characterized by slopes and a main street marked by heavy traffic without traffic lights. This situation must have undoubtedly caused ruptures and emotional strains. For example, fifth graders must commute to branch A for their classes, while families with younger children at MC School are forced to relocate their children to headquarters A. Moreover, teachers needing resources or administrative support must also travel to headquarters A, as they must make photocopies, and lend books

and there are not dedicated staff like librarians or secretaries at Headquarters B. Additionally, the principal of the school rarely goes to headquarters B with the coordinator and school counselor making only bi-weekly visits. In this sense, "neoliberalism has managed to colonize the habitus of many people, including those of teachers" (Van der Walt, 2017, p. 6). Conversely, UE School (Headquarters A) has two buildings. The first construction dedicated to secondary school, preschool, and some administrative offices is located in UPZ 67, mainly Domingo Lain neighborhood. The second building for the primary school, the courtyard, and some administrative areas is in UPZ 67 within the Gibraltar neighborhood. This campus offers classes to students from transition through eleventh grade[25].

Since 2002, the little public primary school became a branch of UE School. In this way, the primary school lost its name, and its autonomy, and its teachers had to change their work lifestyles. Aura[26] remembered these days as follows:

> *The MC School's director sent the children who finished fifth grade in OUR little school to study their secondary education at the UE School, 'supposedly to unify resources'. In 2000, the integration process began. It was terrible! UE school teachers were angry with us! What could we do about the merging? Controversy began because some teachers who did not agree with the merge said that we should not be there, that MC School was far away, that there was a creek on the way there, ha, ha, ha. They made us feel very bad. […] For about twenty years up to now we have been the branch B of the UE School. The school director of UE School, José Simón, was very nice, and very cool with us; although our arrival at branch A was horrible because we were bullied: I never forget when a workmate took us all by the back of the neck and tried to lift us, she almost made us cry and said: "Welcome teachers" Oh my goodness! What a pain!* (Jiménez, 2022, p. 25).

[25] Next to the school (headquarters A) is the Kindergarten Los Niños Traviesos administered directly by the District Secretary of Social Integration and attached to UE School. It is part of project 1096. It serves children from 3 months old to 4 years old full time from 7 am to 5 pm from Monday to Friday. This institution provides a balanced diet and promotes the harmonious development of children. Adapted from: https://repository.uniminuto.edu/bitstream/10656/10233/1/TM.ISE_Trabajo%20de%20Grado_CameloFrancy-P%C3%A9rezLuzDary-Garz%C3%B3nJenny_2019.pdf

[26] Aura Aleida Jiménez Sánchez is one of the primary school teachers at UE School, heardquarters B, who lived the merge process.

President Andrés Pastrana's educational program supported work training for students, which would imply that future teachers' education would follow this ideological program. "Neoliberalism frames the purpose of education in terms of investments made in the development of students' human capital. What students should learn, and the value of education is relative to their individual prospects for future earnings" (Hastings, 2019, p. 1). Thus, competitiveness and individuality are prompted by schools. For example, *we* have witnessed inequality in access to ELT when working as public-school teachers. Firstly, the commodification of education has prompted the co-existence of different ways to manage ELT in Bogotá. There are at least four types of public schools based on their approaches to teaching English namely (i) charter schools, (ii) schools with a Bilingual Educational Model and/or pursuing the IB Diploma, (iii) schools with language centers, and (iv), what I have denominated traditional or common schools.

Colegios en concesión or charter schools[27] according to the Center for Education Reform (2019) in the USA:

> are public schools that provide unique educational services to students, or deliver services in ways that the traditional public schools do not offer […] Charters survive — and succeed — because they operate on the principles of choice, accountability, and autonomy not readily found in traditional public schools (paragraph 8).

However, Wells et al. (1999) have claimed that once a charter school is granted by a local school board, a state board of education, or another entity, charter schools operate with considerably less oversight regulation compared to traditional public schools. In return for this autonomy, they are expected, in principle, to achieve the objectives outlined in their charters. Failure to meet these goals can result in the revocation of their charter (p. 174). Many parents look for a charter school as the first and best option to enroll their children because at these schools' students receive breakfast, snacks, and lunch. These schools also offer an extended school shift from 7 am to 3 pm. Often, the facilities in these institutions involve buildings with a music room fully equipped, dancing classes, well-equipped laboratories, and computer rooms. The schools feature sports locations or agreements with sports centers as well as the

[27] Charter schools or *Colegios en Concesión (in Spanish)* "are built and outfitted by the city administration, and then the city administration gives their administration to private agents". (Contraloría de Bogotá, 2004, p. 5 –my translation)

idea of better academic results on state exams (e.g., named in the Colombian territory as *Pruebas Saber 11*). Wells, et al. (1999) also state that these schools favor a market-competition between schools. The authors contend that "even in low-income neighborhoods, charter schools tend to serve students who are better off in terms of having parents who are actively engaged in their education" (p. 175). This situation allows charter schools to ensure a strict selection process through administrative management. Thus, the success of charter schools is measured among others by the scores on State exams, the number of students who access higher education, students' nutrition levels, and the pregnancy rates of teenage students (Alcaldía de Bogotá-SED, 2018, p. 48). Accordingly, in charter schools' parents understand that a lack of responsibility and involvement in their children's educational journey can result in losing their child's place in the school. Annex 4 provides a list of charter schools in Bogotá.

To illustrate the implications of parents seeking to enroll their children in charter schools, consider the example from a secretary at my school, whose child just recently enrolled in a new charter school opened in the district. During a conversation, I enquired about her reasons for this decision. She described that she had struggled to enroll her child, who had previously studied in a private school, in the newly opened charter school. Similarly, she referred to several factors including the perceived quality of the ´kind of students, whom she described as well-behaved and clean, coming from higher-income families. Furthermore, she regarded positively the presence of responsible and specialized teachers who do not participate in strikes as well as the strict coordinators. Additionally, she appreciated the delicious food, available resources such as musical instruments, the convenient schedule from seven in the morning until two in the afternoon, and the provision of free education. These factors collectively convinced her that charter school was the optimal environment for her beloved child.

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge, that "the limited financial resources of working-class parents place constraints on their ability to enroll their children in the kind of extra-curricular activities in which middle-class children often engage and from which middle-class parents expect an educational dividend" (Lareau, 2002, as cited in Giroux & Schmidt, 2004, p. 217). This disparity highlights the inherent lack of fair competition between charter schools and traditional public schools. Consequently, parents significantly prefer charter

schools and if they are unable to secure a place in a charter school for their children, they often resign themselves to the alternatives.

The second group of schools involves the sixteen schools in Bogota following the *Modelo Educativo Bilingue*-MEB (Bilingual Educational Model). This is an inter-institutional cooperation agreement between the British Council and the District Board of Education (Hereafter SED by its initials in Spanish). This initiative includes offering students bilingual education or more hours of language classes and content classes in another language per week. Schools within this model have to transform their Institutional Educational Projects and area plans. These schools also have to create a bilingual environment by utilizing signals or labels in English and endorsing extracurricular activities targeted at language learning. Additionally, these schools require teachers who have levels of proficiency in the language and who can promote teaching-learning processes in courses in which English is the means of instruction. From my perspective, this project reifies a monolingual model of English teaching, as it does not address the inclusion of any other language. For further details, see Annex 5, which contains the list of schools implementing a Bilingual Education Model.

In this second group, I also included schools that are pursuing the IB Diploma[28]. Ten schools were selected based on their demonstrated progress in bilingual education, high scores on State tests, and certification of high quality. The budget for this program has been stipulated in a document called Conpes[29] issued by the SED in its educational policy between 2022 and 2038. This program is set to begin in 2024 with a budget of 100 million Colombian pesos (25,000 dollars) per school. For a detailed list of schools in the IB Diploma program, see Annex 6.

In the third group, I included schools with language centers. This is another strategy implemented by SED, which provides language classes to students who want to learn English or French in their spare time. Some of the characteristics of this program include: Colombian teachers must be on the official staff and must have a B2 certification of language proficiency; Native-speaker teachers (Belgian, Canadian, Brazilian, and Nigerian) must have an A2 level of Spanish and experience in teaching; depending on students' attendance, the language

[28] Public schools that were choosing by the SED to have *Diploma de Bachillerato Internacional Program*.
[29] 'Transformación del Ecosistema Educativo en Bogotá D.C. CONPES 24 - Política Educativa 2022- 2038' [*Transformation of the Educational Ecosystem in Bogota D.C. CONPES 24 - Educational Policy 2022- 2038]*

centers offer two modalities: one during weekdays and the other exclusively on Saturdays; each course lasts four semesters; students attending weekday classes must complete 200 hours of classes, while those attending Saturday classes must complete 240 hours of instruction.; finally, each group has a maximum of 25 students who have some sessions with native speakers, and most of the activities include games, songs, and dances.

Lastly, the school where this research takes place, in my perspective, belongs to the group of traditional or common public schools. In traditional schools, every student is accepted or must be accepted regardless of religion, race, gender, academic abilities, family composition, etc. All public primary schools can have '*profesores de apoyo*'[30], supporting teachers. Some institutions choose English language teachers as supporting teachers for children in primary. Most of them teach two hours of class each week per group. In *our* school, the supporting teacher is from the area of Information and Technology because the emphasis of the PEI is on this area. Consequently, this school belongs to the group of schools where in primary education, there is not an English language teacher in primary whose major is in English teaching.

From this perspective, the privileged setting for charter schools seems to be a mechanism used by the State to neglect, segregate, and make invisible students at traditional public schools. These students are seemingly disregarded, and therefore, do not deserve specialized resources such as qualified English language teachers.

All in all, this distribution of schools to teach English reflects mechanisms of the State that perpetuate inequalities contrary to the ideals proclaimed by President Iván Duque in his government plan called "*Pacto por Colombia, Pacto por la Equidad" (Pact for Colombia, Pact for Equity).* The National Education Ministry (MEN by its initials in Spanish) hands in its responsibility to make decisions regarding the implementation of ELT policies in primary education to the SED, which is the City's Board of Education (in this case) and to schools. Consequently, some public schools in primary offer one hour per week for teaching English, while others exclude English from the school curriculum. Each institution decides according to its possibilities how to teach English in primary.

[30] Supporting teachers belong to SED staff and they can be English, technology, arts, or physical education teachers among others.

Despite extensive research and analysis over the past decades, little has been said about how schools manage ELT policies daily. To illustrate this situation metaphorically: the bridge called ELT Public Primary Schooling in Bogotá is broken. On one side stands the State with its illusions and impositions, while on the other side, *we* struggle to implement ELT policies in *our* way, carefully navigating to avoid falling off the bridge.

In the same line, law 115 of 1994 and law 1651 of 2013 refer to the teaching of a foreign language in Colombia. The former does not specify a language while the latter endorses English. With the Law of Bilingualism, the Colombian government prioritizes, supports, privileges, and legitimizes English teaching as a foreign language. This goes hand in hand with the ideas of Ennser-Kananen, et al. (2016) concerning neoliberalism as it "is understood as an ideology within language education that views language as a commodity and promotes the idea that foreign language learning is connected to the acquisition of wealth, social status, and professionalism" (p. 16). In this train of thought, Enny[31] acknowledged her students' low English proficiency and expressed her worries:

> *[…] I do not know what the kids who do not have the possibility to study English are going to do! Nowadays, it is very hard; the world has already changed completely. Opportunities are scarce for those kids who do not know the English language, what is going to happen? So sad! And now more, English is no longer an option in the ICFES[32], it is something mandatory, that is, you study it, or you study it! The children, who do not have English classes with such a high hourly intensity are at a disadvantage and will never get a place to study at Universidad Nacional because they will have a very low ICFES score, and English will lower their average scores a lot* (Chaves, 2022, p. 102).

Strategies to implement ELT in public primary schools in Bogota began to take shape in 2004 with the introduction of Sectoral Education Plans through an agreement between SED and the British Council. Despite challenges such as resource shortage and a lack of qualified teachers, the English language must be in the academic curriculum starting from first grade. Concerning the standards for English teaching in the first grade of primary level, Mejia (2009)

[31] Enny Johanna Chaves Enciso is a primary school teacher at UE School.
[32] A Colombian standardized test, its name changed into SABER 11, eleventh graders must take this, because this often determines public university admission.

argues that “this leads to the rather paradoxical situation where the Standards for English are formulated as applying from Grade 1, yet the training and development opportunities are largely available only to those who teach English language in Grades 6-11” (p. 111). Some teachers who are in charge of teaching English in secondary schools have received governmental support to improve their language proficiency. From my professional perspective, having worked as a language teacher in secondary schools and benefiting from programs offered by the MEN and the SED, including the In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching (ICELT) model, I adhere to Mejia’s argument. This situation was not unfamiliar to me, as I was an English teacher in two different schools from 2001 to 2012.

Connected to the previous discussion, neoliberalism reframes all social relations, all forms of knowledge, and culture through market terms. All services established for the common good are potential targets of investment and profit-making. In the discourse of neoliberalism, society becomes synonymous with the market, democracy is equated with consumer choice, and the common good is replaced by individual advantage (Lipman, 2006, p. 51). Consequently, with the adoption of neoliberal principles in education, teachers, students, and school administrators have become commodified. Consequently, teachers have been stripped of their individual identities and reduced to labels such as A1, B1, and C1 based on their proficiency certificates. This commodification extends through the educational system as it “is increasingly subject to neoliberal governance, as […] district schools are replaced by charter schools, and school resources, such as curriculum, testing, and even the training of teachers, are provided by private companies” (Hastings, 2019, p. 1).

In this system, one’s worth is often measured by one’s ability to accomplish scores according to the role you play in the educational system. For instance, Colombian teachers in primary schools are required to demonstrate an A2 level of English proficiency as their level should not be below students’ proficiency level. Similarly, educational standards establish what students should know and should be able to do. Level A1 for students in first and third grade, and Level A2 for students in fourth and seventh grades (MEN, 2016, p. 6.). The focus on standardized assessments also impacts teachers’ professional identities. Jenny Viviana talked about the impact of the English exam required to get the master’s diploma:

> *We all were very frightened; we knew that the exam was complex and we had to prove a B1 level. Oh my God, we had to know a LOT! [...] I do not know how lucky I was that when they gave us the results, it came out that I was B2* (Téllez, 2022, p.140).

This passage reflects the pervasive influence of standardized testing and certification on how teachers perceive and articulate their professional qualifications within the neoliberal framework of education. When Jenny's results were divulgated, instead of acknowledging that she had received a B2 certificate, she said that she was B2.

Continuing with strategies targeted to students, the Third Spelling Bee Contest was introduced into schools and carried out online due to the lockdown. Some teachers agreed to enroll their pupils in the contest, while others were mere observers. Lulú expressed how she perceived students' performances and their home environments during their participation in the competition:

> *During the pandemic, SED organized online events [July 2020] in one of them[33], I saw some ninth, tenth, and eleventh students talking to teachers and answering questions in English. These schools succeeded, have come a long way, or have prepared the questions in advance. It struck me that they spoke everything in English and I said how cool! I think they are mostly charter schools and there are students from another social stratum because the living rooms or studios of the houses where pupils appeared in the transmission looked very elegant. Instead, the videos that my students presented were recorded near the stove, the bed, and the laundry room, it is a way of realizing how children, my students, live* (Lulú, 2022, p. 154).

In terms of policies regarding teaching English and the implementation of bilingual programs, Guerrero (2010) advocated that

> Governments and their policy makers should adopt a situated approach to design and implement their policies. It is widely demonstrated that inequality only leads to more inequality and if governments, especially in the third world, want to overcome poverty, they need to guarantee the opportunity of education to all their citizens (p. 176).

The government's policies and programs targeted to primary school teachers were introduced in education and people's lives, through Agreement 253 of 2006 (Bogotá Bilingüe)

[33] Lulu is referring to the 3rd Spelling Bee Contest organized by the SED.

issued by the City Council of Bogotá, and the Law of Bilingualism 1651 of 2013. Likewise, the National Plan of Education 2006 – 2016 provides the guidelines for English teaching from preschool to eleventh grade. The program Bilingual Colombia 2014 – 2018 promotes the learning of English especially in fourth and fifth grade. Furthermore, the Pedagogical Principles and Guidelines for Suggested Curriculum in English 2016 coupled with the Basic Learning Rights of English were policies that focused on students from preschool to fifth grade. In this last document, Barrantes (2018) affirms that "curriculum has been used as a regulation instrument to control what is included in course design and implementation" (p. 15). Moreover, the State acknowledges that "primary teachers are the ones who massively have the daunting task of teaching English. Most of them, however, do not have the language proficiency needed, nor the methodological resources for this job" (Barrantes, 2018, pp.19-20). Certainly, the government delegates the implementation of this curriculum to school principals, coordinators, and teachers by suggesting principals lead the inclusion of bilingual plans within the institutions' *Proyecto Educativo Institucional- PEI*[34]. Additionally, it supports teachers' participation in agendas promoted by the school or by local or national entities. To exemplify the previous discussion, when talking about the introduction of the initiative of Bilinguart as a complementary activity for bilingual purposes at UE School; Yami describes her experience as follows:

> *In mid-2018, I accepted the proposal to coordinate the centers of interest offered by Colsubsidio*[35] *on Saturday mornings at branch B. I had greater expectations because 'art for bilingualism', I imagined a super wow thing! The paintings, and the performances, I imagined a super learning environment; I found good classes, but they were very traditional ones. The vocabulary, let us repeat; there was only a very good teacher who took children out to the courtyard and made them paint; unfortunately, she was for a short time! Now in remote sessions, I have entered very few classes, it has been very cool because the teachers speak to them in English, and they assign activities so that the children are motivated to develop speech and generate conversations. There is a higher level than the one in the school, in addition, the*

[34] The PEI is the Institutional Educational Project of each school in Colombia, it delineates the objectives, methods, assessment, and in general all the institutions' established principles.
[35] A compensation funds.

> *teachers are bilingual, and you notice it. They send them videos in English during the week, it is cool! This challenges children, develops their listening, and motivates them to listen, 'oh so cool how s/he speaks, I would like to talk like that!' Teachers do have a different level of deepening and playfulness. The group is limited, there could not be more than 25 in face-to-face class; while in virtual there are groups of 30 or 35 students* (Yami, 2022, pp.296-297)

To summarize, policies regarding English language teaching (ELT) have been established by prioritizing economic factors, or by embracing neoliberal ideals of advancement, competition, and market-oriented approaches. This means that ELT has incorporated foreign models that do not consider the expertise of local educators, particularly those responsible for ELT in primary schools. Studies do not account for this reality in depth. While some studies are beginning to address this issue, particularly in rural areas, most research focuses on urban public secondary schools. These research initiatives often focus on teachers' knowledge of the English language as a system, methodologies for ELT, or strategies to improve students' and teachers' communication skills. López Gopar (2009) concluded that "every policy, theory, social construct, pedagogy, and curriculum should be challenged on a daily basis if we are truly to serve the ever-evolving diverse classrooms of today" (p. 399). Consequently, it is time to share the place that *our* stories regarding English, its learning, and its teaching in *our* school occupied in this study. These insights are essential to comprehend how *we* have constructed English lessons, because working together for almost a decade, *we* have hardly ever taken time to discuss ELT in *our* context.

Life-Stories as Sites of Being, Thinking, Feeling, and Doing

How do people make known emotions, thoughts, doings, expectations, disillusions, or uncertainties if it is not through their own stories? Some academics believe that stories are a vital part of human beings. Atkinson (2002) claims that "storytelling is in our blood" because "the stories we tell communicate about our own lives" (p. 122). Goodson (1998) asserts that "stories do social and political work as they are told. A story is never just a story, it is a statement of belief, of morality, it speaks about values" (p. 12). In this vein, *we* story *our* own experiences, emotions, and beliefs about English, its learning, and teaching. Thus, as stories are part of *our* lives when *we* tell them *we* communicate who *we* are, think, feel, and do about what we experience teaching English.

McAleese and Kilty (2019) argue that social actors could take up stories as evidence in areas such as law or policymaking. These researchers also consider that "stories are used to reveal a particular experience (or combination thereof) that when taken together constitute an overarching narrative message" (McAleese and Kilty, 2019, pp.823-824). Similarly, emotions and affections are also constitutive elements of *our* stories. Additionally, Richards (2011) points out that her doctoral students' stories "reveals and document what truths reside in those stories" (p. 815). Therefore, *our* stories serve as pathways to open *our* hearts, minds, and souls allowing us to learn or discover *our* shared socio-cultural, political, emotional, and spiritual roots. Through narrating ourselves, *we* understand who *we* are both individually and collectively in the field of ELT.

Furthermore, some researchers pointed out that their participants contributed with both meaning and content, it is because "subjects contribute their knowledge of reality and the social, cultural, and political ideas it is comprised of through the accounts of their experiences" (Prados Megías, et al., p. 965). Accordingly, in this study, twenty of *us* have shared *our* emotions, feelings, thoughts, and perspectives about English, its learning, and its teaching.

Rivas et al (2012) propose that "Every story is the interpretation of the here and now of the life of each subject, which is interpreted from the reconstruction of her/his story" (p. 15). Every time we talk, we tell stories that create knowledge. In the same line of thought, Mendieta (2013) acknowledges that "We human beings are story-telling creatures who construct narratives to explain our doing as well as to interpret ourselves and others' past, present, and imagined world experiences" (p. 136). Furthermore, "stories carry loud messages in both what they say and what they do not say. They may accept political and social priorities without comment, or they may challenge those priorities" (Goodson, 1998, p. 12).

Through *our* stories "we would know part of the history of the decisions and practices that teachers star in every day and that imprints a local and personal meaning on the social experience of schooling" (Suárez, 2011, p. 383 –my translation). *We* are bodies of knowledge. This is to say, *our* stories and *we* are sites of being, thinking, feeling, and doing. Consequently, the stories *we* collectively and individually share constitute theoretical lenses in this study.

Let us consider the role of the personas involved in this study. Rivas (2019) shared his insights about education research and some of these concepts resonate strongly with me. Consequently, I adapted them to this research:

- "Subjectivity is an axis to understand reality" (p. 50 - my translation). In this sense, reality depends on subjectivity. Teachers' experience with English can reveal how they understand the teaching of this language. Teachers' practices concerning the implementation of ELT policies depend on thoughts, knowledge, feelings, and/or experiences when learning and teaching English.

- "I should situate myself on the personal knowledge which has built biographically and socially by individuals as legitimized and authorized to understand reality" (p. 51 -my translation). Therefore, as a researcher, I need to comprehend who *we* are in terms of *our* epistemologies meaning understanding through *our* life-stories *our* practices.

- "From an epistemological point of view research is the fight of humankind to occupy a place in this world" (p, 51-my translation). As I stated at the beginning, every individual strives to signify their actions and ultimately their reasons to live this life.

This research is intimately connected with teachers and the realities *we* experience in the school. As Espinosa (2019) states, "The more distance there is between researcher and individuals or context, the farther away researcher is from the everyday school life" (p. 68-my translation). I have the honor of sharing *our* second home with my companions on this journey, spending nearly half of *our* lives in the school.

In the same vein, Espinosa (2019) believes that epistemic subjects are immersed in their own common experience expressed through language and represented through symbols, signs, actions, ways of relating, and knowledge(s). Consequently, it allows the existence of multiple realities and possible political and ethical actions (p. 68-my translation). In this study, *we* are constituted as epistemic subjects. Therefore, through *our* stories, *we* understand the events that occur in *our* school concerning English teaching. *We* value *our* voices, and as such, *we* are positioned within a privileged place that allows us to be "at the center, but not as an isolated entity, but as being in a relationship riddled with multiple links entangled in a social, political and cultural context" (Rivas et al, 2012, p. 16). Moreover, in this study "participants

feel and be recognized as intelligent, creative, and talented people […] teachers and their students, who are the protagonists of their own lives and who should be the center of the curriculum as well" (López-Gopar, 2013, p. 303). In this study, my companions and I communicated *our* personal epistemologies through *our* stories, *we* have something to say about English, its learning, and its teaching.

Teachers can develop creative contextualized practices where they make the most of their localized expertise and resources available. The fact that such practices are contextualized means that teachers can connect their teaching practices with the social reality of the school. Another way to refer to this localized expertise is what Olsen (2016) terms the "wisdom of practice" and "personal theories". These concepts reflect the professional knowledge teachers construct throughout their experiences, and, in my perspective, their social sensitivity (Cruz Arcila, 2018, p. 67). I advocate for bringing *our* practices to light as they help to have a clearer perspective of how ELT is addressed in diverse contexts. Thus, teachers' knowledge becomes the primary source to set up professional development programs centered around the premise that what teachers need to do is not completely different from what they already do (Cruz Arcila, 2018, p. 76). Additionally, one can argue the necessity for teachers to build on their existing knowledge and to take advantage of their epistemologies to negotiate with other alternatives. In other words, according to Olsen (2016), teachers' "wisdom of practice" and "personal theories", which are often the product of experiences, have the potential to be harnessed with professional theories emerging from research. In this fashion, teachers' knowledge is fostered and acknowledged instead of simply being discarded and relegated. As Suárez (2011) cogently propose:

> Therefore, if we could systematize and analyze these stories, we could understand a good part of the training trajectories of the teachers involved, their assumptions and ideas about teaching, their journeys and work experiences, their certainties and questions, the influences, and ideological anchors of their pedagogical convictions, and their concerns, wishes, and achievements. Moreover, if we could compile and organize the set of stories of all teachers, we would surely obtain a history of the curriculum different from the one we know from the one that is usually written and read in school systems, of which it is considered public, true, official (p. 393).

Acknowledging teachers' potential derived from their constructed knowledge implies that "Ways to know other-wise are present in our daily practices" (Santos, 2010, p. 56, my translation). Thus, epistemological diversity is under permanent construction by the subjects who share their stories within their knowledge(s). Therefore, each of *us* is a "Valid interlocutor in the field of pedagogical knowledge" (Suárez, 2011, p. 399) as every teacher has something to say and share about pedagogy.

To conclude, Castañeda-Londoño (2023) considers that:

> What teachers narrate reveal knowledges that might go unnoticed when teaching and learning. What I mean is, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, methodological knowledge are not the only arrays of knowledge that teachers develop. It was observed that knowledge is experienced in different ways. Particularly important is the fact that knowledge is not just a cognitive experience, but a bodily and an emotional one. The families' epistemologies and the knowledge gotten in previous personal and social struggles also comprise the teachers' knowledge.

Keeping this in mind, let us examine the journey I embarked upon as a person, a doctoral student, a researcher, a teacher, and a coordinator alongside my companions. *Our* path helped *us* understand *our* stories, which serve as sites of knowing, being, and doing regarding English, its learning, and its teaching in *our* beloved school.

CHAPTER 4: Paths to find this destination[36]

"Travelers, there is no path,
paths are made by walking."
(Antonio Machado,1912, p. 88)[37]

This journey is situated in the school where my companions and I have worked for more than a decade and that I regard as 'my second home'. This research path seeks to gain an understanding of how *we,* namely my companions - preschool and primary school teachers - and I, have experienced English teaching. A "decolonial option" (Mignolo, 2016, 1'55") has been chosen to achieve the aforementioned purpose. This perspective allows me to understand *our* identities and to interpret how *we* are, think, feel, and do in relation to English teaching and learning. This journey to explore the hypogeum of *our* stories revolving around English teaching comprises key elements such as the itinerary, the school setting, the approach, principles, *our* profiles, the invitations to participate in this study, the agenda, the design, the collection of *our* stories, and the path to multi-signify *our* learning and teaching worlds. Machado's notion of the traveler's path is similar to my own journey when referring to this research. In essence, this research journey evokes the stunning Colombian routes I wandered.

Research Approach: Placing Research in *Our* Daily Lives

Research and life go hand in hand. As human beings, we continuously seek to understand and make sense of our thoughts, emotions, experiences, and doings. When a situation is not fully comprehended, we engage in reflection, dialogues, and reading to gain multiple perspectives and insights into what is occurring. This process of seeking understanding leads to informed decisions and subsequent actions. In Ocaña's (2017) words,

> educational research should not be analyzed in isolation from everyday human life. Life is the beginning (first), research is the end (second), and thought or reflection is the mediator (third) between life and research. Living, thinking, and researching are the same. They constitute a triadic configuration (p. 12).

Although research goes hand-in-hand with life, I have noticed that when discussing academic research most of my colleagues find this complex, unreachable, and even painful. It

[36] Some parts of this section appear in the chapter called: What does this Journey Look Like? for the book *Methodological uncertainties of research in ELT education II* (in press).
[37] My translation.

results somehow contradictory as it is worth noting that this study originates in the school where *we* spend half of *our* lives and regard it as a second home.

It is important to remark that, from a Eurocentric perspective, which I do not agree with, this study may be perceived as being in 'the zone of not being' for several reasons. Firstly, *we* are female and thus considered 'inferior by nature'. Secondly, *we* live in an underdeveloped country. Thirdly, my companions have not aspired to teach English nor do they possess sufficient cultural or linguistic capital in English language teaching. Fourthly, this study is unique and specific (Santos, 2010, pp. 22-26, my interpretation). Lastly, *we* do not identify with any particular ethnic group, which raises the question of how to categorize *ourselves* when filling out official government forms. Then, what should I call myself?

From this perspective, there are six possible answers: Indigenous, gypsy, raizal[38], palenquero[39], black[40], afro Colombian[41], and no ethnic group. For example, Celmira Torres belongs to the *Culisa* ethnic group, which is the result of the union of a mulatto[42] and a zambo[43]. This category is new to me, but in this path, there was a very proud *Culisa* among *us* explaining her phenotypic characteristics and describing her parents' physical appearance with detail and passion. At the same time, *we* tried to recall *our* classes about mulattos, indigenous, zambos, afro, and mixed or "*mestizos*". *Culisa* people do exist, even if *we* do not know them. Consequently, I hope to understand at least myself by learning with, about, and from my companions in this journey. If *we* do not recognize *ourselves*, it is also challenging to

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[38] A native of the Islands of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina descendants of the union between Europeans (mainly English, Spanish and Dutch) and African slaves. This community is distinguished by its culture, language (Creole), religious beliefs (Baptist church) and historical. Given its cultural specificity, it has been the subject of socio-cultural policies, plans and programs differentiated from other black communities in the Colombian continent. (Colombia, 2019).

[39] The Palenquera community is made up of the descendants of slaves who through acts of resistance and freedom, took refuge in the territories of the North Coast of Colombia since the fifteenth century and called these refugees palenques. There are 4 recognized Palenques: San Basilio de Palenque (Mahates – Bolívar), San José de Uré (Córdoba), Jacobo Pérez Escobar (Magdalena) and La Libertad (Sucre). (Colombia, 2019)

[40] Black community: It is the set of families of Afro-Colombian descent that have their own culture, share a history and have their own traditions and customs within the field-populated relationship, also reveal and preserve awareness of identity that distinguishes them from other ethnic groups. (Art. 2- Law 70 of 1993). (Colombia 2019). Mulattos (mixture of black and white) are included in this group.

[41] Afro-Colombian Population: These are the human groups that are present throughout the national territory (urban-rural), of African historical, ethnic and cultural roots and descent born in Colombia, with their racial, linguistic and folkloric diversity. (Grueso, et al, 2007:4)15. (Colombia, 2019)

[42] Person who has one black and one white parent.

[43] Person who has one indigenous parent and one of an African origin.

understand *our* contexts, *our* ways of teaching, and/or *our* methodological choices when facing teaching English.

Now, I would like to present an account of this journey to integrate research into daily life. However, I have followed the prescribed methodology as stipulated by the doctoral program's protocols. The following lines introduce my story as an opportunity to be coherent with the biographical narrative approach I have selected grounded on the works of Benson, 2005; Bolivar, 2012; Corman, 2013; Rivas, et al., 2012; and Rivas, 2014.

> *My mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and the neurologist told me that the best medicine for this was conversing. Since then, I have not dismissed any opportunity to chat with my beloved mom. From our afternoon talks, I know that: She absolutely loved studying. Every morning she had to walk an hour to get to school, there were 60 students in a single classroom, where her teacher taught classes to children from first grade to fourth grade. My daddy and my mommy were classmates! Unfortunately, she had to leave school when she was in second grade because my grandfather was murdered in 1950, during the civil war between conservative and liberal parties. Now, I understand why my mommy reads very well and solves math's problems easily.*

This story mirrors my biographical-narrative, which I adapted through careful revision of my thoughts, emotions, actions, and ways of living research. In terms of data-collection instruments and procedures, "the term '(auto) biography' is used to refer to a broad spectrum of research approaches that focus on the analysis and description of social phenomena as they are experienced within the context of individual lives" (Benson, 2005, p. 4). Accordingly,

> the interest in understanding the lives of the subjects and how they have been built personally and professionally, as part of the culture in which they develop (biographical research), to reach, finally, the subject and how s/he narrates his own story as her/his way of understanding the world in which s/he lives (Rivas, et al., 2012, p. 16).

Similarly, as the setting of this narrative, the school where we teach becomes the shared space that *we* inhabit every day. This school becomes the main target of the study to understand how *we* navigate and experience the act of learning and teaching English. Additionally, within this setting a multiplicity of narratives is constantly being threaded

between the participants. Each of the narratives has the potential to unveil the complexities of our lived experiences. Corman (2013) affirms that the real power of narrative lies in the interconnections between stories. Within individual levels, these connections harness the open-ended nature of narratives that allows a broad range of events to come under a narrative's scope. Across these different levels, these connections have the potential to create a powerful persuasive structure that connects events at broad social and cultural scales to present-day events.

When *we* teach English, *we* take to *our* lessons those experiences *we* have lived with this language. In this vein, Rivas et al. (2012) contain that:

> when we tell our experience, we do not talk about "what happened", but what is happening to us now, from which we are rebuilding our past. History then is always the story of the present, as it is built from the parameters with which we are shaping our current reality (p. 18, my translation).

In other words, teachers' stories involve names, places, events, and meaningful people close to our daily lives. Thus, what constitutes our lives in essence is a myriad of common knowledge, actions, stories, myths, and experiences mirrored in our narratives (Rivas et al., 2012, p. 53). Even institutions share and build their own stories through time. These stories are sometimes untold and unknown. The following lines *story* what I found about UE School.

Where does All This Begin?

> *Long ago[44], Mother Earth shared her fecundity with Sutagaos, Cundais, and Usmes[45], together with her chief Sagüan Machica lived as a unique being. In 1750, the Franciscan cleric viceroy Solís founded Selvas de Usme; this land had a huge hacienda called El Maná that extended through the eastern hills of Bogotá and bordered the Yomasa ravine. Two centuries later, some of its owners: Luis Morales, Eliodoro Criollo, Mario Suárez, and Rosendo Galindo divided the hacienda; Mr. Criollo built kilns for the manufacture of bricks, allowed some families to work there,*

[44] The historical information and administrative division of the Ciudad Bolívar locality was taken from the environmental awareness booklet: working together for the environment of Ciudad Bolívar (2014) publication of the Local Mayor's Office of Ciudad Bolívar originally written in Spanish.
[45] Indigenous groups.

when they had already made thousand bricks, he gave to them a portion of land and bricks to build their houses, thus the first neighborhoods emerged.

On September 7, 1983, with agreement 14 of the Council of Bogotá, the minor mayor's office of Ciudad Bolívar was born. In 1992, Ciudad Bolívar became a town with eleven civic dignitaries, bordered to the north by Bosa, to the south by Sumapaz, to the east by Tunjuelito and Usme, and the west by the municipality of Soacha. The administration organized the urban areas of this locality in eight Zonal Planning Units-UPZ from number 63 to 70, each UPZ contains some neighborhoods in it; Mochuelo, Pasquilla, and Quiba are the rural areas of the town.

In 1983, the priest Saturnino Sepúlveda Niño who represented the communities of the Domingo Lain[46] and Gibraltar neighborhoods bought a piece of land, and left a place to build a school. In 1985, Mrs. Mariquita Torres de Sáenz, who was the legal representative of the Domingo Lain Association and the National Learning Service - SENA[47], began to do the relevant studies until the model of the school was elaborated.

In search of economic support, they came to the presidential office, and Ana Milena de Gaviria (the First Lady) became interested in the construction of an educational institution in Ciudad Bolívar. The community longed for the school to be named after Domingo Laín; The Government requested a change to endorse it as a public institution. Alcira Rincón, Tulia Muñoz, and Manuel Corredor decided to name the UE School[48] with the illusion of receiving financial support from this entity. At that time, it was common for countries to give donations to public schools with their same names; but this never happened, no economic support came. On October 25, 1995, the first building was inaugurated; on November 4 of the same year, Mr. José Simón Díaz Rodríguez arrived as the school principal; on January 16, 1996, the Council of Bogotá

[46] Domingo Laín, a Catholic priest of socialist orientation, born in Zaragoza (Spain) arrived in Colombia in 1967, was parish priest of the Meissen neighborhood of Bogotá, and in 1970 he joined the ranks of the National Liberation Army - ELN. Died February 20, 1974. Adapted from: https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-662271 and https://rebelion.org/domingo-lain-golconda-y-la-celam-de-1968/

[47] This is the acronym for Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje. This is a governmental institution that offers free English courses, among other technical and technological studies. National Training Servive.

[48] The history of the UE School was taken from institutional documents. UE IED (2019) History of UE School. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GmkRVyaVPZTC3ZdbBFh-wbvd1hmZtly/edit#heading=h.2et92p0

through Agreement number 2, gave it the name of Centro Educativo Distrital UE (District Educational Center).

Meanwhile, eight hundred meters from the UE School, more than half a century ago, Mr. Ismael Guerra witnessed how students had to commute to school from their houses in distant neighborhoods such as El Lucero, Muzu, El Tejar, and some even from Kennedy Locality. Thus, Mrs. Enna Luz García, Mr. Guerra's wife, taught reading, writing, and math in her house to some children who lived nearby. The terrain where MC School[49] is placed nowadays belonged to Hacienda La María, there were between 20 to 25 meters of a green zone with a booth made of tin, which was donated by a shoe factory called Panam to the community action board of the Florida San Luis neighborhood (UPZ 66) to instruct sewing classes. However, this never happened, and the booth was deteriorated. Thus, on the third of February, 1975, Mr. Guerra took the booth, gathered 150 children, and his wife with a student-teacher started to give formal classes without receiving any salary. They had fights with some community board members for the booth. As the built area was small, many children needed to study. Mr. Juan Bedoya, Mrs. Rosalba de Guerrero, Mrs. Blanca Henao, and Mr. and Mrs. Guerra donated slates, bricks, tin, wood, and materials and built five classrooms and two bathrooms. During a parents' assembly, the School was given the name of MC[50], because she was a fighter "luchadora del pueblo", and the building of this school implied sacrifices and mothers' fights. One of the classrooms looks like a theater, to get to the board you must go down the stairs. In 1976, the community asked for teachers from the SED, Mrs. Pilar Santamaría de Reyes was the secretary of education, she visited the school and Mr. Camilo Reyes Patria, the owner of the land donated the terrain, it was legally registered. Little by little three prefabricated classrooms were installed. There, it was offered the complete primary basic education, up to fifth grade during the morning and afternoon shifts. There were two supported

[49] Thanks to Hermilse Pérez, the school counselor who gave documents from her personal archives about MC School's history. Texts are written originally in Spanish and they were edited and translated into English by the author.

[50] María de los Ángeles Cano Márquez (1887-1967), better known in Colombian history as María Cano, considers herself a pioneer of labor struggles in the country and an agitator of socialist ideas. She was the first Colombian woman to participate openly in the political life of the country. http://www.coomeva.coop/publicaciones.php?id=49177&dPrint=1#:~:text=A%20Mar%C3%ADa%20de%20los%20%C3%81ngeles,la%20vida%20pol%C3%ADtica%20del%20pa%C3%ADs.

physical education teachers one for each shift. The school community worked on environmental projects by recycling, classifying materials, and making cards with recycled paper. The school community also received classes about agriculture given by the Botanic Garden, they cultivated lettuce, goldenberries, herbal plants, and a garden. The first school principal was Mr. Reneiro Quevedo, and the last one before the fusion with UE School was Mrs. Amparo Ramos. The UE School and MC School were independent state institutions until 2000.

Figure 5 displays a timeline of important events in *our* school until the very moment that *we* got together.

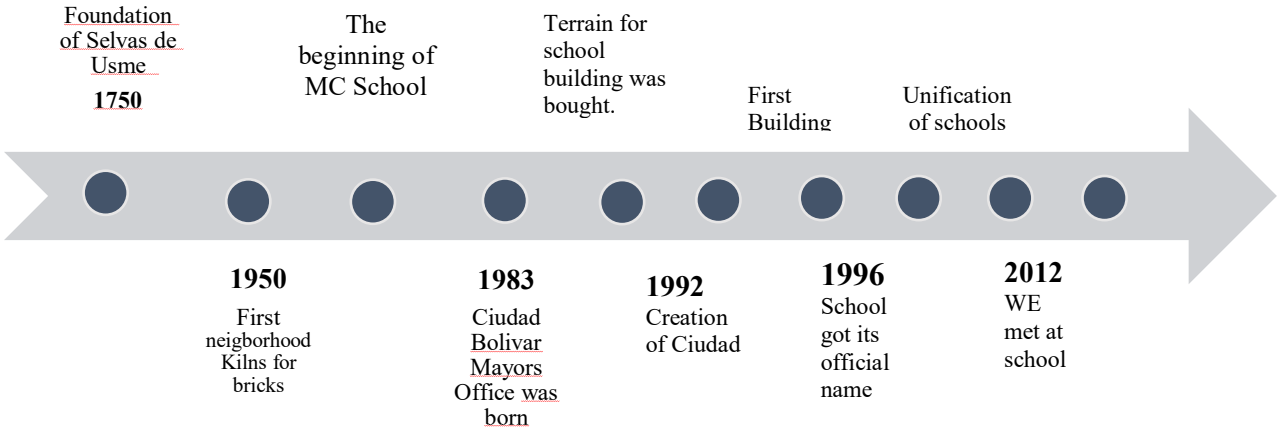

Figure 5 *Important Events of our School*

Families[51] have minimum wage jobs and others are street or public transport vendors, recycling collectors, housemaids, janitors, security guards, and employees who belong to a low socio-economic status. The school is in Bogotá, but as Tollefson (1991) explains, this is located geographically separated from the western center. Diversity is everywhere because most of *us* are *mestizos*[52]. Over the past ten years, I have observed that children at school come from diverse locations in Colombia, many of them were forced to leave because of internal conflict and violence. Some of the children are indigenous and no longer speak their ancestral language, instead they use Spanish, while others long for the warmth of their lands. Even more, recently, families from Venezuela have fled to Colombia with hopes of finding better opportunities. Apart from administrative staff and general service personnel, *our* school holds

[51] Adapted from The Influence of EFL Policies on the Work of Teachers in a Public Primary School in the book *ELT Local Research Agendas II (pp. 115-140)*

[52] Mestizos are descendants of the mixture of Indigenous, Afro, and/ or Spaniards who live in Latin America.

24 teachers in preschool and primary in the morning shift distributed among 19 homeroom teachers, a technology teacher, a physical education teacher (part-time in the morning shift), the school counselor for preschool and primary, the school principal, and myself. In total, *our* school community consists of 95 individuals, including the administrative staff and teachers across all grades.

In conclusion, UE and MC schools are the result of joint community efforts. Moreover, in reconstructing the history of MC school, I had to delve into documents, Hermilse's personal archives, and conversations with Mrs. Leo, who prepares meals for *us* at MC school. This history was absent from institutional archives and the school's public documents- a case of the big fish eating the small one!

This journey encompasses my exploration of my ways of knowing, being, thinking, and doing unified in myself as a whole. Despite my fears about how my companions would reply to my invitation letters to be part of this endeavor, I proceeded to write to them.

Invitations to This Journey

Honoring one's word is one of the values instilled in me since I was a little girl and deeply ingrained in my upbringing. Consequently, I have always believed that my promise alone should suffice without the need for a formal consent form. However, acknowledging the importance of such a document as a requirement to publish, I felt compelled to personalize this process. I strongly believe that a consent form serves as an invitation to embark on a joint journey. Thus, I chose to compose individualized invitation letters for each of my companions. Please refer to Annex 7 for a sample of the letter I wrote to companions with whom I have never discussed the subject of English before. Ultimately, each fellow collaborator was provided with a unique "consent form".

Initially, I wrote four invitation letters for teachers with whom I had discussed English. Nevertheless, during the project defense, jurors suggested expanding to a larger number of contributors. Doctor Mario López-Gopar made me reflect upon the voices that I had left aside and their relevance to my study. Therefore, I decided to write invitation letters to the whole group of preschool and primary homeroom teachers of the morning shift. Subsequently, I crafted a customized invitation letter for each of my fellow collaborators. In this letter, I included the date, my companion's name, and the elements that called my attention in regard

to their actions concerning English or its teaching. I also attached my promise that each of them would be informed concerning the dissemination of any piece of information beforehand. The letter also contained a question for them to reaffirm their willingness to be part of the research, a space to write their pseudonyms, and their signature. However, I fear I may have compromised my commitment to embedding research in everyday life by requesting a fictitious name, which diverges from actual practice. My intention is not to anonymize my colleagues, rather, I aim to respect and amplify their voices. Fortunately, I included "(optional)" next to the option of using pseudonyms. As a result, one of my companions opted for a pseudonym, two preferred affectionate shortened forms of their names, and four created names using initials from their full names, while the remaining group of *us* kept our full names.

As *we* shared *our* stories about English language, its learning, and its teaching, these narratives represent *our* collective knowledge(s). Therefore, using pseudonyms means that when a reader or researcher finds something noteworthy to cite, they may attribute it to my name or the pseudonym. Consequently, the person who shared their knowledge is not recognized as the coauthor of that idea. While it is accurate to consider myself as the author of this thesis, it is essential to acknowledge that my companions enable the completion of the entire process. After all, as Starr Zape-tah-hol-ah Minthorn (2019) claimed “honor the people that have worked with us” (p. 43). *Our* stories are pieces of *our* lives that are commonly shared, they do not constitute the oftentimes called data.

I have not come across reports detailing participants’ reactions, emotions, feelings, or thoughts upon receiving consent forms for signing. Consequently, I sought to explore my companions’ emotions and thoughts upon receiving the invitation letter. Prior to or at the beginning of *our* conversations, I enquired about their insights regarding the invitation letter or being informed about the project. Some of my partners thought the letter was for a personal event, a work issue, or an academic assignment. Among my partners’ insights, they recall gratitude, curiosity, anxiety, and remembrance. They also expressed feeling acknowledged and important. They manifested their willingness to partake in the project and high expectations the project would benefit their daily praxis at school. Additionally, they felt determined to engage in the process and express their opinions, feelings thoughts, and abilities regarding English, its learning, and teaching.

I delivered personally the letter to one of my companions, Otilia, by the end of February. Upon reading her letter, she expressed her gratitude towards the fact that I had considered her for this project. Suddenly, because of COVID-19, I had to change the delivery method for the letters. Therefore, in May, I decided to call Yami, Caro, and Lulu, and read the letter to each of them. At the end of each conversation, my heart filled with sincere emotions after hearing uplifting words from each one of them. Yami said "What a beautiful letter! I feel honored!" while Caro expressed her gratitude with "Thank you"; and Lulu exclaimed, "You left me speechless". However, Lulu was afraid because she did not know English and was concerned about her contributions. After providing additional details, she accepted.

On August 13, 2021, I attended school to deliver letters to fifteen teachers. Unfortunately, because I had not foreseen that afternoon classes had just started, I could not meet with most of them. That day, I did meet Celmira and Rubiela at the school, they read the letter in front of me and expressed their willingness to be part of the study. Rubiela explained that regarding English classes Caro was the expert, as she prepared the lessons for fourth graders. Afterward, I decided to leave the invitation letters with the school counselor, Emilse, who kindly agreed to distribute the letters to the teachers and collect them after they had signed. I also sent individual WhatsApp messages informing teachers that Emilse would collect the letters on my behalf and that I would contact them later. Nevertheless, Enny, Jenny Viviana, María Emma, Marlen, and Maru read the letter because they were working remotely. Claudia Patricia, Emary, Jeimmy, Maispin, Nidia, Sandra Milena, and Sandra Patricia read the invitation letter and shared their feelings and thoughts during our initial conversation. I did not discuss the letter with Aura or Jenny Viviana; I must have forgotten to do so.

I am the coordinator, but I am not the teachers' direct boss, this is the role of the school principal, however some of them see me like their boss. I am aware some of, the slightly power differential between teachers and me. I did not exert any kind of pressure on teachers to be part of this study, but they expressed their frights, they did not want to take an English proficiency test during *our* conversations. Thus, I want to conclude with Sandra Patricia's story to exemplify this situation, as she permitted me to share it. On August 18, I sent her a message on WhatsApp:

I left you an invitation with Emilse, if you have any questions you can write to me, and I will call you back. Can you please leave the signed letter with Emilse? I know you are very busy. A big hug. Nice day! (My translation).

The same day, she sent me a 2-minute, 11-second voice message through WhatsApp in response to the invitation letter telling me her reasons for not accepting the invitation:

> *Mireyita have a lovely day, I hope you are very well, eh, I thank you infinitely for the invitation and for considering me, but the truth is that I do not feel qualified to participate in this project. Unfortunately, I do not have any knowledge of the English language, and it is deeply difficult to make a planning for this school subject, mmm because I do not have the necessary or relevant knowledge to do it. Eh, apart from that, right now with first grade English activities are very sporadic, once a month. My priority is that children learn how to read and to write, more than half of the students do not even recognize the vowels. Then, Mireyita because the work with English in my group is scarce, I do not see how I can collaborate and because of the same ignorance of mine regarding this second language, I do not know anything, I know nothing about what you need to do in your research. So, what a pity! If the project was on coexistence, or on another subject that I am passionate about, I would like to contribute with great pleasure but not with this in English. So, excuse me, what a pity with you! I was forced to reply no in the letter, I could not help you because I really have no way to do it. My knowledge does not allow me because I do not know English. Oh, I am sorry Mireya! (My translation).*

I did not give up, though. I appreciated Sandra Patricia's reply, it was honest and full of her genuine self. I called Sandra Patricia on September 15th to prove to her that she could indeed help me. She reminded me that in a meeting she had said that if she was asked what areas she wanted support from, she would have chosen English. Finally, she agreed to be part of the project and we scheduled our meeting. I was overjoyed because there were 20 of *us* on this journey!

Having my companions' acceptance to talk about English, it was time for approaching them: "with respect, curiosity and admiration" (Calvo, 2019) because they were there knowing something that I do not. Going beyond that, Suárez-Krabbe (2011) uses the concept of

proximity from (Dussel, 1996, p.30), which incites uncertainties and makes me feel down to earth, because we rely on each other independently; proximity is "approaching fraternity, shortening distance to someone who can wait or reject us, shake hands or hurt us, kiss us or kill us" (p.200).

To sum up, receiving a consent form to participate in a study can evoke a range of thoughts, emotions, and feelings that participants typically do not express to the researcher. Fortunately, I was able to connect with them and understand their expectations and feelings, despite my role in the school. This was a promising start to our journey!

Here *We* Go!

A contingency arose as the world, including our country, experienced lockdowns due to the pandemic. Consequently, we scheduled our meetings using Microsoft Teams and the Internet. After making some arrangements, we established the following agenda:

Dates	**Meetings with**	**Topic**
September 15th, 2020	Lulu (pseudonym)	Primary school
September 16th, 2020	Caro	Primary school
September 16th, 2020	Yami	Primary school
September 21st, 2020	Otilia (pseudonym)	Primary school
September 22nd, 2020	Lulu (pseudonym)	Secondary school
September 23rd, 2020	Caro	Secondary school
September 23rd, 2020	Yami	Secondary school
September 28th, 2020	Otilia (pseudonym)	Secondary school
September 29th, 2020	Lulu (pseudonym)	Homeland & writing biographies
September 30th, 2020	Caro	Undergraduate studies & first job
September 30th, 2020	Yami	First jobs & technical studies
October 13th, 2020	Lulu (pseudonym)	First jobs
October 14th, 2020	Caro	First attempt master's & exam
October 14th, 2020	Yami	Career
October 26th, 2020	Otilia (pseudonym)	Career & first jobs
November 3rd, 2020	Lulu (pseudonym)	Participation in projects
November 4th, 2020	Caro	Participation in projects & classes
November 17th, 2020	Lulu	ELT policies, spelling Bee, and classes
November 18th, 2020	Caro	Spelling Bee and classes
November 25th, 2020	Caro	Postgraduate studies and exam (B1)
August 25th, 2021	Aura Aleida Jiménez	All
August 30th, 2021	Celmira Torres.	All
August 30th, 2021	Jeimmy Gómez	All
September 9th, 2021	Maispin (pseudonym)	All
September 10th, 2021	Rubiela Hernández	All
September 13th, 2021	Sandra Milena Camargo	All
September 23rd, 2021	Yami	Postgraduate studies and exam
September 27th, 2021	Nidia Inés Barbosa	All
September 28th, 2021	Claudia Pat. Rodríguez.	All

September 29th, 2021	Sandra Patricia Rincón	All
September 30th, 2021	Emary (pseudonym)	All
October 4th, 2021	Enny Johanna Chaves	All
October 4th, 2021	Maru (pseudonym)	All
October 5th, 2021	Jenny Viviana Tellez	All
October 13th, 2021	María Emma Gómez	All
October 26th, 2021	Marlen Galvis Fraile	All
November 29th, 2021	Otilia (pseudonym)	Postgraduate studies

Table 6 *Our Agenda*

Each conversation was video recorded. I met with Caro, Lulu, Otilia, and Yami several times, so in each session, *we* talked about different topics including *our* homelands, primary school, secondary school, careers, first jobs, ELT policies, Spelling Bee Contest, graduate studies, English languages tests, classes, and school lives. There was a single meeting with each of the rest of my companions, which lasted an hour or more; *we* covered all the topics mentioned above and these conversations took place between September 2020 and October 2021 as Table 6 illustrates. Finally, on any journey, unexpected events can occur, and the itinerary may change based on the circumstances. I had to adapt my schedule to accommodate my companions. They chose the days and times for our conversations, and I was impressed that some of them even offered time from their holidays.

Interviews or Conversations?

With the purpose of integrating research into *our* daily lives, I engaged in conversations instead of formal interviews. One data collection method is "interviews, which are more or less open about those issues that interest the researcher on various aspects, and their contents must be agreed upon" (Bolivar, 2012, p. 7). *We* simply dialogued, which is an activity that aligns with our daily realities. I did not want to assume the role of an interviewer extracting information from interviewees through open-ended or a formalized list of questions. Consequently, *we* did not have to prepare either questions or answers, instead, *we* agreed on discussing *our* primary, secondary, and graduate studies, *our* working trajectories, and personal experiences when using English.

Maturana (2017) conceives conversations as the essence of our lives. Even more, conversations provoke horizontal relationships, which tell us about the action of accompaniment and active listening (Rivas et al., 2012, p. 12). However, Flores Carmona et

al., (2021) theorize "pláticas"[53] as a methodology not yet legitimized by academia, but one that represents a transformative form of research that has been present in scholarly work. My colleagues have made it possible for the entire research process to be completed. Figure 6 displays some screenshots of *our* conversations. Therefore, I handle in my hands pieces of *our* lives not merely data.

Figure 6 *Screenshots of our conversations*[54]

I believe that *we* had open and sincere conversation chats in an atmosphere of rapport and trust, despite my roles as coordinator and researcher. At the end of the conversations, *we* shared *our* emotions, suggestions, and impressions as they were important for me to understand how *we* felt during *our* meetings. Here are some of my companions' comments:

> *[This encounter] was very good, very enjoyable. I liked it quite a lot! It allowed me to express all that I have inside that not everyone can know, right? I have those folks I talk to, and comment on, but not with everyone* (Rubiela's words at the end of our conversation, 10/09/2021).

> *[This conversation was] very good because you remember and you let off steam. [...] It's wonderful to see yourself in another role, to be in another role, it's very nice because with this experience you get to know people in-depth [...]. This is what is needed in schools. It's good to know other people's lives, and experiences. This time was meaningful, rewarding, and satisfying* (Conversation with Emary, 30/09/2021).

There was a strong sense of trust among us, demonstrated by *our* use of proper names despite knowing that it was likely that a book with *our* stories would be written and published. My companions also found coherence between the content of the invitation letter and *our* conversations. My companions were prepared for the possibility that I might ask questions to

[53] Conversations or chats.
[54] Publish with companions' authorization.

examine their English language level. This coherence and the bonds helped us avoid any 'technical problems' during conversations. One of the short exchanges was included to exemplify this situation:

> *Me: […] How did you imagine this encounter?*
>
> *María Emma: Well, I supposed that you were going to ask me things in English that you would ask me about things related to English, but not in this way. I thought you were going to ask me some English. I said to myself, If Mireya would ask anything in English, I would have nothing to say.*
>
> *Me: ha, ha, ha. You thought I was going to give you an exam.*
>
> *Maria Emma: Exactly, and I said oh if this happened, I would pretend to have an Internet connection problem, it could seem like an accident, I would turn off the microphone, heh, heh, heh.*
>
> *Me: HA, HA, HA. (At the end of the conversation with María Emma, 13/10/2021)*

To sum up, we are social subjects in nature, and each of us is shaped in connection to others. We embrace the idea that one cannot truly know another without their participation or we can know only what the other wants to share with us. Thus, it becomes paramount to establish a horizontal relationship during the research journey that allows both voices to be presented in an equitable discursive context. (Corona, 2017). I want to conclude this section by emphasizing that this research approach embodies a de-colonial perspective towards doing research. I wrote invitations acknowledging the personas involved in the process, their knowledges, and experiences as significant assets in the construction of the research process. *We* met together as equals fostering 'heterarchical' relationships. *We* shared pieces of *our* lives and mutually agreed on what *we* wanted to make public.

Our **Stories**

> *"I am because you are."*
> *Ubuntu philosophy*

I started this section with this quote because if Aura, Caro, Celmira, Claudia Patricia, Emary, Enny, Jeimmy, Jenny Viviana, Lulu, Maispin, María Emma, Marlen, Maru, Nidia, Otilia, Rubiela, Sandra Milena, Sandra Patricia, and Yami had not accepted my invitation to

share *our* stories, this research would not exist. At this point in *our* journey, *we* made some decisions on how to work with the video recordings of *our* conversations.

Transcriptions or Stories?

Once *we* had conversed, my first action was to start transcribing the audios verbatim. This was a time-consuming task that can be done by a computer program or by someone not involved in the process. However, neither the transcriber nor the machine can fully capture expressions, thoughts, and emotions in *our* minds present during *our* conversations because "We listen with our three ears: two that we hear with and the one in our heart" (Jo-ann Archibald Q'um Xiiem [Stó: lo- and St'at'imc] and Amy Parent Nox Ayaaw´ ilt [Nisga'a], 2019, p. 14). Having this powerful idea in mind, I continued my transcriptions paying attention to *our* gestures, and movements. I observed *our* faces and, at times, I felt what they were feeling; inevitably, those emotions resonated within my body and my whole self. I laughed, cried, and wondered how to make this writing process into a story as it had been challenging and gratifying.

With these thoughts, I decided to write twenty stories based on *our* conversations because as Walsh (2017) points out "thinking comes from conversations and dialogues, […] writing the conversation makes it more alive, more human, and with more capacity to convene" (Walsh, 2017-my translation). Afterwards, *we* had lunch together in small groups, read *our* stories, and commented on them as a group. As Rivas et al. (2012) cogently put "It can be said that through research with life stories and narrative research, a public construction of knowledge takes place, from dialogue and intersubjective relationship" (p. 17). *We* paid attention to the feedback from *our* companions and the manuscripts were edited accordingly. Stories were written in chronological order. When creating the titles, *we* considered the content of each story highlighting recurring and significant events, as well as the emphasis from the narrator on the points conveyed regarding topics related to English and expressed through their tone of voice or gestures. Each one of my companions read their own stories, provided feedback, and together *we* discussed some titles, as I had some options and could not decide on one. Figure 7 includes pictures from *our* lunch meetings to read the stories:

Figure 7. *Some pictures of lunch-meetings*

Continuing with the editing process, as I mentioned, two of my friends proofread the whole text. Finally, *our* book ¡El Inglés entre nos…! (*English among us…!*) was published (See Figure 8). On the cover of the book, alongside two classrooms from the primary section, one from UE and another from MC school, most of *our faces* are featured in screenshots from *our* conversations arranged around *TransMiCable*[55] moving through the hill where UE School is located. The title of this book reflects the idea that "stories narrated here arise from the confidence, enthusiasm, and support that my colleagues would want to give me in this research task. […] That is why the title of each story is closely related to English." (Castañeda-Usaquén, 2022, p. 13). This represents my perception of research, and I hope this piece of writing inspires otherwise emergent research methodologies.

Figure 8 *The cover of our book*

This book is significant because each story reflects *our* experiences with learning and teaching English. *¡El inglés entre nos…!* contains *our* "conversations, which would focus on

[55] TransMiCable is an aerial cable car that is used by many of the inhabitants of *our* communities as a popular means of transportation.

the relationship with the English language and its teaching; however, we ended up sharing our intimate lives, illusions, joys, frustrations, fears, struggles, in short, our naked humanity" (Castañeda-Usaquén, 2022, p. 13). As it was pointed out, the title of each story relates to thoughts, events, and actions related to English, its learning, and/or its teaching. Aura's, Celmira's, and Sandra Patricia´s stories primarily focus on the learning of English. Caro's, Claudia Patricia's, Sandra Milena's, and my own stories delve into *our* working situations; Emary's, Jeimmy's, and Rubiela's stories intersect between learning and teaching contexts. Enny's, Jenny Viviana's, Maispin's, Otilia's, and Yami's stories revolve around their personal aspirations, regrets, and plans. Most story titles were chosen easily, but some posed challenges. In those cases, several options were presented to narrators, and each chose the title that best suited their own story. Table 7 lists the titles of *our* stories in English.

Titles of *our* Stories	
Aura Aleida's story: **"That saved my homeland"**	María Emma's story: **I never had to teach English.**
Caro's story: "**Give me what you want, but English classes"**	Marlen's story: **"I studied bilingual secretarial, although I never learned to speak English."**
Celmira's story: **"There comes 'whatywhere'"**.	Maru's story: **"I was fed up with the verb To Be!"**
Claudia Patricia's story: **"On Holy Google, I look it up!"**	Nidia's story: **"Bugs Bunny"**
Emary's story: **"English is the boogeyman."**	Otilia's story: **"It was not possible right now either."**
Enny's story: **"I suffered my first anxiety attack with English."**	Rubiela's story: **"I have always managed my way around with no more than what I studied at the Normal School."**
Jeimmy's story: **"I imitated what I liked!"**	Sandra Milena's story: **"I had to teach English There!"**
Jenny Viviana's story: **"I always wanted to be bilingual."**	Sandra Patricia's story: **"Neither forward nor backward."**
Lulu's story: **"Teacher, English is part of the program"**.	Yami's story: **"I have never felt English as my top skill!"**
Maispin's story: **"I am not bilingual, and I believe that I will no longer be."**	My story**: "I failed the year with you."**

Table 7 *Titles of our stories*

Often, research outcomes are confined to shelves, read primarily by evaluators, scholars, and a select group of people interested in the topic. To avoid this situation, a special event was organized to engage a broader audience, especially public kindergarten and primary

school teachers who could find *our* stories thought-provoking and useful for discussing English teaching in their own settings. Figure 9 captures the scene at the launch of *¡El inglés entre nos…!* on October 5th, 2022, attended by my companions, friends, colleagues, and my doctoral advisor. Following the event, some attendees provided feedback, commented, or asked questions about *our* stories in the weeks and months that followed.

Figure 9 *Book Launching*

Luckily, at the end of October, I had the wonderful opportunity to present the book at Universidad Autonoma Benito Juárez of Oaxaca, Mexico (UABJO) in their Critical Applied Linguistics Program in the School of Languages. I dialogued with Doctor Mario López-Gopar, his language student-teachers, and teacher-educators about these stories (See Figure 10). Then, in January 2023, *we* read some of the stories with the entire group of teachers from both branches and shifts of UE school (See Figure 11).

Figure 10 *Book presentation at UABJO*


Figure 11 *Book presentation at UE School*

I have highlighted these socio-academic events because they have contributed to interpreting the narratives and expanding perspectives on the learning and teaching of English. The following section introduces the *personas* who made possible this journey.

We

"Remember: From Latin re-cordis,
go through the heart again."
Eduardo Galeano (1989)

My companions, teachers of preschool and primary in the morning shift, accepted my invitation to embark on this intricate yet remarkable journey to *ourselves*. Together, w*e* agreed to revisit and share the stories that reside within *our* hearts: Aura Aleida Jiménez Sánchez, Caro, Celmira Torres, Claudia Patricia Rodríguez Sánchez, Emary, Enny Johanna Chaves Enciso, Jeimmy Gómez Chaparro, Jenny Viviana Téllez Vargas, Lulú, María Emma Gómez Ramírez, Maispin, Marlen Galvis Fraile, Maru, Nidia Inés Barbosa Silva, Otilia, Rubiela Hernández Mesa, Sandra Milena Camargo, Sandra Patricia Rincón Vargas, Yami, and me, Mireya Esther Castañeda Usaquén. To introduce *ourselves* the following lines, include o*ur* names, the title of our individual narratives, a brief contextualization of where the title comes from, excerpts from *our* stories[56], and the first paragraphs, where *we* describe *our* childhood.

[56] These stories are written in Spanish, in the book called *¡El inglés entre nos…!* Proof readers of the Spanish and English versions of stories: **Francisco Llacer Revert** holds a B.Ed. in Philology and Modern Languages from the university of Valencia in Spain, and he is pursuing his doctoral studies. He works as a teacher of English in the public education system of Spain. He read this document and asked for clarifications when he found some idiomatic or cultural expressions that he did not understand. **Moravia Elizabeth González Peláez** holds a MA

These narratives reminisce about the places of *our* birth, upbringing, and *our* early education. It is a response to depart from *our* childhood as it profoundly shapes *our* lives forever. Thus, in this paragraph *we* speak from the very essence of our experiences and where *we* are.

Aura Aleida's Story: "That Saved My Homeland"

The title refers to friends' help during her learning of English process in an informal language program.

> *I was born in Togüí, a very quiet place located in the department of Boyacá. I started studying when I had already turned 8 years old. At that time, it was like that, one entered school when one was already grown, but it was cool. I remember my dear teacher, she taught me from first to fifth grade, we were friends later because we worked together! I wanted to be a teacher since I was a little girl! My friends and I always played at being the teacher. I had in my mind that I wanted to be a teacher, so I studied high school at Normal Femenina Leonor Álvarez Pinzón in Tunja. The dream of the Togüíceños[57] was to go to the Normal school! A privilege that not many had, it was very expensive to study there, the boarding school was private, and parents had to pay a high monthly pension. In addition, when one entered the nuns asked for an enormous list: 6 shirts, 16 pairs of socks ...; everything had to be marked and the first day they checked counting: 16 stockings, 16 undergarments, 16 ... ha, ha, ha. There were three directors in the boarding school, students had to behave like a charm! if one behaved 'badly', for example, if one chats in line! That now seems terrible to me!, for anything they would write our names in an agenda, if someone had three or four notes in the week, nuns did not let students receive visits or go out with the family on the weekend, AH!? That was terrible, on two occasions my dad went to take me out and as I was punished, I could not leave, oh no!*

Caro's Story: *"Give Me What You Want, but English Classes"*

This title refers to a critical event at the beginning of Caro´s working trajectory at MC school, when she decided to exchange her favorite Math lessons to avoid teaching English.

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in Applied Linguistics to TEFL. **Judith Astrid Rodríguez Ardila** holds a B. Ed, in Philology and languages-English from Universidad Nacional de Colombia. **Jimmy Rodríguez** who was introduced in previous pages.

[57] People who are born in Togüí, Boyacá.

I lived my childhood with my grandmother and all my paternal family. My aunt was a teacher and, at that time, she worked in a private school where my cousin and I studied. We were always super united from first to fifth grade. The only ugly thing I remember from my elementary school is that when I tore the sheets of paper out of the notebook because I had crossed them out, they made a bun with those pieces and placed it in my hair. My primary was very nice!

Celmira's Story: *"There Comes 'WhatyWhere'[58]!"*

This title refers to Celmira's English teacher's nickname at high school, because she only taught the WH questions: What and Where.

I started my primary school at María Auxiliadora de Buenaventura[59] girls' school. What do I remember from those first years until fourth grade that I studied there? My first teacher, Ninfa Panchano, I loved her, I miss her, and she taught me many things that I work with now with my students such as rounds, stories, and games. I learned a lot from her. There, I fell in love with teaching.

Near my home there was a guama[60] tree, and a green area, so the neighbors built a hut: roof, floor, no walls, for the children to play; boys went to there some days and girls others; my friends and I invented the game: ¡La escuelita Firififi! Our parents were so committed and enthusiastic about this idea that they made benches there. After lunch, we played, I was the teacher. I taught them what I learned in school, it was a typical class, I made the report cards on cardboard by hand with a ruler and with all the squares as they looked like! There was a report card meeting and students could fail or pass the year. The first thing, I did, was going door by door picking up the children, my students. I would arrive at a house and say: "Doña Teresa, could it be possible that they can attend school?" and she would reply –"Wait, if they have not washed the dishes they do not go"; the one who arrived late had 'a bad point', and I called his/her parents.

[58] The combination of WH questions: what and where. There comes "whatandwhere".
[59] Buenaventura is the capital of Chocó, a department in the Southwestern part of Colombia.
[60] A sweet fruit.

Claudia Patricia's Story: "*On Holy Google, I Look It Up!"*

This title refers to the way Claudia Patricia called Google, because searching on the Internet is one of the strategies that Claudia Patricia uses to prepare her English lessons.

> *I loved my little school in Nocaima[61] because it was in the countryside. The teachers were very nice, we all respected them, and they were acquaintances of my mother, in a town where everyone knows everyone, right? I felt like family, I loved breaks and physical education classes because we went to a paddock to run, we climbed the trees to take guavas, and it was a school within the town! I loved my school so much! Now, I tell my husband, that I dream one day of working like this, in a small school in the countryside, of course it will be when I am close to retirement. It's a very nice, lovely atmosphere! We made the 'treats/chores': carried sacks, rakes, brooms, collected leaves, cleaned the road, the yard, the school bathrooms, everything. So beautiful! Those days were spectacular.*

Emary's Story: "*English Is the Boogeyman"*

This title corresponds to an expression that Emary repeated constantly during *our* conversation, she expressed along her story the fear she feels of teaching English.

> *My parents enrolled me directly in first grade, in a private school of priests and nuns. I did not study preschool, but many of my classmates did. I remember I had an hour of a very didactic and basic English class: the teacher taught us to say the colors, and the numbers in English; we had a little book to fill and color. From our classroom, on the first floor, we looked at the school principal punishing the students in the courtyard. He beat them for being late or for having committed some fault. I was afraid of going to school and of the principal, when he went to our class and stood next to me: I was very little, and he was very tall! Even more, teachers taught cursive handwriting, terrible! I thought "cursive handwriting is not my friend! Cursive handwriting is a trauma! The boogeyman is the cursive handwriting!" Since I left home, I knew that I would not go out for the break because I would not finish the writing exercises, and I would not be able to fill the page. Sure enough, I was one of those who never came out. That first year was very hard for me, it marked me. Studying there was very expensive*

[61] A little town near Bogotá.

and fatal because everyone (my brother, a cousin, and I) failed the year; my parents took us to a district school.

Enny's Story: "I Suffered My First Anxiety Attack with English"

This title refers to a familiar critical event when Enny could not understand important information in an American University where her son was going to study.

I studied my primary in a religious school called Nuestra Señora de la Paz. The classes were very traditional. Teachers did not teach us many games, just wrote in the notebook or on the board. I think that is why I do not remember; I do not even remember my elementary school friends. In fourth grade, I had teacher Ninfa whom I loved very much, she was very cute, very beautiful, and she was an old lady. I failed that year; I was not a bad student. However, I do remember when the teacher advised my mother that it was better for me to repeat the course because I was poorly prepared. I guess I did not reach the minimum achievements when failing the year, I lost the place in the school. There was a pension paid, my parents were in the process of separation and the money was no longer enough at home for the three children. My mom made a very long line at the Liceo Femenino de Cundinamarca and got me a place there. It was more beautiful. The school was more active because of the elective courses. I liked dances, and music, and wondered how it would be possible that they even taught me something that I love. I have not done this again, knitting with two needles! I enjoy making handicrafts I was happy knitting scarves, hats, gloves, and everything I could think of. In regards to the subjects, I do not remember, much less of my teachers, I have no idea who my teacher was neither fourth nor fifth grade; I think you remember the bad more than the good.

Jeimmy's Story: "I Imitated What I Liked!"

This title refers to the fact that Jeimmy taught English in a private high school and the model she followed was her teacher of English.

I was born in Bogotá, but when I was very young, we went to live in Soacha[62]*, and my parents bought an apartment there. At that time, my father worked in three schools in Bogotá. He was a primary school teacher in the morning, a coordinator in the*

[62] A little urban area near Bogotá.

afternoon, and a teacher at night. I studied preschool in a kindergarten within the same condominium where we lived, I always liked going to study. In preschool, I had a very nice teacher, so I adapted without a problem. There were two private schools considered the best in Soacha: one large that was out of our economic possibilities and the other was very nice and small, where I did all my primary. The same teacher gave us all the classes: mathematics, Spanish, and science, only in fifth grade did I receive very basic English lessons.

Jenny Viviana's Story: "I Always Wanted to Be Bilingual"

This title refers to the fact that Jenny Viviana enrolled in courses of English, but she gave them up. So, she could not fulfill her dream of being bilingual.

During my childhood we lived in Jerusalem Tanques Neighborhood, my mother had a "cancha de tejo"[63] and next door lived a dressmaker who loved me very much. As I had told her that I wanted to enter to study, she made me a jardinera[64] it was not precisely the one in the school uniform, she gave it to me, and I was looking forward to wearing it. My mother enrolled me very soon to study when I was four years old in a little school called Nuestra Señora de Fatima. This was supremely far away. We walked for an hour to get there. My mother chose to leave me to live with an aunt on weekdays. She was the one who dropped me at school and picked me up. On weekends, I went to my mommy's. I live in the San Vicente de Ferrer neighborhood now, and I usually pass by the little school, which remains the same with the same infrastructure. It has not been remodeled as it has a very traditional structure including the building, the large courtyard, the brick rooms, and the green boards, as was usual at that time. Next to the school, there is a cemetery, the older classmates scared us during the breaks with those dark comments about ghosts.

Lulu's Story: "Teacher, English Is Part of the Program"

This title corresponds to the words that Lulu's boss said to her when she expressed her insecurity to teach English, thus this was one of the tasks that the school head assigned to her.

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[63] *Tejo* is a Colombian sport created by a pre-Columbian indigenous group called *Muiscas*. This game is played on two opposing clay courts, where *mechas* (packages with gunpowder) are placed around metal circle called *bocín* that is located in the center of each court. The player who explodes the *mechas* by throwing a metal disk from the opposite side of the field wins point.

[64] A girl's dress, sleeveless with two straps that hold it on the shoulders.

> *I was born in the department of Tolima, municipality of Icononzo surrounded by majestic natural landscapes and in a healthy environment. I started my studies at Gabriela Mistral School. When I finished primary school, we went to school with an emphasis on secretarial. I liked being a secretary, my dream was to be a secretary, and I wanted to have a spacious office and a desk with everything I needed. I remember my first teacher, Betsabé, she was loving and dedicated to her students. Suddenly, my mother transferred me to the annexed school to study third grade, because she wanted me to be a teacher. I wanted to be a secretary, but my mom did not. I felt sad! I arrived at the Normal school by obligation! Fortunately, teacher Cecilia became a friend of mine and she was like my mother there. She was good and very affectionate, and she took care of me and my things, which made me feel very happy.*

Maispin's Story: "I Am Not Bilingual, and I Believe That I Will No Longer Be"

This title refers to the fact that Maispin has studied English, but she feels she cannot speak this language fluently.

> *I studied my primary at Ciudad de Bogotá School, in the San Vicente neighborhood, near the Tunal neighborhood. The teachers taught us to read and write, they put us to do many handwriting exercises and they did not accept blurred notebooks as it was very important that we did everything impeccable. What I remember most are my breaks because they were very long, I played, played, and played, that hour was eternal; I had a great time.*

María Emma's Story: "I Never Had to Teach English"

The title refers to the fact that María Emma did not have to teach English, because she was the social studies teacher in private primary institutions where she worked.

> *I studied at Modelo Del Norte public school. Now, it is one of the headquarters of Heladia Mejía School. I sometimes walked by, in the Muequetá neighborhood, above the church of the 63. Many years ago, accessing public school was a privilege. My parents worked in the 7 de Agosto neighborhood, selling clothes on the street in carts, in some kiosks, and in front of a bakery. I was a 'dirty little face', I liked to ride in those ball carts with the children, and I spent it playing in the street. I remember my first-grade teacher, she was an alternative teacher and, in that year, I received a*

distinction: 'icé Bandera'[65] *for being a good student. The second-grade teacher was called Lucia, and the third-grade one was Martha. She hit me a lot, I failed that year, and I had a traumatic third grade. I remember my primary school more not because of the beautiful things but because of how terrible I was. I think I am hyperactive: I am constantly moving; I do not sit still. Therefore, they beat me a lot, they punished me a lot, they pulled my ears, they hit me hard with rulers. Let us say that my experience in primary school was not very good. I did not have English classes in primary. They taught the basics such as reinforcement of Spanish and mathematics, not even of the other areas. The old teachers made us transcribe many texts.*

Marlen's story: "I studied bilingual secretarial, although I never learned to speak English"

This title refers to Marlen's belief that in spite of her studies she cannot either speak or hold a conversation in English.

I studied my primary in a district school that was near the house where we lived with my parents. It was called Aulas Internacionales Del Sosiego, now, it is called Rafael Núñez. I remember that the teachers during the meetings on the patio always set me as an example for my classmates because of my presentation. I was well groomed, well dressed, and arrived early. My mother combed my hair with two tight tails, she put some beer so that my hair did not come out. So, I was always an example of presentation and punctuality. There was a sad situation, which left me scarred. A very beautiful girl arrived at school, she looked like those girls who are the best, 'from a good family', and one says that she has money, something like that. I did not like her. At the time of the break, she organized a game/round, and they sang a chant. I desired to play with them! Before the holidays, I finally managed to be with them, for me it was an immense happiness to be in that group and to play that. I liked it very much! When we returned from the holidays, I was all happy with my excitement to get to school, not so much for the classes but for the game. As soon as we went out to recess, the bad children ... She organized them, I went to play with them, and the fool said to me: "We do not accept the poor here!" I replied, "I was playing with you." I still remember the girl's face gazing at me and telling me: "We do not have poor girls in this group, and I

[65] Deserve the honor of rising the flag.

do not remember that you got into my group"; I started crying and left. I also remember the teacher who taught me social studies. Her name was Graciela and I was afraid of her. She would enter that room and you had to know the task and everything. I was so afraid that one day she made me go to the board in front of the class and I peed myself in there from fright. I had another teacher who loved me very much, her name was Maruja, she was so beautiful with me, she gave me beautiful things, and I think things that no longer served her heh, heh, heh. I was her right hand, I fixed her chalk, and I would write what she told me on the board. I always stood out for having good handwriting, I remember her saying that my handwriting was very beautiful. In 1969, I think I entered to study primary school, I was never taught English there.

Maru's Story: "I Was Fed Up with Verb to Be!"

This title corresponds to Maru's utterance, because she studied the verb To Be every single class in high school. So, this was a tedious activity.

I studied at the public-school León de Greiff. It was close to my house and now it is called Reino de Holanda. My mother did not give me money to buy snacks. She would pass me some food and drinks through the fence, depending on the weather, if it was very cold, she would give me hot milk with a little 'rosconcito'[66]*. When I got to fourth grade, my mom began to give me money and I bought little things in the canteen. From second to fifth grade, I had a teacher named María Gladys. She always highlighted the beautiful things that students had. I also remember teacher Gustavo. These teachers were examples to follow, I think they were the ones who inspired me to be a teacher because I liked how some of them treated us, and I wanted to repeat that teaching. I went to visit my mother recently and I came across teacher Maria Gladys, it was cool to see her again.*

Nidia's Story: "*Bugs Bunny*"

This title refers to what Nidia understood in her first English lesson in sixth grade. This was an embarrassing situation for her.

[66] A kind of bread or buiscuit with guava jam inside.

I remember that during my first school years, I lived in San Juan de Río Seco[67] because my mother was a teacher in that small town, and my sister and I were with her. Even though my preschool teacher was very nice to me, I do not have great memories of her. Conversely, who caught my attention the most and who I do not forget is my first-grade teacher: Miriam Torres. She was very beautiful and young, she made me sit at the first-row desks, which made me a good student. I felt that I was a very good student at that time. In 1983, my mother passed the exams and all the processes to work as an official teacher in Bogotá. Then, we went to live in Bosa although the school was in San Cristóbal south[68]. My sister and I studied where my mom worked, so I was a third grader there. The next year, we went to live in Tunal and my mother moved to La Alquería School where I studied fourth grade. In 1985, my mother expressed to my uncle on my father's side, who had worked at UE School, her tiredness and concern: - "I do not want to continue carrying my girls by bus". My uncle got us a place in the afternoon at the Rafael Uribe School, where he was a teacher. This was too difficult for me because I was used to studying in small schools. For me that was very hard, even more, I could not adapt either to that fifth grade, or to that school. I begged my mom: "I want to come back to teacher Gladys'!" who was my homeroom teacher. I remember crying, crying, and crying until my mom had to return me to La Alquería School. My sister did stay happy and content in that big school. My mom got pregnant and had my little brother in May, so for the first few months of the year she taught me how to take the bus to school and back home because I would have to commute alone.

Otilia's Story: "It Was Not Possible Right Now Either"

The title of this story comes from *our* conversation about Otilia's plans to start doctoral studies and the requirement of studying English, which for her was an obstacle. Her conclusion was that at this stage of her life her priorities are focused on her role as a preschool teacher.

I attended my primary school in a beautiful and large girls' school. Each classroom had a garden with a peach tree in the back. We ate snacks in a little yard, where there was a chalkboard and another garden. Then, I loved going to play in the primary

[67] This is a small town in the department of Cundinamarca.
[68] Bosa and San Cristóbal are located in opposite places of the city.

forest. I had to do well at school, there was not an option. I had to be one of the best students at the demand of my grandmother who was the school principal. She told me, "You have to do things well done or do nothing, you must demonstrate your training, your responsibility, and all your values". My grades were always the best of the best and my classmates said that this was so because I was the principal's granddaughter. If I failed so that my classmates would love me, my grandmother would tell me "What is happening to you?!". She was always very demanding and a perfectionist. That was a very tough situation to face, terribly hard. In fifth grade, I rebelled, I told my family that if they did not change me from school, I would not continue studying. I was very sorry to leave my school, it was a paradise, and it was very beautiful! But the emotional pressure was too threatening.

Rubiela's Story: "I Have Always Managed My Way Around with No More Than What I Studied at the Normal School."

Rubiela thinks that the English she learned at the Normal school was enough to teach to their students in primary school.

I am from a town in Santander del Sur[69] called San José de Miranda. It is very close, ten minutes by car, from Malaga (capital of the province). I lived on a sidewalk near the village, a ten-minute walk away. Everything we lived there was very beautiful, there was a lot of union between the family despite all the economic difficulties. My parents gave us a lot of love, a lot of affection, they encouraged us to get ahead, not to stay there. They wanted to see their children succeed, and not to stay like them with two or three years of primary school. The support I had from them when we started in the little school was beautiful. There are nine siblings of us, and I am the oldest so many responsibilities fell on me, especially the care of the little ones. In 1988, at the age of seven, I began to study, I entered directly to first grade because in school there was no preschool grade, so I studied there until fifth grade. At that time, I did not have that experience of going out for a walk, we only went to the temple to do the prayer and then came back to the house. The first day of study was something new for my sister Isabel and me. We arrived very well at school, but the second day we got lost,

[69] A territory located in the northeastern part of Colombia.

ha, ha, ha, we were a block away. We searched, searched and looked for the school and we did not find it until some neighbors who were going up told us: "No, it is not there, walk, it is further!" We began to recognize everything where we had to go, as far as we could go, there was a furrow of pine trees that surrounded the school, and through that groove, we found the way.

In my classroom there were 20 children, I remember a lot of my teacher Ruperta because she was an excellent person who had a very nice charisma to teach. I did not even know how to pick up the pencil, you never had that opportunity. Nowadays, you try to make sure that the child at least knows how to pick up the pencil before entering school. She taught me from picking up the pencil to making the pre-writing exercises such as lines, strokes, stripes, sticks, and balls. She also taught us how to color. She taught us all that with a lot of patience and with a lot of dedication. I was always an outstanding student, since first grade I occupied the first or at least the second place, until eleventh grade. In second grade, I knew how to read, I already learned the process of addition and subtraction. They took us to collect the shells or seeds of the eucalyptus, and with them, they taught us to add, to subtract. We learned with that specific material. For science classes, we would go to explore the surroundings, we would take leaves to look at the shape they had, the size, and the colors. In second grade, I had a teacher, Blanca, who worked there until last year, I went to my town, we came across and I was able to greet her. She was quite strict, one of those old ladies who made the process of multiplication hard, something traumatic. She did demand that the multiplication tables had to be learned by one forward and backward. If we did not learn them, they punished us. I remember that for the multiplication table of the number 8, I was practicing all the previous afternoon 8 times 1 equals 8, 8 times 2 equals... Since I was a little girl, I have been very introverted, I do not like to talk. The next morning, I got a lot of nervous, so I went to the front. I started saying the table 8 times 1 equals 8; 8 times 2 equals 16, when I got to 8 times 7, I forgot, that I did not know how much it was 8 times 7, and that was hard for me. The teacher made me stretch my arms, place my palms up, and crash!! She hit me with a ruler. Not happy with that, she added: - "And you must stay here without recess, you cannot go out to rest, stay here learning the multiplication tables!" My mom used some glass bottles of

Postobón soda to pour the milk for the break, when my sister realized that I was punished, she entered the classroom, left me the 'snacks', and went to play. I stayed there; I could not go out to share with my classmates. Those are the two most outstanding moments, first grade that charismatic teacher, good people with all that dedication, and second grade, that experience I had with the teacher, she was not a bad person; it was the only time she hit me with the ruler. That was traumatic, but I learned the multiplication tables. I do not remember who my third-grade teacher was, in fourth grade it was Miss Blanca again, she did not get married. I did not have any other bad experiences with her because I already knew what the job was like with her even though I was nervous when she stood next to me or when I had to present the oral exams. Teachers asked many things from memory, I had to memorize them to be able to pass. In elementary school, I had no approach to the English language. It was always the basic subjects: mathematics, Spanish, Social Sciences, Science, Arts, or Drawing. Readings, many readings, teachers made us read a lot.

My dad was dedicated to agriculture, he planted tobacco, beans, and corn, and you had to wait six months to harvest. Therefore, when I was in fifth grade, I started working in the afternoons, and I had to help with the house expenses. I was going to do the cleaning and organize the house of a teacher at the school. She was teacher Elba's friend and the homeroom teacher of my course. She had a daughter two years younger than me, we both did the homework, and she treated me like a daughter. Once I got sick, I could not go to work, teacher Elba was furious, she told me off terribly. I did not want to go again, because I got mad. I did not like that she had treated me that badly.

Sandra Milena's Story: "I Had to Teach English There!"

This title refers to the fact that Sandra Milena´s first job at a public school was as an interim teacher of English from fourth to eighth grades.

I started my primary school when I was very young in a private school called Lazarillo de Tormes. The school was close to my house. I cried a lot the first few days because my mom left me in a new place that was unknown to me. When I thought it was super cool, I was taken to a public school to study second grade. I remember my classmates, the games, the classroom, and the fact that teachers made us read aloud. Speaking in

public made me feel ashamed. When they said that we had to talk, follow the reading, or start reading aloud ugh! My face was completely hot, and blushed. That always happened to me until university. What I liked the most were my dancing classes, there was a dance teacher and all my life I have loved dancing. The first group I joined was the dancing one! I enjoyed all the rehearsals and performances.

Sandra Patricia's Story: "Neither Forward nor Backward"

The title of this story refers to the frustration that Sandra Patricia has experienced when studying English, because she has enrolled in many language courses, but she could not see any advance, she always failed the second English level.

I studied at a school called San Francisco 1, La Casona, which is next to the church of San Francisco. The school was made mostly in tin and there was only primary. Ana Tulia Garzón was my teacher from first to fourth grade, I learned reading, writing, and addition with her. She was very demanding and affectionate in her own way... She hit our heads with her hand (coscorrones) and pulled our ears, which was allowed at that time. Parents accepted and encouraged these punishments, I heard them saying to the teacher: "Hit them with a belt very hard. If you do not have a belt, we will leave you one to hit them strongly". The complaints that the teacher gave to my mother were that I hardly participated and that I hardly spoke. I was always afraid. If I said something wrong, I would get a 'coscorrón' or my ears pulled, and at home, they would punish me. I was very quiet, soundless! My classmates were also my neighbors, they were violent. They pushed me and beat me. I was extremely quiet. In fifth grade, I no longer wanted to be with the same teacher. On the first day of class, they made us stand in line and asked if anyone wanted to change of group, my friend Yuli and I raised our hands. Teacher Tulia looked at us surprised. Finally, they put us in teacher Cristina's group, she was young and pretty. She chose me to raise the flag, I began to participate in dancing classes, and another teacher gave us physical education lessons, it was a good change!

Yami's Story: "I Have Never Felt English as My Top Skill!"

The title of this story was given because Yami has studied English in many places, but she feels that she is not good at speaking or listening in English.

In elementary school, Luz Stela Cifuentes Forero was a very nice teacher to me. I have tried to contact her, yet I have not been able to. She taught me from second to fifth grade. I had no economic possibilities. When they asked us for materials such as cards on cardboard, I made them in sheets or a notebook, I took them to the class with fear, because I thought I was going to get a bad grade. On the contrary, she exalted my work, she said that the important thing was not in what was done but, in the intention, to comply, to be responsible, and she gave me a higher grade. I always liked Spanish very much, because it seemed to me that it was a way in which I could express what I felt and my ideas. In class, we wrote about ourselves, and how we felt; she did not make us write 'crazy' things that were not so close to our reality. She told us: "Write down what you had for breakfast today". She posed the mathematical problems like this: "If your mother bought four loaves, there were three of us, and each one ate one, how many loaves are left?" She used our reality. She was an excellent teacher! Many of the things I apply in my classes are from what I learned with her.

My Story: "I Failed the Year with You"

The title of my story comes from my first year at school as a coordinator, because I could not share some tips for classes of English with my companions.

I was born in the beautiful city of Bogotá. My mother decided that my brother and I should study in a private school because at that time there were many teachers' strikes. She wanted to be able to go to work calmly knowing that we would be studying. The school was small, and the opportunities for outdoor activities were reduced to what we could do in a tiny courtyard. I remember very fondly teacher Zilia, who taught me to read, write, tie my shoes, use cutlery, and many other things since she was my kindergarten, first, and second-grade homeroom teacher. I keep the book 'Yes! English for Children for second grade, was the only year I had English class in elementary school. I recall listening to and singing a song. There were two painful situations that I went through in elementary school. The first one was when the teacher put the tape in my mouth because that day, I was talking a lot in class. I went out with it to recess. All the children looked at me curiously and when we returned to the classroom the anguished teacher took off the tape, asked for forgiveness, and hugged me. On another

occasion, I had to make a poster alluding to good grooming habits. I forgot to tell my mom that I needed cardboard. So, I looked for what to do with my job and found a piece of cardboard that I had already used and made the sign that said: "Cleanness is health". As soon as the third-grade teacher saw it, he made ironic comments loudly about the somewhat wrinkled and old cardboard that I had used, I felt very sorry.

Reading became my favorite hobby. I devoured the book Corazón by Edmund De Amicis. I eagerly waited for the next issue of one of my favorite comics called Memin Pinguin. On those sunny days, I would place an umbrella in the yard of my house, prepare lemonade, and spend my vacation accompanied by books or magazines when it was not possible to go to my aunt's farm in the countryside, near San Cayetano, Cundinamarca[70]. I love traditional dancing, so I did not miss the opportunity to participate in performances. My dad gave me a basketball when I finished primary school and my mom enrolled me in swimming and skating lessons. With a lot of effort, she bought me a bicycle so that I had activities to occupy my free time, she had several jobs, so we hardly saw her at home.

As I also play the role of researcher, I would like to introduce the multiple ways in which I have experienced research. This process has shaped my actions in this study. Thus, I want to introduce my experience as a researcher[71]:

In 1994, I decided to do research work for my B. Ed. with an Indigenous community called Nasa (i.e., better known as Paeces), who has lived in Puerto Rico-Caquetá for many years. One of the chapters of the monograph was devoted to the characterization of this community. It was because they needed this study to get some financial support from the State to carry out their projects. Since then, I strongly believe that every study must leave something beneficial for people who work and share their knowledge and life with researchers. Furthermore, one of the suggestions at the end of the research was to include their grandparents' ancestral knowledge(s) such as their linguistic heritage, religious beliefs, and ancestral knitting within primary school. It sought to encourage young people to speak Nasayuwe, their mother language, fostering the use

[70] A little town near Bogotá.
[71] This section is part of a document chapter called: What does this Journey Look Like? for the book *Methodological uncertainties of research in ELT education II* (in press).

of the native language in the school to preserve their culture. Speaking Spanish at school is one of the mechanisms that school uses to homogenize people, this imposes a single way to talk.

Following this, my experience at public schools started in April 2001. I chose a semi-rural school, located in the south of Bogota. I had a large class of fifty-one sixth graders. Students were my motivation to carry on with my studies due to the number of questions related to English Language Teaching that came to my mind in those circumstances. Consequently, I initiated a master's program in Applied Linguistics at TEFL keeping in mind this beloved group. At that moment, I explored teenage students' intercultural awareness when using culture-based materials during English class. This work opened my eyes to a broader perspective about culture and identity. It also provided ideas and reflections on how to create, use, and/or adapt materials imbued with cultural content to contexts and specific needs. Additionally, the Social Studies teacher and I created some material in English about historical facts from Colombia that gave us insights into students' understanding of cultures. Thus, I strongly concur with López-Gopar (2009) when he stated that "children became teachers and linguists" (p. 3). During our classes, my students employed different strategies to learn such as inventive spelling, while writing. Consequently, if the teachers fail to reflect upon their students' learning processes, they can risk misunderstanding those ways of knowing as errors (Castañeda-Usaquén, 2012, p. 41).

Between 2010 and 2011, I developed a project with seventh graders, culminating with the creation of their own books, which they read aloud and recorded their voices. Our experience was recognized by SED, and students became the authors of their own books written in English. These kinds of activities show how teachers and students can collaborate to understand their practices from their respective roles, thereby contributing to teaching and learning together. Seventh graders and I learn from each other highlighting that there is not only a way of being or of knowing, but multiple ways.

In 2011, in one of my experiences as a university teacher, I joined a research group at a private university, whose focus was on developing competencies among students. I

had to adhere to the techniques proposed by the main researcher since the project had already been presented and we had to adjust to it. I did not feel comfortable just doing quantitative analyses, applying progress exams to my students/participants, and then comparing results between the control group, and the experimental one. Ultimately, I believe this approach sought to promote standardized exams in the faculty.

Then, in 2012, I became a coordinator in UE School in the primary section marking my return to elementary education settings after more than fifteen years. To excel in my new role, I studied a specialization in educational management in 2014. During this period, my colleagues and I carried out a research study comparing a charter school and my school focusing on the occupational outcomes of their graduates.

I also felt the need to organize a group with teachers to transform our realities in terms of language teaching (Spanish and English), and mathematics considering the diversity presented in our school. Thus, Kumaravidevelu (2002) explained that teachers (i.e., teachers-coordinators) "organize themselves as a community of educators dedicated to the creation and implementation of forms of knowledge that are relevant to their specific contexts" (p. 14). We did some projects, which were rewarded by the Board of Education. In 2018, I enrolled in this doctoral program with an emphasis in English Language Teaching.

I hope this brief introduction provides readers with an understanding of my background and inspires them to say, 'Nice to meet you!'

The journey to approach *our* stories to comprehend what they reveal about learning and English teaching has had ups and downs. Once the book was in people's hands, this research continued by reviewing each story and considering readers' comments, impressions, and questions. I also reflected on the way to interpret *our* stories, which constituted pieces of *our* lives.

Data Analysis or Conjoint Representations?

At this stage of research, words like accountability, reliability, validity, and trustworthiness are unavoidable. As a researcher one is obliged to share with the readership how the study meets such characteristics. Regarding validity in research, Vasilachis (2009) claimed:

> The knowledge obtained, being different, rests on another legitimacy, on that which gives it its own depth, development, and scope. To be valid, this knowledge must account for both components of identity at the same time, that is, by focusing on what is shared by all, it must be able to exhibit differences without essentializing them and without making them the axis of cognitive interaction. Such differences are contingent features that do not make the person whole or pertain to his or her dignity (paragraph 64, my translation).

Similarly, Horwitz (2001) introduced a detailed step-by-step description of the analysis procedure using a table emphasizing that reliability and validity do not apply to narrative studies. Instead, she opted for the concepts of auditability, credibility, and fittingness proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1986). According to them, credibility consists of a prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing (emotional catharsis), and member checks (p. 77). I strongly agree with M$\bar{a}$kua et al. (2019) when they declared that companions "do not make up a false story" (p. 146). To that, I would wonder why they would. *We* do not need to fabricate any story.

According to Gergen & Gergen (2003), a way to disclaim validity is reflexivity (p. 579). This journey involved openly discussing with my companions, through conversations or written pieces, my geographical and historical situatedness, my personal investments in the research, the various biases I bring to my work, the actions I have or have not taken, surprises encountered, emotions experienced, and the decisions made concerning what to include or exclude from the report. Furthermore, this alignment occurs because I concur with these authors concerning how research is inherently situated historically, culturally, and personally. In the same line, Musgrave (2019) voiced that reflexivity in research "has to do with self-awareness. […] the process of applying reflexivity to your research requires you to closely examine your motivations for choosing the research" (p. 9). One way to scrutinize my motivations to research English, its learning, and its teaching with my companions at school was through writing my life story, as part of the seminar on methodology at the doctoral program. In one´s own story "we cannot suspend our beliefs, separate our experience or delete our memories because our experiences will be inextricably linked with how we view and analyze the data we collect during our research" (Musgrave, 2019, p. 10). The reasons to walk

this research path have been articulated in the problematization section and throughout this document.

Building on the previous discussion, “No one is an expert, we are part of the whole. All we are facilitators for others to uncover their own truth, as much as we can” (Wilson & Restoule, 2010, p. 39 as cited in Fast & Kovach, 2019, p. 25). Therefore, through *our* conversations my companions made it easier for me to discover my truths, and vice versa. This mutual process of self-understanding underscored the collaborative nature of *our* research journey.

To interpret *our* stories, I found valuable Richards’ claim (2011) on how “Our narratives captured our lives, and illuminated our joys, worries, intentions, and beliefs” (p. 789). Consequently, this study focused on *our* learning and teaching trajectories regarding English. Moreover, Richard (2011) expresses how “It seems as if telling our stories has helped us to remember long ago incidents and recall recent events and to use those occurrences as a way to explain personal decisions” (p. 796). I was particularly moved by Richard’s closing remarks, where she expressed a strong belief in the truth of every word of her students hoping to authentically represent their truths. Similarly, I aspire to have achieved such a goal and done justice to the truths revealed in *our* narratives.

Finally, as Brant Castellano (2000) states “Knowledge is validated through collective analysis and consensus building” (p. 27 as cited in Fast & Kovach, 2019, p. 24). This approach resonates with the co-constructed narratives proposed by Gergen & Gergen (2003) to avoid methodological individualism (p. 603). Therefore, in this study, after *our* conversations, *we* shared suggestions, impressions, and emotions. *We* also discussed the issues *we* preferred not to disclose in the stories, documents, or presentations. Subsequently, when *our* stories were ready, *we* met to read and comment on them, a practice Gergen & Gergen (2003) refers to as multiple voicing (p. 580). *We* co-interpreted *our* stories, as *we* constructed them. *We* read and provided comments and collectively decided what to share. Thus, *we* exercised *our* right of representation or in Gergen and Gergen’s (2003) terms conjoint representations (p. 592).

At this point, the question arose of how to report and make public the findings. The harvesting of *our* stories took the form of a book called *¡El inglés entre nos…! or English among us…!* The title reflects *us* holistically encompassing *our* thoughts, culture, actions,

emotions, and relationships that made possible the creation of a book derived from candid and trustworthy conversations about the English language, *our* personal connections to it, and *our* experiences with English teaching in *our* school. At this point, interpretations and responsibility for what is shared relied increasingly on the researcher's decisions.

Interacting with *Our* Stories

The researcher is a human being with their own ideological, political, cultural, spiritual, emotional, and epistemological stances. "We bring our persons" (Gergen & Gergen**,** 2003, p. 592) to our study. "Our research is guided by who we are" (Shirley & Angulo, 2019, p. 43), and as Mākua et al. (2019) put it "Your research is your own story expressing itself through the process and product of your experiences, thinking and writing" (p. 147). In this context, I, as the researcher, make evident my ways of being, thinking, doing, and feeling throughout this research journey, in essence, it represents a way of living.

In the same vein, Mignolo (2014) has inspired me to continue seeking alternatives to understand *our* context in his words "decolonial thinking is not a method to apply but a way of being in and thinking about the world" (p. 62, my translation). Thus, I aim to understand myself alongside my companions in this world that *we* inhabit. In addition, the readers of this thesis assume a role in this study because:

> It is the readers who make the judgment about the plausibility of a knowledge claim based on the evidence and argument for the claim reported by the researcher. The confidence a reader grants to a narrative knowledge claim is a function of the cogency and soundness of the evidence-based arguments presented by the narrative researcher. (Polkinghorne, 2007, pp .484-485).

Headings and comments were included to point out historical, cultural, emotional, spiritual, social, and political issues that were apprehended: "Stories are our theories…stories are not separated from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimated sources of data and ways of being" (Brayboy, 2006, p. 430 as cited in Shirley & Angulo, 2019, p. 65). In the same vein, Maturana (2007) stated that all of us make theories because every person is intelligent.

We discussed the chapters focused on interpretation, findings, conclusions, and further research, with support from Doctor Helena Guerrero through this process. Finally, I want to

juxtapose the concept of pedagogy with that of research as a means to "clarify and tangle paths, do not plant dogmas or doctrines, but sow seeds so that they can germinate "other" knowledge equally valid to the established knowledge" (Ortiz Ocaña, et al., 2018, p. 205). This research journey led me to different paths of "understanding" and uncertainties simultaneously. Thereby, I present in the following pages, how this research journey unfolded.

Having collected *our* stories (data) in a book, this research journey continued to explore learning and English teaching in *our* daily lives. The narrative interpretation involved delving into the content of stories, and examining what they encompassed (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 401). Conversations revolved around core themes closely connected with English, its learning, and its teaching following a sequence spanning through childhood, secondary school, tertiary education, jobs, and lives at UE school. The objective was to comprehend these narratives:

> Narrative knowledging is the meaning making, learning, or knowledge construction that takes place during the narrative research activities of (co)constructing narratives, analyzing narratives, reporting the findings, and reading/watching/ listening to research reports" (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 395).

Each story was read several times, initially I used color coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990); however, this method of classifying or trying to find categories seemed to risk fragmenting lives rather than revealing their interconnectedness. Thus, I focused on those meaningful and recurrent events, actions, emotions, and beliefs emerged across the stories aligning with life stages: childhood, secondary school, university, working days (before UE School and at present), and after graduate courses. This process required shaping to assemble a puzzle where each piece of one's life resonated harmoniously with others.

Building on the aforementioned discussion, Savin-Baden and Niekerk (2007) explained that the process of meaning-making represented in the construction and interpretation of storytelling occurs first between the narrator (person who had the experience) and the listener (researcher). Subsequently, this process is reenacted on a broader level, often one that is understood to be less personal. Thus, the researcher assumes the role of narrator and the listener becomes the consumer or reader of the research when it is published (p. 464). Furthermore, Bolívar (2012) posits how

> in life stories, the question is not representativeness, but the relevance and coherence of the argument presented, which shape the credibility and plausibility of the story, within the context and social group of reference. Methodologically, the question is not in vainly trying to insert the life of the individual into artificially constructed social groups or categories, but of seeing the relevance of the story in the culture of which it is a part (Bolívar, 2012, pp.15-16, my translation).

> Consequently, keeping in mind that narrative is a mode of knowledge, and that narrative reasoning works by means of a collection of individual cases in which one passes to another, and not from one case to a generalization. The concern is not to identify each case under a general category; knowledge proceeds by analogy, where an individual may or may not be similar to others. What matters are the worlds lived by the interviewees, the singular meanings they express and the particular logics of argumentation that they deploy (Bolívar, 2002, pp. 11-12).

I interacted with each story by reading each of the sections corresponding to life stages. I focused on childhood, teenage and adulthood and these interactions allowed me to comprehend *our* learning trajectories, *our* working trajectories and *our* epistemologies regarding the learning and the teaching of English.

In conclusion, figure 12 outlines several steps to uncover what *our* stories, the hypogeum, reveal about English, its learning, and its teaching. It is noteworthy that this exploration was characterized by a multifaceted journey, where I encountered multiple tracks with detours, ups, and downs, typical of introspective journeys within *ourselves*, *our* thoughts, beings, doings, and *our* academic, working, and personal domains.

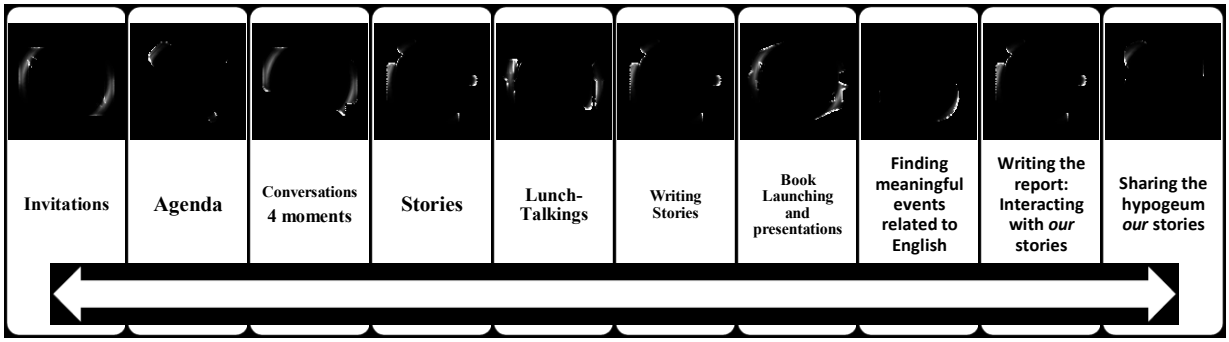

Figure 12 *Steps to get destination: hypogeum (our stories)*

Accordingly, this research report includes theories, results of prior studies in this field of ELT for children in public primary schools, and the multiple ways *our* stories reflect *our* beings, feelings, and doings and *our* personal epistemologies regarding English, its learning, and its teaching.

Limitations

Two aspects that could be considered as limitations of this study were: first, the subjective nature of narrative interpretations, because potential biases could occur due to my role as a participant and researcher; second, I relied just on one "data" source, namely *our* stories so the findings cannot be generalizable. Although, because of the nature of this study public schoolteachers can identified themselves with some of the issues presented here. Additionally, I invited only to my companions of the morning shift, however Celmira and Rubiela shared their views of the teaching of English to children in the afternoon shift because they worked there until 2020.

The following section chronicles *our* trajectories detailing *our* lives as learners and English teachers, and the evolution of *our* personal relationship with this language. I concur with Shirley and Angulo's (2019) idea that "the spirit aspect in data analysis was where the data began to transcend" (p. 72). Who stands to benefit from this study? Can this study contribute to transforming the landscape of English teaching in *our* context?

CHAPTER 5: *Our* Traits in Educational Settings: Bodies - Minds - Souls

"If you want to know me,
look inside your heart"
Lao-Tse

This intricate path to uncover answers to the research questions parallels the quest to explore the hypogea in the National Archeological Park of Tierradentro[72]. After driving 48 kilometers by unpaved roads from the nearest terrestrial transportation terminal, followed by a zigzag ascent for a couple of hours, one encounters a visible series of holes that pique curiosity. Upon locating the main entrance of the hypogea, descending into the chambers reveals columns adorned with ancient pictures everywhere portraying daily moments of the Tierradentro culture. Within these chambers, the main task is to find the multiple meanings that ancestors conveyed through their iconography. Fortunately, Nasa or Páez guides are present to explain to marveled visitors what they know about Tierradentro culture (See Figure 13). Similarly, *our* journey implied delving into *our* inward narratives about English, its learning, and teaching. Each conversation was a step to access the hypogeum and *our* stories served as pictures to be interpreted alongside the multiplicity of knowledges, voices, and epistemologies converged in companions, researchers, theories, previous studies on the field, personal background, and tutors' advice.

Figure 13 *Walking path to a hypogeum in Tierradentro, Cauca, Colombia*

[72] Tierradrentro is an ancient cultural site in Cauca, Colombia. It is well-recognized by its ancient underground tombs and burial chambers from indigenous populations inhabiting the region.

The hypogeum called *our* stories contains three interconnected chambers: learning trajectories, employment trajectories, and personal epistemologies. Both trajectories made possible the construction of personal epistemologies. Collectively, these chambers have the potential to shape the community's ways of thinking, being, and doing in relation to English teaching. Figure 14 displays the hypogeum that derived from *our* stories encompassing the multiple ways in which *we* have learned, taught, and lived English. The learning trajectories chamber explores *our* experiences as students in primary, secondary, tertiary, and graduate education in relation to English. Primary education contains a niche called '*English as a Privilege in Primary'*. Secondary education contains three niches named as follows: (i) '*From Limited Understanding to Enough for Teaching in High School'*, (ii) '*Memorizing Verb TO BE and Cheating to Pass English in High School"*, and (iii) '*Popular Culture Inside High School Classrooms'. Our* experiences in tertiary education comprised a niche called '*English in the Bud or a Core at University'*. Finally, graduate education covers a niche called '*English a Nonsense Requirement and a Barrier for Graduate Studies*'.

The employment trajectories chamber comprises three sections, each organized by three places of work. The first section details *our* first experiences teaching English in institutions different from UE School, it includes a niche called '*Simulated Bilingual Schools'.* The second section corresponds to *our* practices at school before 2002 when the merging of UE and MC schools began. It consists of two niches: '*From Arrangements Between Friends to Workloads'*, and '*Inaudible Teachers' Requests*'. The final section, covering *our* experiences when teaching English from 2012 until now, encompasses three niches: (i)' *English the Boogeyman', (ii) 'Escaping from English',* and *(iii) 'Taking Charge of English'.* The last chamber called Personal Epistemologies contains four niches: '*Teachers and Students' Needs', 'Teachers' Profiles', 'Questionable Policies for ELT',* and *'Uncertain Methodologies'*. Each of the chambers emerging from *our* narratives creates this hypogeum. The following lines describe them in detail. The paths leading to this hypogeum were not straight, on the contrary, they were characterized by mazes, detours, obstacles, and ups and downs.

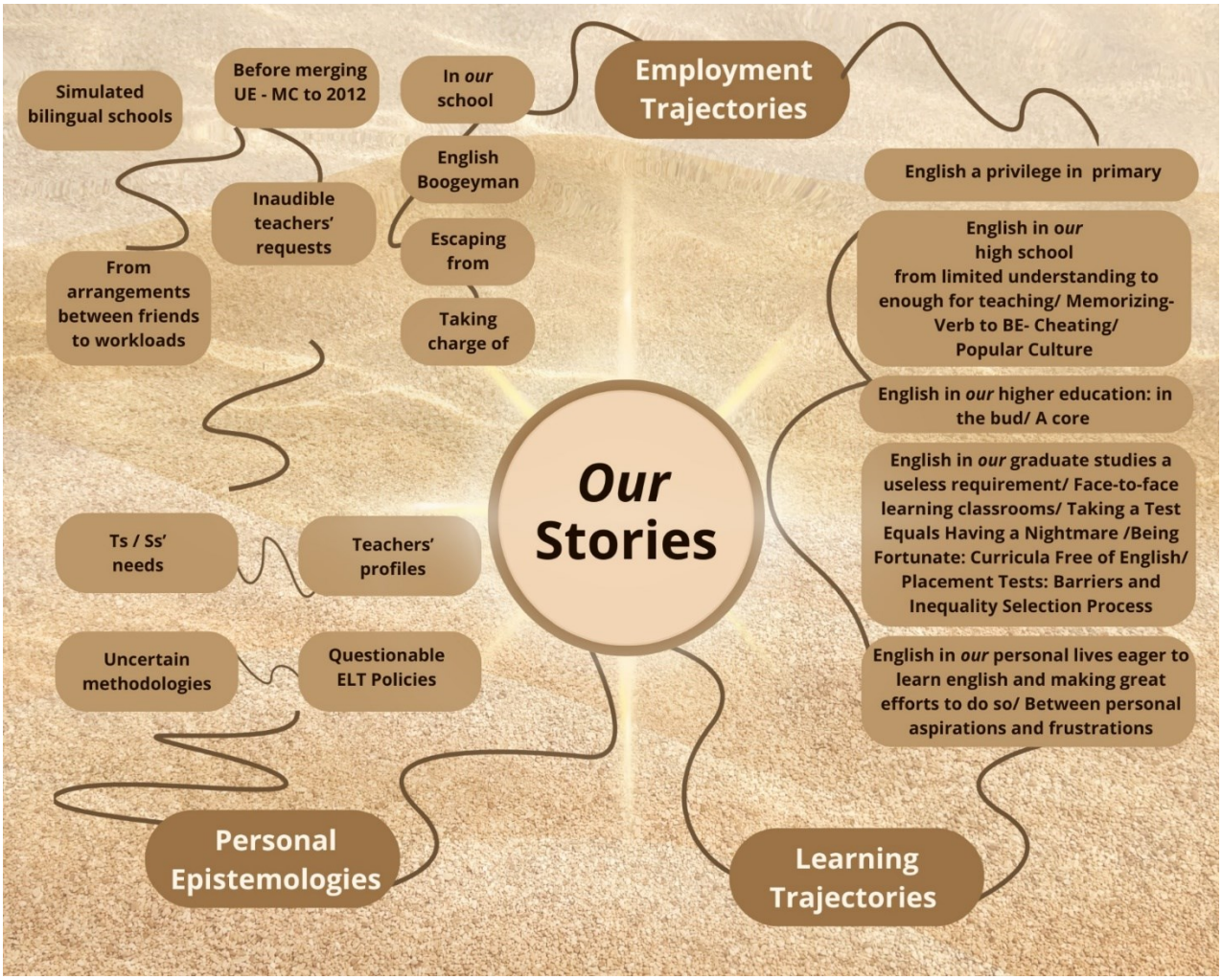

Figure 14 *Hypogeum of Our Stories: learning and employment trajectories that build epistemological paths*

Historicity is essential for a comprehensive understanding of *our* educational setting. Digging into the deep roots of history has contributed to answering one part of the research questions: What have been *our* academic and professional trajectories as English language teachers? To achieve this, *our* dialogues concerning *our* childhood, teenage, and youth made it possible to trace back *our* relationship with English as learners. This retrospective examination provided an account of *our* beings, feelings, and actions as learners, as well as an overview of the roles that English has played in *our* academic lives.

The past cannot be detached from our current lives as it has helped to shape who we are. Thus, the following pages locate readers in the circumstances before *we* arrived at UE School. I firmly believe that by sharing certain aspects of *our* academic, professional, and

personal lives both readers and *ourselves* will gain a better understanding of *our* beings, feelings, and doings regarding ELT. To facilitate this understanding, some sections have been organized describing *our* relationship with the English language and its teaching throughout different stages of *our* lives prior to our first meeting at UE School.

Our Learning Trajectories

Before being teachers, *we* were students. Let us explore the memories of *our* encounters with English as learners. The following pages narrate events of *our* learning trajectories, which in turn inform *our* practices. This includes primary, secondary, and higher education, graduate studies, and some language courses *we* have enrolled in voluntarily. In the end, some views about the role of English in *our* academic lives that have influenced *our* personal lives are portrayed.

Childhood leaves an indelible mark on *our* lives and experiences during *our* academic journeys significantly shape who *we* are, given that *we* spend almost half of *our* lives in educational settings. In this section, the reader will find answers to the following questions: What was the place that English lessons occupied in *our* early years of schooling? What were *our* beings, feelings, and doings when learning English in secondary school from sixth to eleventh grade? What was the role of English lessons in *our* undergraduate lives? What do *we* think of English in *our* graduate lives?

English A Privilege in Our Primary School

During *our* dialogues, fifteen of *us* did not mention having English language classes in the early years. Aura succinctly expressed this by stating *"I never studied English language in primary school, at no time".* Between the years 1978 and 1998, Emary, Jeimmy, and I had English language classes in the private schools *we* attended. In contrast, Maru and Sandra Patricia, who studied in public institutions, had scarce opportunities to get in contact with English as it was not an official school subject in primary education during those two decades. Only in 2013, English was formally introduced as a subject in the State primary schools with the passage of Law1651(2013) on bilingualism.

In my story, I recall memories of English language classes in primary school in private and public institutions, I wrote: "*I keep the book 'Yes! English for Children' for second grade, the only year I had English class in elementary school, there are in my mind some scenes of*

myself in the classroom listening to and singing a song". In Emary's story, she emphasized the fact that she received English language classes only when she was a student in a private school.

> *In first grade, in the private school, I had an hour of English class: the teacher taught us to say the colors, and the numbers. I had a little book; I completed the exercises and colored drawings; the class was very didactic. […] In 1988, when I entered the District School, I did not have any English language classes, this disappeared. […] In 1993, my father did better financially and enrolled me to study fifth grade in the private school called Miguel Ángel which was near my home, and I had English classes again.*

On the whole, English language class was not included formally in the schedule of public primary schools. Conversely, in private institutions, there was a dedicated time allocated for English classes for children in fifth grade. Thus, having English language lessons at primary school was a privilege. As referenced by Enever (2016, p. 355) receiving English classes was a signal of prestige to people. This led to politicians in India including this language in the curriculum making this school a commodity (Ordoñez 2004; Guerrero 2010; Enever, 2016; Ennser-Kananen et al., 2016). English was accessible primarily to wealthy families that could afford their children's tuition in private institutions. This situation appeared in Bogotá as well, as seen in Emary's description of her education in private schools. Consequently, English was a privilege.

Moreover, Ordoñez (2004) enunciated that in Colombia "early bilingual education has been an urban, middle-class, private school phenomenon due to social and political pressure to access English partial immersion" (p. 450). Additionally, for most of *us,* teaching English to children lacked a clear reference as this language was not taught in *our* early years. This lack of exposure meant that *we* lacked a concrete example of how these classes would look like. English classes were advantages, commodities, and privileges that children who studied in private schools could have. The following lines address the subsequent stage in *our* learning process. It illustrates *our* beings, feelings, and doings when learning English in secondary school, from sixth to eleventh grade.

English in *Our* High School

From *our* collective narratives, it was possible to organize a timeline of *our* high school studies reflecting the diverse institutional contexts *we* attended. Figure 15 depicts the year of *our* graduation. In 1974, Marlen began her secondary school, while Claudia Patricia concluded her studies in 2001. Fourteen of *us* completed an academic high school. Lulu, Aura, Nidia, Rubiela, and Sandra Patricia pursued their education in Normal schools denoted by an asterisk (*) next to their names. Claudia Patricia stands out as the sole graduate with a degree of Normalista superior. She completed twelfth and thirteenth grades as it has been marked by two asterisks (**) after her name. On December 19, 1997, Decree 3012 was issued mandating an additional four semesters of studies to get the diploma of *'Normalista Superior',* Claudia Patricia recalled this emotive moment when she heard the news:

> *I always liked being a teacher that was a dream of mine since I was a child, and my desire was to study at the Normal school. In eleventh grade, we finished academic high school with an emphasis on pedagogy; when we were told that we had to do twelfth and thirteenth grades to get the diploma of Higher Normalists, it was magnificent to be the first class of Nocaima in 2001, we were all happy* (Rodríguez, 2022, pp. 73-74).

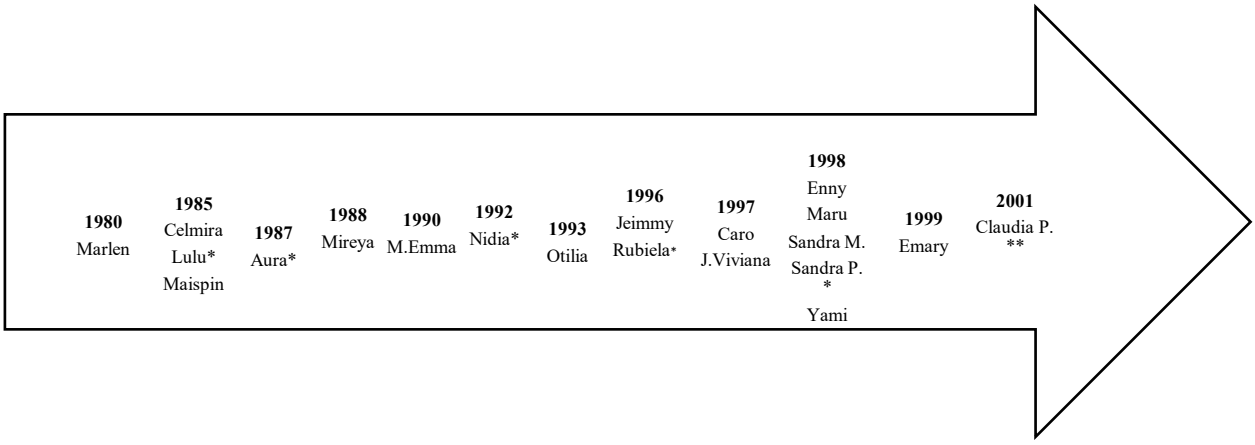

Figure 15 *Graduation Year from High School*

Now that *we* have established the types of institutions *we* attended and *our* graduation timelines, it is pertinent to examine *our* beings in English language classes. The following section delves into *our* ways of being English learners, *our* capacities, abilities, and attitudes towards learning this language. This exploration seeks to address the question of how *we* were as learners.

The roles *we* assumed in English classes as students in high school and the ways *we* perceived *our* capabilities to learn varied widely including being the English teacher´s helper, performing well at English, performing poorly in some skills, and being 'unable' to learn this language. Yami and I were selected as the English class monitors, which earned *us* recognition within the school community. Yami expressed, *"The teacher chose me as his class monitor because I answered a question in English"*. Similarly, I shared my experience, stating that, *"from sixth to ninth I was always the English class monitor, I helped teachers to review workshops, I remember especially teacher Ferney, he took some primers with stick figures in them for the class to understand easily, I also won the English contests, and I had recognition in school!"*. Furthermore, Enny perceived herself as a good learner when she said, *"I always considered myself very good at English in high school"*. Conversely, Emary expressed her concerns recognizing that she was not good at English admitting, *"I am very bad at pronunciation and listening."* Nidia accepted that she was unable to learn the English language: *"I was always like hum [hesitantly]! Was I unable?"*. These reflections prompted *us* to consider what *we* learned in classes and how *we* applied such knowledge.

From Limited Understanding to Enough for Teaching

There are two extremes regarding learning English regardless of whether *we* attended academic or pedagogical high schools. One prevalent perspective among most of *us* is that *we* had a limited grasp of the English language during high school. The following are examples that support this idea. Caro expressed, *"I never understood English. I never learned the verb to be in high school"*. Otilia echoed this notion by pointing out, *"What I learned about English in school was rudimentary. I feel like I did not learn much"*. Similarly, Aura remarked, *"I did not understand anything and I learned almost nothing"*. Nidia reiterated these feelings, emphasizing *"I felt that I learned just a few things… English in high school was like a lack […]. I felt that I did not learn English in school"*. Lulu, who attended a Normal school, highlighted, *"The English that I learned was that of the Normal school, and it was very bad. … I personally, and I think my classmates did not understand what the teacher said or wrote either."*

In contrast, on the other side, Maispin, Rubiela, Sandra Patricia, and Jeimmy expressed that their high school education in English had been beneficial for their teaching. Maispin who

studied in an academic high school, acknowledged that what she knows of English is basically what she learned in high school:

> *The greatest effort I made in English class was when I was in eighth grade. I learned what I know about the English language nowadays… In my first English class I taught: "a" and "an", I followed a methodology like that of my eighth-grade English teacher, some vocabulary and formulas because it seemed to me that it was very easy to learn them* (Maispin, 2022, p. 169).

Along the same line, Rubiela is convinced that the classes she received in the Normal school have been very useful to do her job nowadays. She expressed:

> *[Teachers] taught very elementary vocabulary: the things that were nearby, animals, plants, objects, elements of the kitchen, above all the parts of the house; and some greetings … This is what I remember most and what I can most easily work on in my English classes with the children…I have remained with what I learned at the Normal school; at the university, I had good English teachers, and I learned quite a few things from them; we took two semesters of very Basic English classes, but this was rather a review of everything we had studied at the Normal school* (Hernández, 2022, p. 257-258).

Sandra Patricia preferred her English classes at the Normal school to those she had during her undergraduate program or courses she took after graduation, *"I favored the classes at the Normal school because they were full of fun, were like playing, and doing something."* Likewise, Jeimmy acknowledged, *"[In my English classes with teenagers], I did the same things that my high school English teacher [taught me], ha, ha, ha, I imitated what I liked!"* Maispin and Jeimmy followed their secondary English language teachers' actions, they applied some activities they had experienced as learners within their own English lessons.

Jeimmy, Maispin, Rubiela, and Sandra Patricia attributed significant importance to their English teachers in their professional lives, they recalled having had good teachers who inspired them. Therefore, they have replicated what they learned with those high school teachers in their own lessons. Now, let us examine what activities and practices characterized *our* experiences in English classes during *our* high school.

Memorizing, Studying Verb to BE, and Cheating to Pass English

During *our* English classes in high school, *we* engaged in five main actions namely cheating, studying hard to pass or face remedial exams, studying the verb to be, memorizing, and doing arts and crafts. Firstly, Aura admitted, *"I cheated during examinations. I wrote down some things in English on my desk."* Lulu echoed her, stating, *"We copied into our notebooks without understanding what we were writing"*, and Celmira explained, *"I just copied what was on the board. […] Everyone passed exams, these were 'a piece of cake' because the teacher gave us the answers."*

Secondly, the English language was difficult to understand, so Lulu expressed her gratitude for the existence of remedial exams:

> *I studied a lot to understand a little more because I did not pay any attention at all to the class. […] I had to study to be able to pass the English language exam, fortunately, there were remedial exams at that time* (Lulu, 2022, p. 147).

In the same fashion, Sandra Patricia complained:

> *Sometimes I did miserably on tests, I had to take remedial and re-remedial tests … In the Normal school, teachers thought that because one was a sixth grader, one already knew English, but I barely knew some colors, greetings, animals, and vocabulary. I had to fit in at that level… I tried to sit next to those students who understood a little more than me* (Rincón, 2022, p. 269).

Similarly, Sandra Milena had to study very hard to pass the exams, she explained, *"The first few years we were given English classes, the basics. We had an English book that had too many readings, long texts, spaces to complete the conversations, and all that stuff. English classes gave me a hard time".* Nidia also shared, *"In seventh grade, when I had to take the remedial exam, my mom hired an English teacher […] who was our neighbor, she paid her a few classes to prepare my remedial English exam at home."* Consequently, English learning was not an easy endeavor. *We* made efforts to pass barely remedial tests and paid for individual private tutoring as a strategy to pass the subject.

Thirdly, studying the verb *TO BE* was an activity that many of *us* remember fondly. Enny exclaimed*, "I do not remember the topics very well, but I am sure that we studied the*

verb 'To Be' only". Nidia recalled, *"I studied the verb 'To Be', the pronouns, I practiced to make sentences"*. In the same line of thought, Rubiela expressed*, "In tenth grade, we had more hours of English classes, we studied the verb TO BE"*. By contrast, Otilia expressed her gratitude, she stated: *"English classes had a small hourly intensity, they were very traditional, and not very varied: followed the book, the 'I am', the conjugation, the infinitive. We completed grammar exercises in our books with love."* It can be concluded that conjugating the verb '*to be'* was a central and typical activity in *our* classes. Maru's story encapsulates this sentiment with her titled narrative '*I was fed up with the verb To Be'* where she expressed *"What I studied in high school was verb To Be. The verb 'To Be', no more. That was all."*

Fourthly, *we* engaged in memorizing elements from English. In this regards, Sandra Milena acknowledges,

> *Learning vocabulary was very difficult, it was quite difficult! It was a bit tricky! Teachers gave us those lists of verbs in present, past, and future tense for us to memorize them. I remember preparing the tests: I stood outside the classroom, in the green area, with the list of verbs, I repeated, repeated, and repeated… and that was with great difficulty, I could not learn them well. I learned those lists 'with ups and downs'...* (Camargo, 2022, p. 260)

Likewise, Sandra Patricia mentions:

> *We also memorized many dialogues; in pairs, we stood in front of the classroom and said them aloud. That was wonderful! I felt that I was pronouncing in English; sometimes I did not even know what I was saying, heh, heh, heh…* (Rincón, 2022, p. 269)

Furthermore, Claudia Patricia explained, *"I remember, that I memorized 'three little birds', 'don't worry', quickly. Indeed, I learned by heart 'shoemaker', uh! Shoemaker? The story of the 'shoemaker'".* The previous excerpts underscore the prominent role that memory and repetition played in English classes at high school.

Finally, doing crafts during English classes was a common activity. Celmira and Yami acknowledge how during teachers' absences due to strikes, union meetings, or missing lessons, they replaced such times with arts or crafts. Celmira points out that, *"When the*

English teacher was absent, we did crafts" and Yami claimed, *"We did not have English classes many times because of strikes."*

Overall, tests in *our* high school English classes served primarily the purpose of assessment, as described by Ur (1997) "The test gives a score which is assumed to define the level of knowledge of the testee. This may be to decide whether she or he …has passed a course" (p. 33). In this case, tests measured memory and determined whether students passed or failed English. Thus, it can be said that memory plays a crucial role in English classes. Furthermore, all of *us* talked about the conjugation of the verb *TO BE*, and the long lists of verbs in present, past, and past participle forms, focusing on accurate verb forms regardless of the understanding of their meaning.

From the above, despite the trends in teaching approaches, our high school education in English was predominantly focused on memorizing a list of verbs and short lines of dialogue, the conjugation of the verb to be, and grammar. Few teachers integrated songs and the most common skills were reading and writing in the form of transcriptions. From *our* stories, it can be said that English teachers in high school often employed methods that involved memorizing isolated words. There was a strong emphasis on learning key lexis mainly through the Socio-Cognitive Approach and a particular interest in repetition for its own sake responding to the apparent Communicative Language Teaching. Furthermore, the repetitive practice of the conjugation of the *verb to be* in simple present tense resonated daily in most of *our* high school classrooms. The aforementioned practices echo how many of *us* recall *our* education in English when *we* were teenagers. However, it is worth noting that three of *us* recounted different experiences of English classes in high school.

Popular Culture Inside High School Classrooms

Jeimmy, Sandra Patricia, and Yami found their English classes enjoyable and inspirational. Sandra Patricia was delighted in some classes because she played an important role in them, and she understood what she was saying:

> *When I was in tenth grade, our group had to perform based on the song 'Thriller'. A friend´s boyfriend spoke English well, so he created all the scripts for us. We danced, and dressed up; the play was recorded, it was impressive! I played the role of Michael Jackson's girlfriend! I had to talk a lot, I knew what I was saying; we rehearsed, and*

> *we practiced a lot, for two months. We did a great job and we got good marks in English class!* (Rincón, 2022, p. 269)

Yami compared the classes she had with different teachers, expressing a strong preference for Teacher Alfredo's lessons, which she loved. She found his classes engaging and memorable. In contrast, she could not stand the other classes, describing them as boring. She expressed:

> *The other English classes I received were common: we copied the list of verbs, and past tense verbs, and matched drawings, and words. Learning was not so cool. On the other hand, with teacher Alfredo, it was very cool, we had short dialogues about our lives, told our classmates what my name is, what my favorite color is, where I live, and what I want to do in my future. I remember those classes a lot and I never forget them…* (Yami,2022, p. 281)

Jeimmy liked her classes at high school because the activities were designed to approach students' interests. These classes were useful for her social life and effective for understanding messages and practicing listening. The title of her story is "I Imitated What I Liked". In her narrative, she refers to her English teacher in high school. This teacher was her role model. Jeimmy stated, *"I enjoyed the English class. I liked it! I loved this, and I paid a lot of attention to it."* And she continued describing the class:

> *In the 90's ballads in English were fashionable, and the teacher played them in classes: we listened several times, she gave us the lyrics of the song on a sheet with blank spaces to fill in, and we had to write the word or words that were missing. This was cool because you could understand the message of the song you liked. She made us learn all the verbs, but we did not have to repeat the conjugation in the present, past, and future. We made a little booklet, one month we studied some verbs and completed the primer, which was assessed. Even the boys tried to have their primer done; It was hard work, and that's why the teacher gave high grades. We also played 'stop' in English, she taught a topic and the vocabulary, and she evaluated when we had enough vocabulary of colors, animals, jobs, and clothes we played 'stop' with many boxes. We enjoyed the English class, and I enjoyed it a lot. I liked it, I loved the English class and I paid a lot of attention. I learned a lot with her, because of her I liked English,*

> *because before I thought that learning this language was very difficult. She made me feel that English wasn't that difficult* (Gómez, J., 2022, p. 113).

From these excerpts of *our* stories, it can be seen that popular culture was alive in classrooms as everyday life was relevant, students' voices were heard, and both meaning and pleasure in the learning process were significant (Giroux and Simon, 1988, p. 9). *We* remembered the classes where *we* had fun, understood the messages *we* were saying, talked about *our* own lives, and did activities that broke the routine and atmosphere of traditional classrooms. Thus, classes that caught learner's interests and tackled one´s realities were also appreciated. This sequence of events provides context for our academic journeys and experiences. Now, let us examine our relationship with English in tertiary education.

English in *Our* Higher Education

This passage contains *our* stories after finishing secondary school highlighting events related to *our* undergraduate studies in terms of *our* personal, academic, and working lives. The first of *us* who obtained her degree was Marlen in 1990, whilst the last was Claudia Patricia in 2018. The emphasis is on the role of English in *our* careers and *our* conceptions of this language.

Celmira, Sandra Milena, and Sandra Patricia studied for a BA in teaching at the same public university, preparing them to teach in primary and secondary schools. However, Sandra Patricia did not like to work with little children. Celmira and Sandra Patricia initially aspired to be Biology teachers. Otilia and I also studied at the same public university; she became a speech therapist while I pursued my career as an English language teacher. Nidia began her education at a public university but eventually completed her degree at a private institution, where Aleida was her beloved classmate. Emary became a preschool teacher, Yami studied Spanish and humanities, and Claudia Patricia, and Rubiela specialized in teaching children. The latter four pursued their studies at private universities in a blended modality.

Caro, Enny, Jeimmy, Lulu, Maispin, and Marlen studied in private universities, while Jenny Viviana, Maria Emma, and Maru studied in private universities as well during night shifts. As *our* academic trajectories cannot be detached from *our* personal lives it is important to note that Jenny Viviana and Maru had to work to pay for their studies, unlike Maria Emmat.

Marlen and Yami studied to be bilingual secretaries, but both of them asserted that they finished their studies without learning how to speak English. Aura, Caro, Celmira, Enny, and Yami were mothers while studying their careers. Figure 16 displays information about *our* year of graduation and relevant aspects of *our* lives. Maternity is represented with a smiley face [:)], the obligation to work with a dollar sign [$], studies at night shift with a hash [#], and distance learning with an ampersand [&].

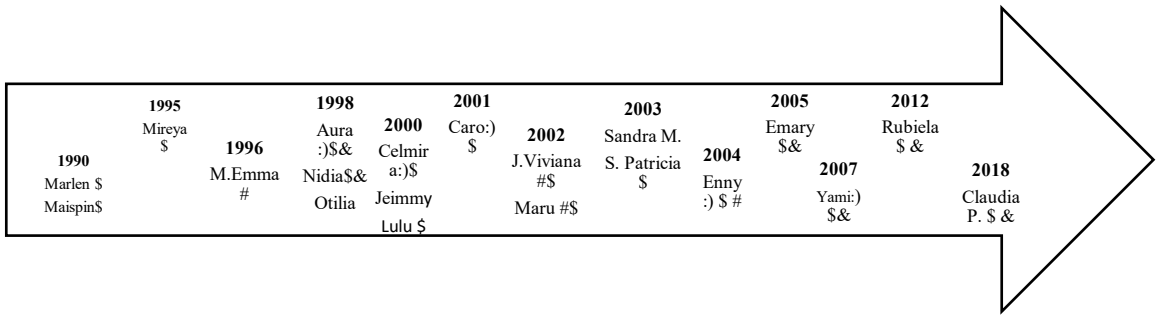

Figure 16 *Higher Education Lives*

Celmira, Sandra Milena, Sandra Patricia, Otilia, and I could get a place to study in public universities. Celmira and Sandra Patricia wanted to study biology but were unable to pursue that field. Otilia and I, however, were fortunate to study the careers that we wanted. Most of *us* had to balance work and study often choosing to study degrees that *our* families or *ourselves* could afford, the cheapest in the market as Caro admitted. In addition, distance and blended learning became prevalent options. On the other hand, Jeimmy, María Emma, Otilia, and Sandra Milena enjoyed university lives without financial or time constraints, they were fully dedicated to being university students. Now, let us examine the role of English in *our* tertiary education.

English Subject in the Bud

The presence of English in *our* undergraduate studies varied significantly. It was either non-existent, optional, mandatory, an emphasis on undergraduate studies, or an additional external requirement for obtaining the degree. In this train of thought, '*English in the Bud'* is at a stage of development in Colombian educational policies that is not fully matured. Since the implementation of Law 1324 issued in 2009, all of the undergraduate students are required

to take the National Exam (*Saber Pro)* to obtain their degree. One of the components of this examination includes an English proficiency test. Consequently, Claudia and Rubiela had to do this exam, although *we* did not address it in *our* conversations.

English was not a subject in the syllabuses of the careers that Caro, Lulu, and Maru pursued. Caro pointed out, "I *never had English language classes, these were not mandatory!*" Lulu remarked, "*Training in the area of English was not present in my undergraduate studies*" and Maru concluded, "*In the university, English was never taught to me, this subject was not a requirement*". Moreover, English was an optional subject in the syllabuses of the careers that Sandra Patricia, Otilia, Celmira, and Sandra Milena completed. Sandra Patricia and Otilia chose not to study English for different reasons, while Celmira and Sandra Milena opted to register for English for different motivations. Sandra Patricia stated:

> *During my career, English 1(one) was elective, it was not mandatory within the program; since I did not understand anything, I preferred to go to dancing, theater, or other electives. Nor do I remember having English classes during the practicum; the support that teachers sought was in literacy and mathematics* (Rincón, 2022, p. 271)

Otilia described her need to know English and her reasons for choosing another elective:

> *For me, English was a huge limitation because most of the good articles of my career were written in English, I felt very frustrated because I started reading and did not understand. There was a girl, only one; out of thirty-five, only one in our career who knew English perfectly, she was the one who supported us and helped us. In the second semester, she discovered that she could charge us for translations and did her little business. English was offered as an elective along with much simpler ones. My criteria to register for elective subjects were courses in my mother tongue and those that would contribute to my career because English at that time did not look as fundamental as it does today. If you ask me today if I would allow my children to do what I did, no, I will not allow them. I could understand the general idea of a document written in English, with a lot of effort, […]. That was what happened to me at the university, when you had the reading of someone who does know English you realized that you could not capture some crucial details, then that made you feel frustrated. Now, one has many*

> *tools to understand English, you have all the support of both applications and Internet programs; that frustration of not understanding becomes a possibility; the approach to English also becomes much more pleasant. One does manage to advance, the mind is also open to learning, now you do not have to face alone the frustration that no matter how hard you tried you failed* (Otilia, 2022, p. 235).

Celmira and Sandra Milena opted to study English. Although English was an optative subject, Celmira identified this as a compulsory one:

> *In the undergraduate degree, I had English classes since we had to receive some 'electives', within these was a second language. I had to take these classes, it was an elective; but a forced one, ha, ha, ha. It is not that I do not like the English language or that I hate it, but the person who taught me in secondary school did not make the learning of this language pleasant; in the university the class was ordinary: we had to enroll in this class! This was one more subject, you had to comply with this, you have to learn some English, the basics, the minimum, whatever, you have to learn something because you have to get your degree.* (Torres, 2022, p. 63)

Sandra Milena chose English subject to learn how to teach this to her future pupils:

> *At that time, English was not important, it was not a compulsory subject, it was an elective, and one selected what one wanted. One semester I chose English thinking: 'It is time to study some English because how are we going to teach a second language to children?' the classes were a reinforcement of what I had studied in school: the verbs, the verb TO BE, some conversation; although they were not that significant because I do not remember them. Later, when they did the new curricular project, I supposed they understood the importance of English for the education of the little ones and included English as a compulsory subject* (Camargo, 2022, p. 261).

English was a compulsory subject within the curricula in the programs that Claudia Patricia, Enny, María Emma, and Rubiela studied. Claudia Patricia was not captivated by her teacher's methodology, she asserted:

> *I graduated as a children's pedagogue recently; I studied blended learning. There, we were given three basic levels of English. The methodology of the teacher was not so striking, and this did not catch my attention, it was autonomous, independent work, and I had to study, review, and prepare for a test. English was a requirement, I had to pass those levels to get my degree* (Rodriguez, 2022, p. 77).

Maria Emma claimed that the teacher's methodology did not allow her to learn the English language:

> *During the undergraduate program, we studied English, we had to work in groups, organize activities, prepare dialogues, and translate. What I remember was that we prepared a fruit salad saying the ingredients and the recipe in English, and we also represented a situation in the family. The work fell on us because we had to look for the information, organize and then show it, I feel like I did not learn that way* (Gómez, 2022, p. 160).

Rubiela found that English classes in the undergraduate program were a review of what she had studied in secondary school:

> *In the degree, I had good English teachers, and I learned quite a few things from them; we had two semesters; it was very basic English, rather a review of everything we had studied at the Normal school; little deepening; there was also no requirement to do an alternative course, they gave us those two semesters, we approved them and passed that subject.*

Enny realized that she was good at English and regretted not having studied languages as a career.

> *I had to study three levels of English to get the diploma, I advanced a little more. The classes were in the language center of the university, we had headphones, and we did dialogues and exercises. I was smart in English; I did super well because I liked it. I have sometimes thought, 'Oops, I should have chosen languages!' With a bachelor's degree in languages, I would have done very well* (Chaves, 2022, p. 101).

Aura, Maispin, and Nidia studied at the same university, and they could choose English subject as the emphasis, but the three of them favored Sex Education. Aura believed that

studying English was time-consuming and that young people could learn this language easily. Thus, she did not choose this emphasis for her studies because she had duties at home, and she considers herself bad at English. She is thankful to her classmate Nidia who helped her to do well in this subject:

> *I entered to study the BA at Antonio Nariño University, having studied the pedagogical high school some semesters were homologated so, my time at the university was shorter. I was fortunate to meet teacher Nidia there, I did not choose English as an emphasis; I preferred sex education; my decision has to do with my belief that 'I am bad at English'. So, I have a degree in preschool with an emphasis on sex education. My classmates who were smart and young chose the emphasis in English; although I was not old, I already had Romel (my son), I already had a husband and more things to do, and I did not have much time anymore; instead, those boys had more free time. What I did in English was due to Nidia's support, in the classes, in the midterms, and in everything, she helped me; I knew nothing, and she knew a little more than I did; sometimes, a teacher would make us work in a group, that 'saved my homeland'* (Jiménez, 2022, p. 22).

A certification of English proficiency was required by the university, where Emary studied, despite the program did not offer English classes. She had to present a certificate demonstrating a certain number of attendances of English classes to obtain her degree. Therefore, an English certificate became a mandatory requirement. Emary explained her experience with English language classes as follows:

> *We had to do an English course to get the diploma. We looked for the institute and had to present a certificate of at least 120 hours of classes. [The course] was the same, the basic topics and I passed this because my classmates helped me, they saved me; I am afraid of English* (Emary, 2022, p. 85).

Overall, the decision to choose English class as an elective course often stemmed from the fact that this was a requirement to obtain a degree or the desire to learn this language to teach to future pupils. Some of *us* had a genuine interest in the language and pursued careers that involved its study. At that time, it seemed that English did not play a crucial role in *our* university lives, it was not a mandatory subject in some settings allowing *us* to select

complementary subjects. In Otilia´s case, she remarked that she wanted to study subjects taught in Spanish. It seems that in that period of history, English held a less prominent position in academia or there was some flexibility in terms of having English language certifications reflecting its developmental stage as English in the buds.

English: A Core in Our Undergraduate Lives

Marlen, Jeimmy, Jenny Viviana, Yami, and I chose careers where English subject held a prominent role in *our* studies. Marlen and Jeimmy studied English at language institutes, Yami and Marlen studied bilingual secretariat, Jenny Viviana started a career with an emphasis in English, Yami studied Spanish language and Humanities that included English teaching, and I hold a BA with an emphasis in English.

Jeimmy decided to study the English language in an institute to bridge the gap with her peers at the university. Additionally, she devised a strategy to be able to understand the lessons:

> *I studied preschool at the University of San Buenaventura, starting in 1997 and finishing in 2000. My dad's school [where I studied] was good, but a small one in a neighborhood. At San Buenaventura University, there were girls from Cafam[73], from recognized public schools, and from another private school that I do not remember the name of, I was the only one who came from a school that nobody knew. I feel that I did come out well prepared, but the level of English did not compare, the girls of the Cafam school spoke fluent English that one was wow! The English teacher was surprised and liked that they spoke like that. At that moment, I thought, I must do an English course because I like it and I needed to catch up, I enrolled in the Tecnisistemas Institute. We studied English almost every semester, there were many English lessons because at that time it was not like now, the lessons were included in our career program. It was cool, but I found it very difficult because the teachers did speak everything in English. I decided to buy a journalist tape recorder, at that time cell phones were only for making and receiving calls, and text messages, I recorded the class since I did not understand many things, and when I got home, I put the recording repeatedly until I finally understood: ah, [the teacher] is saying such a word! It was*

[73] CAFAM is a school part of a compensation fund.

> *arduous, my classmates were not as kind as those in my neighborhood, the social stratum was different, people behaved differently, and it was very complex to find someone who helped me; I had to record every single class, and that worked for me. Afterward, I did not have to record anymore, because I already understood the teacher* (Gómez, J., 2022, p. 115).

Jenny Viviana initially pursued a career with an emphasis on English. However, university policies later changed, and she was informed that she would not receive a degree in a bilingual program. This raises questions about whether she was misled. Did universities and colleges exploit students' aspirations of bilingualism during the English boom for financial gain? Jenny Viviana had many classes of English and described some of the activities she did using this language:

> *In 1998, when I turned eighteen, my mom organized a chain*[74] *to raise the money that was needed to pay for the first semester of the bachelor's degree in preschool education with an emphasis in English; then, during the career, we were told that we could not graduate with an emphasis on English, that our title could not say that. However, we studied a lot of English, we were asked to do English classes for preschool children, decorate the classroom with English expressions, and do games and other activities. I did not speak English fluently, although we did address a lot of preschool themes in English. I remember that the teacher at the university told us that there were techniques for English teaching, distributed our groups, to find out what the technique was about, for example, the 'suggestopedia', and based on the information we performed in our class. The workshops in English classes at the university were very nice. I have always been captivated by that language.* (Téllez, 2022, p. 133)

In Marlen's case, she studied in four different institutions before realizing what she wanted to do for a living. In the language center and the community college English classes were in the curriculum:

> *In 1981, I decided to enroll in Instituto Electrónico de Idiomas because I felt that English was important, there, I studied for two years. Then, I studied bilingual*

[74] A system for saving money with a group of relatives, friends, or colleagues: Each member gives an amount of money periodically to one of the members, they take turns until all the participants receive the collected money.

> *secretary, although I never learned to speak English. I was not able to speak. I can translate words when I read, and I understand what a paragraph says, but I never spoke in English. Later, I studied at INPAHU international trading* (Galvis, 2022, p. 177).

Then, Marlen decided to become a teacher and she recalled her English language classes at university with emotion:

> *Over the years, life teaches you: my mom died, I was working, and I realized that I wanted to be a teacher. What a pity with my mother! after she died, I gave her the pleasure of being a teacher. In 1986, I started studying at San Buenaventura University for my bachelor's degree in preschool education and continued one more year to get the title for basic primary education as well. The classes were cool, you learned, and you had to prepare always playful activities for the preschool children and to do classes in English. I have always liked innovation, that classes are not the same: that the teacher writes on the board, copies it in the notebook, and so on, no, no. I remember that when the teacher said that we had to make an oral presentation and that it would have a grade, I had the idea of performing. We decided to represent a scene of El Chavo del 8, at that time the Chavo and the Chapulín*[75] *were the programs that were hitting on television. We set ourselves the task of watching the Saturday program, to know what it was about, a classmate recorded it and we began to make the script, I played Doña Florinda and another student took teacher Jirafales' role: Doña Florinda and the teacher in love speaking in English and with the famous expression 'no te juntes con esa chusma, chusma' ['do not join with that rabble! Rabble!'] I no longer remember how this was said in English; each of us memorized a little piece, and each one of us had a script to say in English. Learning the lines was complicated because one forgot things, but in the end, one succeeded. For example, I would say, listen, listen to me, listen and point my index finger at my ear, of course, I had the little piece of paper underneath in case I forgot something. Our grade was five in English subject. How beautiful would be the presentation that at the end of the semester we*

[75] Mexican series that were very popular in Colombian television.

> *were asked to make a presentation in the cultural week of the university! Ha, ha, ha, El Chavo del 8 in English, and we laughed a lot.* (Galvis, 2022, p. 178).

Similarly, Yami pursued studies to become a bilingual secretary and later transitioned to a BA in education. However, both Yami and her family criticized the fact that she is not a bilingual speaker yet. As Yami could not afford her studies, the institute provided a fifty percent discount to study bilingual secretary. During this time, she met a teacher whose appearance resembled that of an American person. She talked about this part of her learning process as follows:

> *I was always super clear that I was going to be a professional, I was going to go to university; I did not know how to achieve it, because [my family] did not have the financial means to afford my studies. I do not know why I never applied to a public university! Perhaps, no one told me about that possibility, and I never thought about buying a pin for registering. At the end of 1998, when I was in eleventh grade, the representatives of an institute came to the school to invite us to enter higher education. On that day, the students had organized a strike at the school, because teachers had taken away the radio station and would not let us buy any food inside the school. I was involved in the matter because I was the student's representative, and I was leading the protest. Days after our graduation ceremony, a classmate told me that she had been called from that institute, she asked me to join her, we got there and she began to do her registration process; meanwhile, one of the women who was registering students looked at me insistently, until she could not take it anymore and asked me: "Is it true that when we were in school, you were leading the strike?"; I felt sorry, I thought she had seen it wrong, I timidly told her: 'yes, I was'; she replied: "I like people like that, do you want to study?" with great joy I nodded, she offered: "I'm going to give you half a scholarship", and I enrolled in a bilingual secretary course.*
>
> *I studied and worked simultaneously, my brother had contact with a student welfare center and did his best so that I could work there with the children, helping with school reinforcements, and collaborating with homework and crafts. They accepted me because there was a link between the church and the student center, they knew that I had been a Sunday school teacher, that I had the idea of managing children, and that I*

> *had already started studying. I was a teacher from a very young age, I was only 18 years old. [Going back] some classes were cool in the institution, because 'supposedly' it was a bilingual course, we had conversations in English. I did not learn anything, I memorized, I did well in the tests, but I did not know much. There was a teacher, I do not remember his name, he was blond with green eyes, and he was Colombian. He proposed dialogues, we pretended that we answered the phone, because we were going to be secretaries; I remember very much that in one class I answered: - "si, aló"; and he: "Ha, ha, ha"; Of course, because I had to answer in English. I translated a lot and made sentences, maybe I did not enjoy it so much. The teacher was at the institute for a very little time, they changed teachers several times because that was a 'chichipatico*[76] *institute'. I imagine the teachers did not last because they did not get paid well, I do not know. I was bored with English, I did not understand, a lot of grammar was taught, and it seemed complex to me. I did the translations and the assignments, I did well because I translated, and I did well because I have always been judicious. I made the attempt, but no, I did not learn or learn the basics. I finished those vocational studies, my family made fun of me because they said that I was bilingual, but I did not speak English.* (Yami, 2022, p. 285)

Yami persevered in her studies and discussed the challenges she faced in performing well on English tests, detailing the emotional impact they had on her. She also recounted memorable activities she developed for her classes and how she effectively balanced her job with her studies, acknowledging the demanding yet rewarding nature of her commitment.

> *I studied a degree in basic education with an emphasis on Humanities and Spanish language, of course, I had a lot of English language classes, and I did like that. We had face-to-face English class every Saturday from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.; although there were days we left at noon.*
>
> *In one of the English classes, we made a free portfolio that helped me because it brought me closer to reality, motivated me to write, I learned a lot and I enjoyed cutting, gluing dolls, and using colors. One of the texts for the portfolio was to describe*

[76] Colombian expression for low quality and cheap.

the holidays: I wrote about Orocué[77], my dad, the park, the church, and what was on the left, in front, and on the right. Another issue was family, we had to do something special. My friend's husband who was a graphic designer and a cartoonist helped me make my family in cartoons. I felt happy because the corrections were very few, and I thought I was learning. I never copied, I did my job honestly and I was happy because I was moving forward. I keep that portfolio! For pronunciation, we had to record our voice and deliver the audio. That was super funny! The teacher would give us a text, one had to read it and send it recorded in English. Later in class, one listened to the audio, when comparing the original audio that the teacher played with our audio, they were very different, one said the words super badly. Obviously, one's pronunciation was not good at all. They also made us spell, which scared me, because we had to go to the board to spell the name, 'My God! How is it said? How is it? How is it? How is it?' This made me nervous. They made us buy super expensive materials for English, from Cambridge: it included the book, the workbook, and the cassette, at that time it was the cassette to study; I have not thrown away those books, and I have not been able to throw them away, I have a lot of books from college; sometimes I look at them and I feel cool because I like to highlight, I see what I highlighted; and I said 'Wow, so cool!' At that time, I read a text and understood very few things. I was not able to globalize it or to get a main idea, I understood single words. I have not been good at semantics and the subject of grammar for me was dreadful, it blocked me, and I could not understand; however, I enjoyed learning English. The exams did produce a lot of tension, it was ugly, I felt that the English exam was approaching, and I felt sick, and my stomach hurt. Oh my God! Without English, I could not graduate. The exams were writing, listening, and pronunciation. Teachers made some of them, in those classrooms of the Javeriana that are so beautiful, with a lot of technology. We watched videos, or we listened to a conversation there, and based on them we had to answer the exam. I felt like I did not understand. I had to buy the 'little tape recorder' to record and be able to send the audio, I remember many times in the bathroom recording my voice, memorizing to do well on the exam... My classmates cheated a lot, even though I got a copy from hand to hand, without having asked for it, it was usual in the

[77] A Colombian town located in the eastern planes (*llanos orientales*) region, in the department of Casanare.

> *classroom, I do not know if the teachers pretended not to see them, it was evident; or that the teachers ignored, since we studied blended learning. Teachers did not give us the same importance as the classmates who studied in person, it seemed to me. No teacher captivated me. Although I did well, I felt like I learned a lot! Anyway, in the house my relatives mocked me and said: "She is bilingual in the vocational and now studying a career with an emphasis in English, but she does not speak English!" I should be the best one in English; but no, I am not number one in English! Sometimes I sit down and think, 'If I know so much then I should listen to a conversation or a movie and understand it, but no, I do not understand it.'*
>
> *I feel like the university offered a good education. Perhaps for so many things I could not dedicate the necessary study time to grow in English as I wanted. I tried to study when I had an exam on Saturday, I studied on Thursday and Friday, but not every day. What I did was memorizing mechanically. Not thinking about the language, no. I had to study and work at the same time because at that institution it was expensive, we did not pay the same as the ones who study face-to-face. It was expensive, I don't know how I managed to pay for it. I did miracles with my time. ... In 2007, I graduated, it was nice to feel that I could see my dreams come true, but I only learned basic English. I did very well thanks to God, and my daughter Sarita was born that same year.* (Yami, 2022, pp. 286-289)

To conclude this section, I studied a BA in Philology and languages in English. However, in my biography I do not describe classes in terms of what I learned, but how I felt and how I perceived my teachers:

> *In the second semester of 1990, I began my undergraduate studies in Philology and English language. My friends and I shared the discrimination of some teachers who had long conversations during classes with classmates who came from bilingual schools. On the first day of class, the teacher despaired because I could not answer if my name was spelled with 'double l' or 'y'. Quite a few lessons learned and unrepeatable, from a teacher who threw the door in our face, and mocked at me because of a word I used during an oral exam, and it was in the first semester to such an extent that I was absent from several classes. In order to pass she allowed us to learn a poem in English. I did not make it despite my prodigious memory, I failed*

> *English 1(one). I believe that these events helped me to understand my practice, and to concentrate more on communication, comprehension, and oral and written production. I remember my teachers Libia, Nohora, Miriam, Francis, Melba Libia, Leonor, Ricardo, Jairo, and a teacher of whom I do not remember his name, but his Irish face, not only because of their way of teaching but especially because of the way they approached us, they cared about how we were, advised us, landed their classes to reality. They were educators, great human beings who, in addition to being experts in the subjects they taught, showed love for the profession, I thank them for having infected me with their passion for our work. They were years of studying and working simultaneously, of many sacrifices to pay for transportation, materials, and food; the tuition, the student identity card, and the medical service were very little money (200 Colombian Pesos) a quarter dollar. Sometimes when I did not have what to eat my friends kept me sandwich from the ones they did not sell. They also took care of my nap under a tree when I had to work at night typing marks. One wonderful day in October 1995, I graduated. I was the first in the family to finish a university degree, and even though my mother was the one who had the least economic resources, I felt elated!* (Castañeda-Usaquén, 2022, pp. 200-201)

Reflecting upon *our* relationship with English, those of *us* who studied a career that had English as its core did not discuss the exposure to this language, which was primarily experienced within classes at university. This means, *we* lacked opportunities to speak in English in real-life conversations. Jenny Viviana, Jeimmy, Marlen, and Yami detailed their English classes, revealing some approaches, methods, or techniques for language teaching. Jeimmy's classes exemplified the Direct method, where the teacher spoke in the target language and students had to create their own strategies to understand lessons such as recording classes and repeating them at home. Jenny Viviana's experiences illustrate the use of task-based language teaching, as she was required to prepare English classes for preschool children, decorate the classroom with English expressions, make games and other activities, and prepare oral presentations about techniques to teach to their future students. Communicative Language Teaching was evident as students, like Marlen, participated in short role-playing dialogues such as a secretary and a client. Other strategies included students keeping portfolios to organize work and activities, document progress, and reflect upon

classes, while activities such as the spelling bee evoked nervousness and anxiety in some of *us*. These insights underscore the multifaceted approaches that shaped our understanding and engagement with English throughout our academic journeys.

In exploring Yami's narrative, an unconventional strategy emerged at the institution where she pursued a bilingual secretary. The institute hired male Colombian teachers whose physical appearance resembled English native speakers to attract a good number of students/clients. This practice can be seen as a form of colonization of bodies and knowledge is manifested, privileging teachers who fit certain phenotypic and stereotyped standards over qualified Colombian English teachers. Additionally, students were required to buy expensive materials, books, and cassettes, so studying English was a luxurious activity. Continuing with this journey through *our* academic trajectories, the next question to consider is: What role did English play in *our* graduate studies?

English in *Our* Graduate Studies

Out of the twenty teachers, seventeen teachers are employed in public schools under the regulations of Decree 1278 of 2002. For these teachers to be promoted from grade two to grade three, they must hold a master's or doctoral degree, have completed three years of service, passed an annual performance evaluation, and successfully passed a competency exam. Their promotion is subject to budgetary availability. Most of *us* have enrolled in graduate studies to be better prepared to teach *our* pupils, be promoted, or increase *our* incomes. English has colonized graduate studies in different ways. Some of *us* had to study English as part of the program to get a degree as this was a compulsory subject. For others, achieving a certain score on an English placement test was required to access the master's program, and for some no English certification or coursework was necessary.

English: Useless Requirement

In some specialization and master's programs, a certain level of English language proficiency or an English language certificate was required as a 'prerequisite' for enrollment. Knowledge-for-teachers which "involves the knowledge and skills taught to teachers for the purposes of certification or implementation of curricular programs" (Xu & Connelly, 2009, in Macias et al., 2020, pp. 27-28) was mandatory. For instance, Marlen in her specialization program, and Caro, Enny, Jenny Viviana, Maria Emma, Maru, and Yami in their master's had to either take English language classes or pass an English proficiency exam to obtain their

diploma. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that I also had to take an English test to be admitted to the masters, but as I did not mention this event in my story, I would not include it in this document. Thus, the subordination of public primary and preschool teachers has been institutionalized through annual evaluations, competitive exams, and students' performance in national tests. These dynamics underscore the colonization of learning practices by standardized testing as one studies to get good marks and obtain a degree. Indeed, Barrantes (2018) argues that due to the subordination of the political frame of training, teachers receive instrumental formation rather than an integral pedagogic one with programs that impose English teaching without considering teachers' particularities (p. 15).

Enny had to study English because this subject made part of her master's program on evaluation. She learned some techniques related to reading comprehension and pointed out the importance for students who are pursuing a master's to read information written in English:

> *I did the master's degree in quality of education and evaluation, and it was obligatory to study two semesters of English. I did super well, they were quick reading techniques in case teachers assigned a document we could flip through it and understand what it was about. I remember the technique of the titles and the first paragraph. They sent us the texts that we had to read for the subjects and within the links they gave us there was always a reading in English, but I never opened it, it was optional. The oldest teacher who was the director of the program did try very hard to make us read texts in English. For example, he always asked us about the suggested reading in English, whether we had read it or reviewed it and he explained what the reading was about. Logically, one realizes that there is a lot of information that is not in Spanish but in English very academic and much enriched without translation. Therefore, it is important in the case of a master's degree or a doctoral program that you know English, you miss out on information that is very valuable because those books are not translated into Spanish* (Chaves, 2022, p. 106)

Jenny Viviana, Maru, María Emma, and Yami were peers in the master's, with Caro joining them in the same program a semester later. They all opted for a graduate program aligned with the school's pedagogical project, which is focused on technology. They had doubts about signing up because of the requirement of passing the English test to be able to

get a graduate degree. However, the university facilitated the accomplishment of this requisite by offering a course, and the test. Consequently, they had to pay for the master´s, the English language course, and the English test. All of them covered these expenses on their own without any support from the government. Maru expressed her initial reservations about registering for the master´s:

> *I did the master's degree at Viviana's insistence. She encouraged me by telling me that we were going to be together. I doubted it, I doubted it because of English. I told Vivi "I am very bad, seriously I am very bad in English, and look I am not going to pass [the English test]". She enthusiastically told me – "Oh, let us take a chance", she told me that Maria Emma, Yami, and she had already signed up. A day before the closing of the inscriptions Viviana asked me – "Have you already registered?" I said, "No. I have not signed up because I am not sure. No, Vivi, I am not going to do it." Immediately, Viviana called the person in charge of the inscriptions to tell her. A member of the university staff called me, we met, she convinced me, and I signed up. Thanks to Viviana I did the master's degree in new technologies in virtual mode, one of the degree requirements was to have at least the B1 certification of English proficiency level. I knew I had to take the English course and pass the exam* (Maru, 2022, p. 190).

Caro was also reluctant to enroll in the master's. However, she mentioned the support from the university to meet the English language proficiency requirement, she had given up the idea of being funded by the government and preferred to pay for her studies, for the English language course, and for the test. She expressed:

> *[A member of the university staff] told me: "Do not worry, you do the English course with us and then you do the exam." I thought with enthusiasm: 'Ah, well, do a course first!' It was not the test at once, without having prepared this. Neither the English course nor the exam were included in the cost of the master's degree, we had to pay separately, the course and the exam cost around $ 1,500,000 (500 dollars); we had to obtain a minimum B1 in reading and writing sections of the English exam. I even preferred to pay for the master's degree out of my pocket to the master's degree funded by the government because the requirement in almost all of them was the English level! From thinking about taking the exam, and from my experience with the public*

> *university, I closed myself to doing the master's degree with State aid* (Caro, 2022, p. 40).

María Emma noticed that the English course in the master's program had the same contents she had studied in the undergraduate program at the university. She also criticized that English was not needed during the master's. It was just until the last semester that she had to write the abstract of the final document. María Emma also expressed concerns about the applicability of what she had learned in her classes with her students. She mentions:

> *The classes were the same: a booklet and complete modules…. One ended up studying the regular verbs, the irregular ones, making the cards of the regular verbs, all the rules of when a pronoun is used when this verb should be used, when not, and all that, the course ended up being that. That could not be applicable to children. English is vital, although I did not need it at all in the master's degree. All the subjects were in Spanish, of course for my degree work there was a part that I had to do in English. I looked for someone to help me with the abstract, I wrote it in Spanish, I translated it and then Julian's niece, who is an English language teacher, checked it for me to make it perfect* (Gómez, 2022, p. 165).

Yami felt motivated by English lessons to the point of devoting more time to giving English lessons to her pupils and own children. She agreed with María Emma that the course did not give clues to teach children, the course was just a training to prepare them to perform well in the test.

> *For the master's degree, English certification was a requirement, so we had to start doing the course separately, taking up English again. This raised my self-esteem a little because I realized that I understood some things, when the teacher began to explain, I thought 'I already know that!' I was encouraged to teach more English to the children. I thought it was very important that the children did not have to go through that process to get to a second language, so I began to give more English classes in my course to motivate my children with this language. The English course during the master's degree was a preparation for the exam, to present it, pass it, and be able to graduate. It was not with that pedagogical, playful, didactic approach that we would*

> *later replicate it in our teaching work, no, no… In the course, I did neither badly nor well* (Yami, 2022, p. 292).

Sandra Milena is sympathetic with her peers who had to study English to be able to obtain their graduate degrees:

> *I did a specialization in the management of educational projects, at a private university, there was an enrolment requirement of an English exam with a minimum score of 3.6, I presented it and I got 3.9. If one fails, one will have to do a course, as I did the master's degree at the same university, I did not have to do the English exam again. Several teachers interested in doing the master's degree who did not pass the English exam had to look for alternatives because, in addition to paying for a course that prepared them for the exam, they had to pay and pass the exam; otherwise, they could not get the degree. Several teachers were desperate, my God!* (Camargo, 2022, p. 261-262).

Maispin argues that she did pass the English test, but she did not understand the reason for this requirement as all the assignments, readings, oral and written reports and presentations were in Spanish.

> *I studied for a master's degree in educational sciences at a private university, and the first thing they told us was that we had to take an exam to know what level of English we were at; in the results, I marked intermediate level and I did not have to take a course. My classmates who were below the intermediate level had to take English courses during their holidays and pay them separately, although I do not know why because we never did anything in English during the master's degree* (Maispin, 2022, p. 169).

The previous excerpts from *our* stories shed light on how an English test and/or a language course in graduate programs was useless. These strategies were devised just as a requirement to be fulfilled. The English language was not essential for completing studies in these programs, but the compulsory proficiency tests caused frustration, despair, and tension. This raises the question: what is the purpose of the English certificate? Who benefits from these courses and tests? Subjects in the master's curricula were taught in Spanish, and the few

assignments in English could be done using technological tools or with the assistance of an English teacher.

Face-To-Face Learning Classrooms

Three key issues emerged from the stories of Caro, Jenny Viviana, María Emma, Maru, and Yami concerning the master's program. First, they acknowledged their teacher's command of English. Second, they highlighted the positive rapport and learning atmosphere throughout classes. Lastly, their stories discussed the anxiety and fear provoked by English proficiency tests.

Maru, María Emma, and Yami exalted their teacher's knowledge. Maru pointed out that "*The [teachers] that one sees right now are eminent, like the one that I had in the master's degree, that teacher, Holy God! Super good!*" Maria Emma expressed that: "*The teacher was very good I could tell she knew a lot"*. Similarly, Yami concluded:

> *Teacher Yolima was very good. She played a lot of songs in class because she thought it helped us improve our listening and pronunciation skills and we did dialogues as well. She started with all the desire that we would learn; but surely, she noticed that a very high percentage of people were interested in simply passing the exam, her desire diminished, and she dedicated herself to preparing us for the exam; I perceived it that way* (Yami, 2022, p. 292).

The previous discussion elucidated Knowledge-for-teachers, as previously outlined, culminating in the necessity for a certification. Maru, Jenny Viviana, and María Emma found joy in their camaraderie, sharing breakfasts, and supporting each other. Both Maru and Jenny Viviana emphasized the significance of the teacher's rapport and the positive classroom atmosphere in fostering motivation for learning. Maru particularly underscored the importance of class work.

> *The coolest thing was that Viviana, María Emma, and Yami were my peers, so we had a fantastic time that motivated me the most, the four of us always worked in a group, when we did not understand, we supported each other. Maria Emma and I had a hard time, heh, heh, heh, there was confidence that for us it was easier to look for Yami or Viviana to explain us than directly to the teacher. It was much simpler with them, the*

moments of breakfast and sometimes lunch were enjoyable among friends (Maru, 2022, p. 191).

Jenny Viviana remembered:

We had face-to-face classes on Saturdays, and we entered nulled, but it was a supremely beautiful experience. Maru has the gift of humor, the teacher enjoyed with us, we were very dynamic in the class to respond and do, and we learned a lot, although we did not stop the jokes during class. I remember that the teacher, a very good teacher, gave us examples in the 'video beam' … Yolima was also a public-school teacher, she had a nice way of reaching us, to make pleasant classes, and it was something very amusing, the learning, the little or much we have learned was very enjoyable. I feel that we in the course support each other all the time, the teacher gave the guidelines to make it so. We were happy, I say it openly this English course was the most beautiful academic experience that I have ever had. It was very nice, I learned, we flowed there, so we forgot everything when we left class, ha, ha, ha; but at the time, we were excited doing the exercises, we could see the desire, the ***joy*** *for learning* (Téllez, 2022, p. 139).

The foregoing passages narrated the good learning environment created by the teacher and students.

Taking a Test Equals Having a Nightmare

Caro, Jenny Viviana, María Emma, Maru, and Yami described the crucial final English test day in the master's program as a significant source of anxiety and fear. Caro detailed the day they took the English proficiency test:

The final exam stressed us, oops, that was very stressful! We went to an institute that is on 72nd Street (northeast of Bogotá) the test evaluated writing and reading skills: we had to write three letters, read, and complete a text. God is great and wonderful! You had to write a letter requesting some plane tickets, it had to include the time, the date, the city, the reasons why you wanted to travel there and the places you wanted to know. It was the same one that we had had in the mock test. I had already learned that one! Just that one. Thank goodness! When I knew that it was time to study ***English,***

> ***that there was no choice,*** *I felt very afraid: I did not know anything and I thought oops, for English, I will not be able to graduate! It is a necessary thing I must do to graduate. I put a lot of effort into it and passed the exam on the first try. Anyway, they condition you to learn something that I felt I was not good at. I did the English course with my cousin and a friend. For my friend it was difficult, she always told me desperately: "I do not understand, I do not understand." she failed the exam, resubmitted it, and did not pass it again; she was warned that the time to graduate was running out, that if she did not take the exam she would fail. She knew that if she did not pass the exam, she could not get her master's degree.* ***English is a great limitation!*** (Caro, 2022, p. 42)

Jenny Viviana admitted that she had studied hard, but she did not feel to have enough preparation to face the test:

> *The course lasted eight months, I think there were 27 classes, and we began to anguish at the last moment, as the day of the exam approached because we were aware that we did not have such a high preparation. Although those who had already done the same master's degree and had failed the English exam, told us that they had been allowed to take it again virtually, they had to pay one hundred thousand pesos (25 dollars), I think everyone could finally pass, knowing that, reassured us a little. Maru said: "I do not know anything about English, I do not know an A or a vowel." We were very lucky to take the exam, because that day, we were all very scared; we knew that the exam was going to be complex and we had to demonstrate a B1 level, my God, we had to know a lot, a lot, a LOT! The things of God, I suppose: the exam was face-to-face in a computer room of the university that is the north of Bogotá; a guy in charge of the technological part who was super relaxed watched over us; all the teachers were nervous, very scared and he said, "Calm down, answer." I do not know how lucky I was that when the results were given, I got B2* (Téllez, 2022, pp. 139-140).

María Emma described her disappointment during the exam and what she believes about this requirement:

> *The anguish of having to take the English certification exam began at the end of the course. I think it is very bad that if I did not pass the English exam, I could not get the*

> *degree. I needed to get the master's degree anyway. It does not seem to me that not knowing English is a barrier to one´s projects. English may be very important, but I am not good at learning this. I had to look at what to do, I could not stay there stuck by an exam. I think God knows how He does things. On the day of the final exam, we could use all the resources. We were saved because if we failed, we would have to pay again for the test. That English course had an additional charge, it was not within the master's program and the exam also had to be paid separately. God is great we all managed to pass!* (Gómez, 2022, p. 165-166)

Maru expressed her relief when she knew she had another chance in case she failed the test:

We practiced a lot, obviously [the teacher] was preparing us for the exam; even if we did the English course, we had to pass the test, and get certified in B1. What comforted me, a little bit, is that if I failed the exam, I would have a chance to do it again (Maru, 2022, p. 191).

Yami talked about her tension when answering the test, but she was sure that she could get the minimum mark required:

> *It was time to take the final English test for the master's degree requirement. We were summoned to the university headquarters and given a certain time to answer. That experience of that exam was terrible. We were all teachers who were doing the master's degree with the aim of being promoted. A young boy was supervising us for the exam and one of the examinees said aloud: - "oh, I am not interested in English, I do not want to learn it, I do not want to speak it" and questioned the requirement of the exam adding: - "Besides, this exam, what for?" In the midst of the tension, I answered the exam very distressed, with great fear, with everything. I solved it carefully. I thought I was capable of a B1 because the written part had a much higher percentage in the marks. I did not feel so weak in the written part, that is what I said to God! The certificate, the requirement to graduate with the master's degree was to be a minimum of B1, in my certification says that my level was B2; I do not think that is my level, good luck, I do not know. (*Yami, 2022, p. 293)

English language tests have played an important role in *our* lives as students. Adrianzén Segovia (2021) reported that "The main cause of anxiety among students are the exams since the result of them has an impact on their future negatively influencing the student's performance because for some it generates feelings of frustration" (p. 75, my translation). Additionally, if you do not pass the exam, you do not get the diploma. Overall, there was a positive atmosphere in face-to-face classes; master's students enjoyed their English lessons and expressed admiration for the teacher. However, this enthusiasm evaporated and turned into a nightmare on the day of the test. Fortunately, all of them passed the exam and obtained their degrees.

Being Fortunate: Curricula Free of English

Neither Marlen, Sandra Patricia, Rubiela, nor Otilia were asked to present any English exam to carry out the master's. Marlen understood that she was fortunate:

> *In 2010, I did a master's degree in education with an emphasis on learning problems, at Uniminuto with a double degree from Tecnológico de Monterrey, and knowing English was not a requirement, I was very lucky! Now, they ask for an English certificate or courses for the master's degree.* (Galvis, 2022, p. 180).

Sandra Patricia expressed gratitude for being able to obtain her degree without the necessity of studying English or presenting any certificate of proficiency in the language, which also allowed her to save money. She expressed: *"In the master's degree FORTUNATELY I was not asked as a requirement to know English because I would have not gotten my diploma and would have lost 'my little money'*" (Rincón, 2022, p. 274). Likewise, Rubiela pinpoints, *"Now, in the master's degree English is not required we do not have to enroll in any English language course"* (Hernández, 2022, p. 257).

In my case, I did not mention anything about the English language in my specialization studies, as English certification was not required. Otilia did not need English either, but she had to read some texts written in French and she described her experience as rewarding:

> *I did the master's degree in Montpellier III in France, I needed French, although at a supremely basic level because most of the teachers were fluent in Spanish. The nice thing was that there were several students who spoke French perfectly, it was super, super, super cool support. My level of French is lower than my level of English;*

> *however, that did not become a limitation. I looked for my classmates, we did study groups, we helped each other, there were translators, and the teachers generated unconditional support. We had to read some texts in French, which was very hard, but as we studied in a group, our peers good at French helped us a lot to those who did not, and there we made an idea of the fundamentals, of the subject that we needed to understand.* (Otilia, 2022, pp. 239-240)

To sum up, those who did not have to take an English language course or present a certificate of proficiency were considered very fortunate. English exams, intended to demonstrate proficiency, are often perceived not as an investment, but as a waste of time and money. These exams are not only seen as useless but also nonsensical, posing significant barriers to teachers' studies, aspirations, and their ability to obtain a degree.

Placement Tests: Barriers and Inequality Selection Process

When some of *us* have chosen a university to study with the possibility of receiving a partial grant from the State, *we* have undergone a rigorous selection process, which has included proving English proficiency through tests. Caro and Otilia found the requirement of the English test a barrier to continuing their studies. Caro could not access a master's program and Otilia did not qualify for a doctoral program. Caro narrated her experience during a placement test and the reasons why she postponed her studies for almost three years:

> *In 2013, I wanted to study for a graduate degree, a colleague recommended the master's degree in my mother tongue offered by a public university. At that time, one enrolled and did not have to pass the application to the academic council of the school (this was supported by the State). The application was sent directly to the university. Since I entered this school, I always had to teach Spanish, I had never had a third grade, so I needed to prepare myself. I did not know what a subject was or what an adjective was. I was lost because it was not something that caught my attention, my passion was Math! I needed to learn didactics to teach Spanish, to make it easier for children to learn, and to bring the children something cool so that they would fall in love with Spanish class. Therefore, that master's degree was the one that caught my attention the most, there were others. Regarding the evaluation, I think that this did not serve me in my work since I do not want to be a counselor, coordinator, or principal.*

During the admission process, a very, very ugly experience happened to me: I was summoned to the university's language center for an English exam that I did not know I had to take. We were told that the test was not qualifying, but it served as a filter. They handed me the exam sheet. I did not understand anything, I wrote my name. I saw that all the teachers read, filled, wrote, and wrote. I sat there with that sheet of paper, looking everywhere... In the instructions, it said that we could answer in English or Spanish. Although the test was all in English, it was necessary to interpret what the text said. I did not understand anything, not even with the dictionary! I looked everywhere and said, "No, this is not for me!" When I received that sheet of paper, I returned it. I think I was the only one who did not fill out the test, nothing! As soon as I saw that the teachers began to deliver the exams, I stood up, handed in that sheet, and left. Days later, I was summoned for an interview, the second interview, the personal interview, not the English skills interview. I did not attend this. I was so embarrassed that they were going to say to me, 'You handed over that blank sheet, how did you deliver a blank sheet?' Obviously, I was not going to be selected for the master's degree. I managed to pay for the registration and to take all the documents, I only needed the interview with the person in charge, but I did not go out because of shame. I wanted to do the master's degree there: 'Oops, a master's degree from a public university, super!' I studied the undergraduate program in a private one. I wanted a degree that would improve my curriculum, that people would say, 'Oops, you are a graduate of this university!' Studying at a public university seems cool to me, but I could not. I felt frustrated, now I think I applied for the master's degree that was not for me, perhaps it was for those who were graduates in languages, or graduates in Spanish and I was from preschool. My mother tongue is Spanish, but that master's degree was more aimed at teaching high school or university students. I was in the wrong place. This situation gave me the idea that 'if I do not know English this master's degree is not for me'. That was traumatic! I closed myself to looking for master's degrees because everyone said that in order to do a master's degree you had to know English. I was much cautioned, in my search, the first thing I asked: do I have to take an English exam? I already knew I was not going to do well. Three classmates invited me to do the master's degree with them at a private university, they were going

> *to pay for the registration for me, but when they said: "let us go the four of us to take the initial English exam". I immediately said vehemently: NO! NO! NO! Every time they said master's degree and English, immediately, I immediately said NO! That generated many fears, I felt that not knowing English closed the doors to access what I wanted to do. That was a hindrance. It seems very unfair to me to have to pass an English exam to continue studying, very unfair! The former coordinator asked me all the time: "What about the masters?" He always told me, "Caro, could you please study?"* (Caro, 2022, pp. 39-40).

Otilia shared Caro's perspectives about English tests to access graduate studies. She expressed:

> *In 2018, I aspired to do a doctorate funded in part by the Government. The requirement of English proficiency for admission seems to me to be exclusionary. If you are told, "I give you the opportunity to study" and if the program has a large percentage in English or any other language. and you do not accomplish that, you will never graduate. It is different than being told, "If you do not speak English you cannot study". In the first case, you look at how to defend yourself and take it forward or something you can do. On the other hand, requiring mastery of English at the outset is much more difficult because many more conditions are required to achieve English proficiency. In my particular case, I see it this way: if I take charge of a commitment and to fulfill that commitment, I have to carry out something in the second language, I do whatever it takes to accomplish the task. I undertook the challenge because it was already a commitment acquired. After I was rejected for my PhD, I thought 'I would have to give priority to English if I want to study'. In my day to day, I must give many priorities that are already my commitment, that are already my responsibility. However, I tried, I even enrolled in SENA, but the schedules never fit for me to be able to do that English course. If they [the programs] keep limiting me because of that, I do not see it as easily achievable. And I feel on the contrary, that even if I do not master English, I do have a lot to be able to investigate, contribute, and grow in what is fundamental in my daily performance as a teacher. I feel that English certification is an exclusive prerequisite: 'it could not be done right now either'. On the other hand,*

> *suppose that I have already been accepted into a doctorate, it is already formal, I already have greater institutional support, and the conditions are given in another way. There is the stimulus that if you understand this text, you will grow in your own inquires, in the things that you want to continue deepening. Obviously, it could also be analyzed that I have lacked discipline, that if I wanted, I would have done it. In that situation, the day-by-day plays a big role. One has been psyched up that all the time one must be producing and where is the time for leisure? Where is the time for family or to learn other things? If one continues to study it is because one has an illusion, because one saw in the academy a possibility of building a dream. Often everything becomes a feeling of remorse that if I am not dedicated 24/7, I am a sinner. In Colombia it is very acute, if you do an international study, it is very different. Here, we are very 'academic', it matters what should not matter so much, it is blurring how valuable the love that can be awakened in a human being for knowledge, for intellectual growth, for the contribution that intellectual growth can give to the community with whom the person interacts.* (Otilia, 2022, pp. 240-241).

From Otilia's narrative, the manifestation of cognitive and epistemic colonization becomes evident, as she encountered barriers that prevented her from pursuing the doctoral program she wanted and she deemed most relevant for her educational practice with students. In this sense, Jordao (2016) declares that English "can be a burden to scholars and students who do not feel this language belongs to them. Whe n learning English as a foreign language […], such a burden easily becomes a tool of colonization –of mouths and minds" (p. 191). Otilia has chosen to continue dedicating herself to her students, viewing this commitment as her primary mission, until the requirement of English proficiency tests ceases to be a prerequisite for enrollment in doctoral programs supported by the State.

In terms of educational inequality, Caro and Otilia expressed profound frustration due to their inability to meet the requirement of having a B1 level of English proficiency for admission and eligibility for a grant offered by the SED to pursue graduate programs. However, when approximating the historical-structural model to research language policy "motivation is determined by broader sociopolitical factors" (Tollefson, 1991, 33). Thus, some teachers, are placed in a selection process that is unequal and discriminatory. It creates an uneven playing field in selection processes, disadvantaging teachers who did not have the

opportunity to acquire English proficiency through formal education. Some teachers expressed a desire to access quality education supported by the State because they could not afford the high prices in private institutions that offer master's and doctoral studies or the stringent admission criteria and limited places in public institutions where there is a large demand for aspirants. 'Studying at a public university is like winning the lottery'. These linguistic requirements perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage and favoring teachers' impoverishment.

All in all, *our* experiences have led *us* to study English on *our* own, investing significant time, money, and effort to learn and/or practice this language during *our* graduate studies. Most experiences have not been rewarding and tests have generated discomfort and have broken dreams. Finally, being aware that one of *our* tasks is to teach English to *our* pupils, my companions have told me what they have done to learn English by themselves in formal and informal settings.

English in *Our* Personal Lives

We talked about specific actions and decisions to learn and practice English such as enrolling in informal English language courses, downloading Apps, and studying online. *We* desired to learn English, *we* sought strategies to accomplish this objective. This implied making efforts, investing time and money, and, in many cases, overcoming frustration when advance seemed slow or elusive. Along this learning journey, sweat and tears were present on the path. Placement tests triggered nervousness while the ongoing aspiration to speak English like a native speaker remains unfulfilled for many of *us*.

Eager to Learn English and Making Great Efforts to Do So

The following pages narrate the courses that some of *us* willingly enrolled in, without receiving any payment or diploma. Aura, Claudia Patricia, Emary, Enny, Jenny Viviana, Maispin, María Emma, Nidia, and Sandra Patricia invested their money and time in the endeavor of studying English just because of their interest. Despite the great effort made, they admitted they could not advance in the learning process. Aura recalled her experience:

> *Sometime later, I was so keen to learn English that Nidia and I enrolled in a language course at Codema[78]. We left MC School, had lunch, and then went to study. We did*

[78] It is a society formed by public school teachers from Bogotá that offers services as loans, education, and tourism among others.

> *three short modules, the classes were cool, the teacher was very cool too, and she made everything dynamic. I remember that we prepared food, explained the recipe in English, made the sandwich, and ate it. Thus, lessons were very experiential. I liked that teacher. She started the class, in a few words and very subtly told us: "Nobody can make fun of anyone, nobody can criticize anyone, nobody can say anything to anyone", In short, that was what she wanted to say! That encouraged me because even if one were wrong, no one could say anything to anyone, out of shame, for not breaking the norm. That minimum agreement was essential because sometimes one is self-conscious thinking, 'How about if I said something wrong and they would make fun of me?' I do not know if there was something that happened to me when I started studying English in my adolescence, the teacher told me something because I did not understand! In Codema, I made the attempt: I arrived home, I did the assignments, and the teachers left a lot of homework! Romel [her son] helped me and Nidia explained to me. We practiced English together, but then I forgot everything! When I took the tests, I was confused! I started to get lost, to look at others, to have to ask everything. I arrived stressed to class, oh, I could not do that! Oops, that was wrong! Until one day I said no, I was not going back to that class, I was stressed and I was not there to stress myself out anymore. I decided: 'I do not go back there and I did not come back' I did not want courses where I had to do projects, where I had to do research, I wanted practical things, that would give me joy, where I could be happy, happy doing that* (Jiménez, 2022, p. 24).

Similarly, Claudia Patricia has done some English language courses, but she thinks that she needs to study more:

> *I have two diplomas, one in didactics of Mathematics and the other in didactics of Spanish. Also, I did two levels of English at SENA. I also paid for a course in a language center downtown, I learned a little more English. I see it written and I understand what it says, my problem is pronunciation, I think it is pure insecurity. I have studied because I wanted, and wish to do a good English course* (Rodríguez, 2022, p. 76).

Emary enrolled in English language courses, but she felt bad at the second level, she was behind the rest of the students, and she gave up:

> *In 2007, I did an English course at Libre University, the classes were on Saturday afternoons. At level A1, I did well, but in the second class of level A2, I did not understand anything. There were people very good at English, who spoke in English, but I did not. I was so lost. I felt so bad that I gave up. I said that I could not handle this, I tried, but no, no. I did not go back to class, I did not continue, and I have never tried again because I have escaped from English, that is the reality* (Emary, 2022, p. 93).

Enny spent money on an English language course. She believes that this was expensive and that learning this language needs a lot of practice and effort:

> *At that time, [when I was a teenager] perhaps the [language] courses were expensive, even still, studying English is very expensive. Last year, I started studying English I paid three million pesos (800 dollars) for a year. That is expensive, isn't it? I am at the Winston-Salem. I like it. My best friend learned there, and she is very good at English: she studied modern languages at La Salle and complemented with the Winston. My sister studied there too. They, both liked Winston's methodology; however, now everything is virtual, and I am studying in this mode. Oops no, it has given me a super hard time! In my undergraduate, I was very good at English; Right now, my God! I think with age it gets harder. I sometimes feel behind. Sometimes I say, I do not understand this, and I must study, and study. I am going at a slow pace; when I was asked in the first class: "Why do you want to study English?" My answer was, "I want to study English because I want to learn, I do not need this." I am fine the way I am. I do not need to kill my head with this like other people. I also study it because I made a promise to [my son], Santi: "I promise you that at least in your graduation ceremony I will understand some of what they are saying", he is studying journalism at an American university. Here, they teach grammar that is slow, isn't it? And if you do not practice it is difficult. I was stressed the first days, I was afraid to ask the teacher in class, I doubted it and I thought: "Oh no, I am clueless" I enrolled to learn and I paid for that! I decided to tell the teacher, he would correct me. My husband laughed at me, he said: "You speak very funny" because I switch Spanish and English when I can no*

> *longer say more or I see that they do not understand me, I speak in Spanish!* (Chaves, 2022, pp. 107-108).

Jenny Viviana has spent time and money on English language courses, but she regrets her actions as a student. She mentions:

> *In 2006, I paid for a course in an Institute that was by Primero de Mayo Avenue, this was called 'American School Way', I studied at night when I left work and I could schedule one or two hours a day, every day you had to call and say: "Today I want to go to class at such an hour." At the time, I did not have my little girl, but I have always been obsessive about home chores. I had a lot of excuses for not going to study: I had to do household tasks, I had to prepare food, I went home because it was raining, I could not communicate to schedule the class, I would go tomorrow. I did not prioritize lessons and ended up going just once a week, sometimes I did not go. I lacked judgment and interest, and at this point, I regret that a lot. The truth is that to pay for the course I took out a loan with interest and all because I said: "I want to study English". However, I did not give it importance, I did not value the money I was investing, and laziness won me over. It is one of my frustrations, of course, it is never too late to learn; one of my greatest ambitions, of my greatest desires is to domain the second language perfectly, and I would like to do it. Perhaps one postpones the plans, the desires because one concentrates perhaps on the chores of the house, on the children, and it is downplaying. I always wanted to be bilingual, I always wanted to, always, always, I still regret it* (Téllez, 2022, p. 134).

Maispin has studied English courses with the purpose of accompanying her daughter as well. She discusses:

> *Then, I did two or three levels of English on the SENA platform on my own, I have an intermediate level. In 2007, I wanted my daughter to do an English course at a public university, Pedagógica University, as she could not walk, I signed up to accompany her to Saturday courses, where we did three levels. For various circumstances, we gave up. In the courses, we studied the same things such as translating songs and answering questions. It was a beautiful experience because it helped me to refresh what was forgotten because when I stopped doing things in English, I started to forget.*

> *I like English, it is very curious because I do not have very good listening in English. It seems to me that people speak very fast and sometimes I do not understand what they are saying while writing and reading is not that difficult* (Maispin,2022, p. 168).

Maria Emma has had some experiences when studying the English language:

> *I have made many attempts to learn English, but I did not develop that skill. I entered Gran Colombia University to study English, I bought a very expensive book, and I made the attempt. I feel that the courses do not meet my expectations. On another occasion, I bought some booklets from a teacher at the school, it was about following the lessons and learning, but that did not work either* (Gómez, 2022, p. 164).

Finally, Sandra Patricia studied English at three different universities. However, she prefers by far her studies at the Normal school. She stated that:

> *I wanted to study English because I felt it was necessary to learn that language, it is the language that dominates the world, which opens doors to you in many other places. I have always had the desire to be able to travel, to go to the United States, to know, and understanding the language allows you to do that. In my school life, English classes had been few, one class every eight days, and I often missed them. It has been frustrating to learn English, I have entered three different universities to study. The first one I entered was Antonio Nariño University, I bought some books, and I paid for inexpensive classes on Saturdays, in the first module I did well as it was the basics, what I have always studied. I failed the second module, I was given the opportunity to present the leveling assessment, and I did a manuscript, but I did not pass. Oops, no! Nothing. I decided not to go back, I kept all the books. I took my daughter, Daira, to the children's courses; she learned. As I did not return and I did not let her continue, she now reproaches me – "if you would have allowed me, I would have learned". A year later, at the San Mateo University Foundation, at the headquarters on 63rd Street, I enrolled in an English course, they said that the teachers were very dynamic. I tried again, and the same thing happened to me: the first module was well, the second was not, and I gave up. Then, I entered Universidad Pedagógica, I think that this course was an agreement with the SED. The first module was what I had already studied in my school life. From there on, I neither went forward nor backward. I tried; The*

> *teacher wondered – "why is it that you do not learn?" There was already a blockage, so I gave this course up and said "I would not try to study this 'stuff' again" because this is not for me, I already realized that no, no, and no. No, I would not study this 'stuff' again. In the three universities, one sitting there with the book open, the teachers talked, there was an audio, and one "Mmm, what does it say?" One tries to answer, tries to write, but in the end no. I prefer by far the classes of the Normal school because they were playful, I liked playing and doing something* (Rincón, 2022, pp. 273-274).

Aura, Claudia Patricia, Emary, Enny, Jenny Viviana, Maispin, María Emma, Nidia, and Sandra Patricia made efforts to learn the English language for various reasons, but they could not finish, and ultimately abandoned their efforts. Aura, María Emma, and Sandra Patricia feel they are blocked and lack the ability to learn English. Enny, Jenny Viviana, and Maispin highlighted the need for dedicated time and opportunities. The following section describes how some of *us* also dedicated *our* free time to studying English.

Some of *us* have engaged in free courses to learn and practice English as a hobby, just for fun, or to support *our* families. Caro, Lulu, and Sandra Milena spent their leisure time studying the English language. Caro described how she enrolled in a public platform and accessed an app to assist her daughter. However, time constraints have been an issue. She stated:

> *In 2019, my daughter was in college and teachers asked her to reach the last level of Duolingo, it is an application designed to learn and practice English that one downloads, and it is super easy. Duolingo sends you messages, about how long you have not reinforced, at the level of English you are in, and if you have lost points. It is as if they told you to 'catch up' because you are losing levels! My daughter asked me for help because in that program they lose categories if you do not practice every day, so, I helped her some days. Some workmates also got into this. Duolingo is cool because one reviews themes. Lulu did follow, but not me. At first, I was excited about English, following a Mexican teacher who did tutorials on YouTube. Little by little, I left him. Recently, I enrolled in an English course at SENA. It seemed so basic to me: the pronouns and the verb TO BE, I got bored, I already knew that. I wanted something*

> *more advanced, for my level, ha, ha, ha, of course, my level is already low again. There is no time these days* (Caro, 2022, pp. 52-53).

Lulu described her hobby:

> *I have learned English in Duolingo and with YouTube tutorials. When I have 'free time'*[79] *I put myself in Duolingo to move forward. I think in 2018, it was Caro who taught me how to use this, her daughter was using it and I thought it was cool. You had to use it every day so that you did not lose a coin, the breakthrough. Since then, I have had this on my cell phone, and from time to time I do it to practice. There are five levels of each topic, one is advancing more and more, but there is no time to finish that. Of course, it is free. Duolingo is the basics of English. I have not told kids to download the app because only one or two have cell phones.* (Lulu, 2022, p. 152)

Sandra Milena is fond of the English language, but she is not good at following virtual courses, she asserted:

> *I like English, in fact, I took several virtual courses offered by SENA, but for virtual studies, I am sometimes a little bit lazy. I did the activities, and the teacher connected to talk to us twice a week. I am not very responsible with that part, I have wanted to resume to re-enroll in an English course, something that helps me. I want to do it for pure pleasure and because it is important, it does seem very important to me* (Camargo, 2022, p. 261).

The previous excerpts reflect the nature of *our* independent work attempting to learn English. The evidence of *our* interest in continuing *our* education in the language by *our* own means.

Between Personal Aspirations and Frustrations

The aspiration to speak English fluently has been a prevalent dream for most of *us*, deeply embedded in *our* professional and personal spirit. In some of *our* stories, fluency is regarded as a synonym for being bilingual, which constitutes for some of *us, our* main goal for language studies. Despite substantial efforts, the dream of sounding like a native speaker has

[79] Lulu made use of a colloquial expression *"Cuando estoy desparchada". The expression alludes to one's lack of plans or any other activity to do.*

remained unattainable. Four stories exemplify this circumstance, each title reflects core aspirations of achieving native-like proficiency in English, a goal that has not been achievable yet.

Jenny Viviana in her story “I always wanted to be bilingual” tells us about her dream of being able to understand spoken English and to speak this language fluently. She hopes to continue this learning process with her daughter. These are the concluding lines of her story:

> *[my daughter] says that she likes to be a teacher too, in fact, she plays every day to be a teacher and I dream that she learns English perfectly, let us see if God grants me that, and perhaps, I learn alongside her too...* (Téllez, 2022, p. 143).

Maispin’s story called “I am not bilingual, and I believe that I will no longer be” describes how she perceives her desire to understand oral exchanges and communicating when being a tourist in the USA, as it is expressed in the following lines:

> *I do not understand much English because [North American people] speak so fast. I have always asked my son, what are they saying? Or to my girl, Melly, what are they saying? They understand more than I do. It is the truth; I do not understand much. I understand 'candy' or I understand when they tell me how much to pay, very little things, I am not bilingual and I think I will not be anymore* (Maispin, 2022, p. 173).

In Marlen’s story titled “I studied bilingual secretarial, although I never learned to speak English”, she narrates one of her trips as evidence that she is not bilingual:

> *When we went to Orlando, I found it so depressing to have to ask my son’s girlfriend, “What are they saying?” On one occasion, my husband and I walked in alone to see the whales in 'Sea World', we sat down, someone started talking into a microphone and people exclaimed with regret: “Oh! Oh!” we were intrigued about what they had said. Mm, no idea! People stood and left. We think they said there is no show anymore, goodbye. There was no one to ask. We had the opportunity to go there, but without someone who knew English, it was a pity. Another day we were left alone again and I said to my husband: “Let us eat at Mac Donald’s that it is easy to order”, the girl asked me and I answered everything: 'Yes', she pointed me to the menu and I said: 'yes', when they delivered the food, they were many hamburgers, a lot of potatoes and*

> *extra food, I did not want all that! but I had said to her, 'Yes,' 'yes.' I thought it was expensive, it said 7 and 8 dollars on the menu; but I had to pay $12 and $14* (Galvis, 2022, p. 184).

In Yami's story, "I have never felt English as my top skill!", she discusses her disappointments, frustrations, and family mockery. In this excerpt, Yami describes some aspects of her bilingual secretary course:

> *I was bored with English classes, I did not understand, a lot of grammar was taught, and it seemed complex to me. I did the translations and the tasks, I did well because I translated, and I did well because I have always been a responsible student. I made the attempt, but I did not learn or I just learned the basics. I finished that technical program, and my family made fun of me because they said that I was a bilingual person, but I did not speak English.* (Yami, 2022, p. 285)

Yami continues her story in the following excerpt, discussing her undergraduate studies, which focused on a degree in basic education with an emphasis on humanities[80] and Spanish. She stated:

> *No teacher captivated me. Although I did well, I feel like I learned a lot! Anyway, my relatives mocked me and said: "She is a bilingual secretary and now she is studying a career with an emphasis on English; but she does not speak English!" I should be very good at English, but I am not proficient in English! Sometimes I sit down and think, 'If I know so much then I should listen to a conversation or a movie and understand it, but I do not understand it'* (Yami, 2022, p. 288).

Yami talks about her frustrations after completing her master's degree:

> *So many times, I have tried to learn English, and it is supposed that I would be very good at speaking. I take a written text and manage to infer and understand it to some degree; grammar is very difficult for me; I write something. It frustrates me to watch a movie and not be able to understand what they are saying. It is hard, I tried and play the film, I paused it, I rewound it and finally, I could understand it. I get frustrated. I*

[80] Humanities area includes English language.

> *have a bilingual secretarial course done, my emphasis was on humanities, and I am supposed to have a B2 in English.* (Yami, 2022, p. 293).

Fortunately, for Yami not everything is frustration, there was a stress-free and rewarding moment for her:

> *Recently, we went to Jamaica with the whole family. I had the satisfaction of hiring a tour package to the island, talking to the guide in English, and translating to my family what she was telling me about the country. My daughter saw the importance of knowing English, I was the only one who could communicate with the islanders.* (Yami, 2022, pp. 293-294).

Overall, in every phase of *our* lives, *our* bodies, minds, and souls are deeply involved. I aimed to depict how *our* stories reveal the profound impact that the process of learning English has had on *our* lives. Most of *us* have invested significant time and money into learning the English language and *we* have faced challenges in securing a place in graduate programs due to the requirement of demonstrating a certain level of English proficiency through placement tests and certificates. Now, I would like to introduce *our* trajectories in *our* teaching scenarios, all of which are related to English teaching.

Our **Employment Trajectories**

The following pages narrate *our* teaching journeys prior to arriving at UE school. These sections address questions related to *our* professional trajectories: What was the role of the English language in *our* working trajectories? How did teachers who arrived at UE School before 2012 experience the English language?

Understanding our prior exposure to English in the workplace before arriving at UE School is crucial. Caro, Celmira, Claudia Patricia, Emary, Enny, Jeimmy, Jenny Viviana, Lulu, Maispin, Maria Emma, Marlen, Maru, Rubiela, Sandra Patricia, Yami, and I worked in private schools. Otilia held a position as a teachers' trainer in the private sector whose target was public school teachers. Celmira, Jenny Viviana, Lulu, Maispin, Marlen, Sandra Milena, and Sandra Patricia worked in public schools as interims before being teachers at UE School. Marlen taught Information and Technology in junior high school. Aura, Emary, Maru, Otilia, and I were part of the SED's staff in different public schools before arriving at this one.

Nidia's first and only job has been at MC branch B of UE School. Table 8 displays the type of schools where *we* worked:

Private Schools	Caro, Celmira, Claudia Patricia, Emary, Enny, Jeimmy, Jenny Viviana, Lulu, Maispin, Maria Emma, Marlen, Maru, Mireya, Otilia*, Rubiela, Sandra Patricia, and Yami*.
Public schools as interims	Celmira, Jenny Viviana, Lulu, Maispin, Marlen*, Sandra Milena, and Sandra Patricia.
Public schools as staff	Aura, Emary, Maru, Mireya, Nidia*, and Otilia.

Table 8 *Working institutions before our arrival at UE School*

It is important to highlight that Jeimmy and Sandra Milena were English teachers and were dedicated solely to teaching English as their main. Jeimmy worked in a family-run private high school, and Sandra Milena taught English subjects in a public school in primary and middle school. I also worked as an English teacher from preschool to higher education in private and public institutions.

Figure 17, titled "*English Language at Workplaces"* introduces *our* connection with English language itself or as a school subject. Six main groups were assembled depending on the role English language played in *our* working sites: (a) English classes were absent from curricula; (b) teachers avoided the teaching of English; (c) English was other's business; (d) teachers struggle to communicate in English; (e) teaching the simplest things of the language; and (f) playing a role: teacher of English.

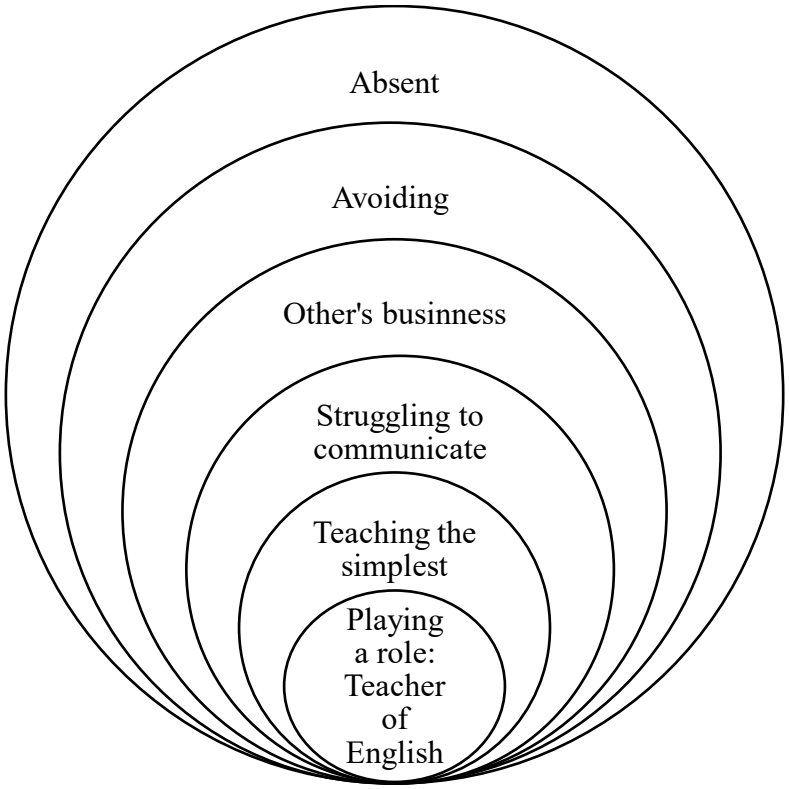

Figure 17 *English language at workplaces*

In the first group, English was absent from the curriculum or was not existent in some teaching scenarios. Otilia aligns with this first group as she did not refer to the English language because she worked as a teacher's trainer. Aura and Caro fall into this category as well because in their experiences in rural areas, they had no contact with English. Aura gave details: "*I never taught English in the countryside [Togüí in Boyacá], nor did it cross my mind to teach [my pupils] a word in English*." (Jiménez, 2022, p. 21).

In the second group, Emary and Sandra Patricia actively avoided English teaching. Emary, for instance, exchanged English classes:

> *I have always avoided teaching English: first, I worked with my best friend, she likes English, she is fascinated by this language. She taught English to my students, and I taught Ethics or Religion classes to hers. We changed. There, I started escaping from the English subject, because I felt bad, how am I going to teach something that I am not sure about? No, no, I do not feel good. I was saved from English by my friend, I had someone to teach English to my students.* (Emary, 2022, p. 94).

Similarly, Sandra Patricia recalled:

> *... I was assigned an English class, two hours a week. I looked for a way to change the Dancing class with a colleague who did not like dancing. I took the opportunity and proposed 'exchange': "You give English and I give the dancing class"* (Rincón, 2022, p. 273).

The third group titled "*English was other's business"* is exemplified by Enny and Maria Emma, who never had to teach English at the private schools. During their work in these institutions, they were relieved of this responsibility as it fell under the purview of dedicated English teachers. Enny, whose primary field of study major is Mathematics, claimed:

> *I worked in the best private school in Soacha, the Bolivar School, where I taught Mathematics in fourth and fifth grades. An hour of English was taught there. I think that now they give more intensive English lessons, the schools have understood, more the private ones, even if they are small that English is important. That is an extra point for parents to be encouraged to private school, so the children advance in English. Then, I went to the Colsubsidio Chicala School. In my work experience, I have never associated Mathematics with English, I could not, I must teach Mathematics in Spanish. I never needed English, not at all* (Chaves, 2022, pp. 102 - 03).

In addition, Emary and Sandra Patricia fit into the fourth category as they had the opportunity to collaborate with English teachers in primary. Emary worked in a private school and Sandra Patricia in a public school. The following excerpts highlight aspects of the classes conducted by English teachers. I recall there was a time when having a tape recorder was not usual, on the contrary, this was a luxury object. English teachers (in my context) were recognized for going from classroom to classroom carrying a big one. Emary and Sandra Patricia´s stories described some of these features encountered by colleagues in primary schools.

Emary discussed:

> *There were teachers for Computer Science and English in primary school at Michelangelo School so I had nothing to do with English or computer science.*

> *Physical education was given to us. It seemed good because the school principal said – "it has to be a teacher with a degree in English who prepares primary school children", the teacher taught English from third grade, and those who were the homeroom teachers of first and second graders had to teach English. I was saved for six years again!* (Emary, 2022, p. 94).

While Sandra Patricia narrated:

> *[…] In the school where I worked, there was an English teacher. I taught to third graders, this group of children had already had English with that teacher in first, and second grades. Her classes were very playful, with many games, audio, and videos; you could see that children learned and that they liked the class. Sometimes, I stayed to listen to the classes to learn some English. Because of this process, fifth graders did oral presentations and dialogues in English; although it was not very fluid, they conveyed clear messages* (Rincón, 2022, p. 272).

Yami's narrative aligns with the characteristics of the fourth group. While she did not engage with English language instruction during her work as a teacher in private schools, her connection to English emerged prominently when she assumed an administrative role within a charity organization.

> *… the director of social welfare of the charity resigned, and I was offered this administrative position, I accepted this, and I related to the board of directors, with the volunteers of the AIESEC from all around the world, with foreign donors. Some of them did not even speak Spanish, it was difficult. I had a bigger challenge with English because I had to translate letters for the godparents as well. There, I realized I did not know anything, ha, ha, ha. I remember Umish Gorachia who was an Indian; and Haruku, a Japanese, no! It was very difficult to communicate because they spoke so little Spanish. That somehow challenged me: 'I was the director, and I could not communicate with people, it was very ugly, wasn't it?' Of course, there were rewarding moments, the foundation has an agreement with Swedes, and they sponsor school children, and eventually come to visit. A Swede came, and I took the risk of talking to him, we talked a little, we understood each other, I was able to give him a tour of the*

> *school, and I explained very elementary things, which was cool, something I had learned* (Yami, 2022, p. 290).

Aura, Claudia Patricia, Jenny Viviana, Maru, Rubiela, and Sandra Patricia are in the fifth group called "*Teaching the simplest"*. They agreed on the fact that when they had to give English language lessons, they taught elementary vocabulary. Jenny Viviana worked in a public school in the afternoon shift with fourth and fifth graders. She shared: "*I taught English, we studied the topics of the curriculum without much depth*" while Rubiela stated: *"Some years I have had to teach English and it has been very basic: household objects, school supplies, animals, etc."*

In the last group, Jeimmy, Lulu, Maispin, Marlen, and Sandra Milena had to teach English. Lulu particularly dedicated herself to the task of teaching English to her pupils, diligently she prepared classes as follows:

> *I did not feel sure especially in teaching English, I thought I was going to do it wrong. Until the school principal told me: "Teacher, English is part of the program". This made me start looking for strategies to teach well. I listened to songs and audio on cassettes, I read books, and I prepared the pronunciation of each word I was going to teach. Publishers carried samples of the books and cassettes. Sometimes in the school library, I also found material. I practiced pronunciation before I went to class because you had to pronounce it well. I understood that I could do it and that I had to use the resources available. I bring different materials in English to my classes* (Lulu, 2022, pp. 148-149).

Maispin not only taught English but also, contributed to organizing the syllabi. She stated:

> *In 1999, when I started working, I never did interviews, my first job was in a private school, recently opened outside Bogotá, in the municipality of Rosal. The owner of the school considered that English was essential to gain recognition. So, several teachers designed the curriculum, and we all contributed with something: we took books, we looked at how it was done, and we structured a plan that was not very complicated. but that it would not leave the students behind either. Despite being professional in*

preschool, I was assigned fourth grade and it was very cool to work with the course. The English I taught the children was not very advanced. We were just starting out, just taking off. In my first English class I taught: 'a' and 'an', I followed a methodology like that of my English teacher in secondary school, some vocabulary, and formulas because it seemed to me that it was very easy to learn them. For example, the simple present is written like this: the subjects, the verbs, I started with the 'TO BE'. The classes were simple for them and by the end of the year, I was teaching them how to translate songs. Children in that school were very open to whatever you wanted to teach them. They received everything in such a wonderful way that one could advance, it was very beautiful and curious. I worked for five years there. (Maispin, 2022, pp. 169-170).

Moreover, Sandra Milena asked her sister for help to do her job. She expressed:

In 2008, I got a place as a substitute in Antonio García School where I spent two and a half years filling in for a primary school teacher who oversaw the coordination in the afternoon shift, and he had to teach Spanish and English until ninth grade. Consequently, I had to give English lessons there! I taught in sixth and seventh graders and to the children of primary. "Oh my God! I had to do it, well ready, I'll do it, I'll do it, I thought. That was one of the things that motivated me to improve my English level. I had completed courses with ups and downs, as my sister was studying English. I learned with her and asked her to teach me and explain to me how to prepare for the classes. "One says 'hello', and 'good morning' to the little ones, and time passes in those activities". On the other hand, with young ones, one cannot say to them: "We will learn the greetings", they already know them. My sister helped me a lot. I was not an English language teacher, I was a primary school teacher, but the teacher-coordinator had that assignment. I have always been like that, whatever they put on me, it does not matter, I do it somehow, and I look for how to do it (Camargo, 2022, pp. 262-263).

Jeimmy felt secure teaching English and Spanish in high school and she suggested her father -who was the school owner- to give her the chance to work there. The following lines illustrate her interest:

For English classes, I looked for guidebooks and found 'English There, English Here' for three courses; I bought the ones that were missing, I did my planning from there, I designed the workshops, and the support material and I did the same as my high school English teacher. Ha, ha, ha, I imitated what I liked! I still think it is a very good book because you find the explanation of everything there! It exploits all the skills; it gives many ideas, and the children liked it very much. Something very curious happened to me, almost all children come to high school with many shortcomings in English, because in primary school, a teacher must teach all the subjects and without being specialized in English it does not work. The children reached sixth grade, without even knowing the colors. Oh, my God! I kept material in English from the garden, all the VHS of Sesame Street, from dolls: the colors, the greetings, the jobs, the clothes and the climates, the basics and I thought about that material for sixth graders. To be careful with the class and avoid sabotage I made the laws of the class and gave a percentage of grade. So, I played with them because they were difficult. I graded everything! I reached sixth with the material, and the children were happy. Then, I did a diagnostic test for the other courses, none of them knew, or very few, there were one or two per course who knew some English, and the rest did not. I did a leveling for everyone to start increasing the level, I saw the same topic with different degrees of difficulty. I put the same video of Sesame Street as the big ones. At first, they made fun of it, and then they got used to the class, and they liked it. They were very attentive to the screen watching the videos and everything I played in English. To my surprise, at the end when we were doing a review workshop, they exclaimed: "Oh teacher! Video please, video please?" they liked that I put the videos like these puppets, and they learned. The video was interactive. The dolls speak in English and explain the subject, then ask, "What color is this?" and remain silent. ... "Very good, red!" all in English, I remember the eleventh graders shouting: "RED". At some point I recorded them, surely, I left everything at school. I found it very interesting to see that they were children wanting to behave like adults. They liked everything I took them because it was playful: they lost the fear of talking and expressing themselves, we made some books about the animals in danger of extinction in 3 Dimensions as in those stories where the dolls come out, they had to make the description of the animal in English,

> *study it and present it to their peers. We did very different things, which they liked, this caught their attention and so I got them to speak, listen, and write. The students had an English class every day because my dad wanted the school to have an emphasis on English. Therefore, he increased the number of hours of English per week, he liked it because he saw that the children liked the classes very much and learned a lot, and the level of English advanced. I was the only teacher, there was one course per grade, and I did the workshops every afternoon and on weekends. Each workshop was constituted by what they had to do writing, exposition, listening, the material that I had to carry I write down for each one, the evaluations, and so on. I organized everything in primers, one semester for each grade. As time went on, my job was so enjoyable that I was given hours of English and Spanish for the night shift and Saturdays. (*Gómez, J. 2022, pp. 118-119)

The previous narratives reflect the various ways *we* encountered English instruction during our teaching scenarios. Some narratives evidence how English was not included within the curricula, while others illustrated the ways teachers avoided teaching English. For some others, their experience involved hurdles in communicating in English, merely teaching the basic aspects of the language, or relying on qualified colleagues for teaching. Finally, for just a few, they assumed the responsibility of English instruction within their settings. The following lines illustrate some experiences while working in bilingual schools.

Working for Simulated Bilingual Schools

Claudia Patricia's narrative reflects her perplexity, as parents paid for English lessons to their children, positioning English education as a coveted commodity (Ordoñez 2004; Guerrero 2010; Enever, 2016; Ennser-Kananen et al., 2016). Ordoñez (2004) terms this phenomenon as the "early bilingual, urban, middle class, private school phenomenon" suggesting that school owners capitalized on this perception. The question arises: were parents misled by this illusion? Claudia Patricia expressed>

> *I entered a private school where I taught all the subjects in the second grade. The funny thing is that it was 'a bilingual school', that was what the owners said, and I wondered: 'bilingual?' The teachers did not speak English. In fact, I must be an English teacher there, and I should also know English well. We taught one or two*

> *hours a week of English class, I taught them the basics: the colors, the greetings, that is why I was puzzled by the name of the school 'bilingual' and I always had this doubt* (Rodríguez, 2022, p. 75).

To sum up, *we* took action regarding English teaching in the institutions where *we* worked before joining UE School. Some of *us* did not have any prior connection with English as teaching this language was not part of *our* duties. Others sought external assistance or exchanged this task. In some workplaces, there were dedicated English language teachers for primary school, while in another instance a teacher struggled to communicate using this language. Some of *us* were taught simple isolated words. It is important to point out that Jeimmy and Sandra Milena were English teachers in secondary school and they used all the means to do their best. Having reviewed *our* encounters with the English language before working at UE School, it is pertinent to discuss *our* current relationship with this language.

English Teaching Before the Merging of UE and MC Schools

The stories about *our* teaching trajectories at UE and MC schools took as a crucial moment the merging of these institutions in 2002. How was English teaching like before the merging of UE and MC schools? While Nidia and Aura's stories revealed how classes were administered at MC school, Celmira shared her insights at UE school in the afternoon shift. These stories remarked the big difference between top down and bottom up ways to design policies to administer teachers' expertise.

Before 2002, an English teacher taught this language to students of MC School, whereas in primary section at UE advocated for the incorporation an English teacher in their work team. Some excerpts of Nidia, Aura and Celmira's stories elucidated how national educational policies such as the National Development Plan for Colombia of 1990 transformed school lives.

From Arrangements between Friends to Workloads!

Nidia and Aura witnessed changes in the school dynamics when they were working in MC before this school became part of UE School.

> *[At MC], teacher Arsenio played the guitar and the 'rasca'*[81]*, he also sang to the children, he was happy. The head of El Recuerdo School was a friend of the principal*

[81] A traditional Colombian musical instrument.

> *of MC School, they made an exchange. A few days, teacher Arsenio went to El Recuerdo School to teach Music and other days the English teacher Stellita came to MC to do her class. I do not remember how many days she was coming. Oh, the kids liked it a lot! She sang to them, spoke to them in English, and designed the guides. So, I said that is what kids need: An expert in English, not one who teaches them perhaps badly ha, ha, ha, who teaches them to pronounce badly. Stella was a very good teacher! Then, I do not know, what happened! Arsenio was transferred…* (Jiménez, 2022, p. 23).

Nidia claimed:

> *There were many changes in those days. The Physical Education teacher had arrived first to work only for MC School, even though the school was small, he only gave classes in MC, two days a week each course had this class. There was also a Music teacher, I do not know what happened! They also switched to Music for the English teacher, who worked at El Recuerdo School as well. Those were the things we had, which we have been lost over time* (Barbosa, 2022, p. 222).

From these narratives, it can be inferred that prior to the merger of the schools, the administration of classes benefited from richness and high quality. Through collaboration facilitated by the principals, who were friends, qualified teachers of music and English provided instruction to children from both schools. This cooperative arrangement yielded mutual benefits for both educational communities. This exemplifies how bottom-up decisions can positively impact a large number of students.

Inaudible Teachers' Requests

In the past, the principal of UE School inquired about the support teachers required, but the responses from teachers went unheard. Aura and Celmira specifically advocated for the incorporation of an English teacher. Aura elaborated on this request.:

> *[My students] liked the English class [with teacher Stella] and I liked this too. So much that I fought, I had always asked for English teachers for my children, I did not ask for a Physical Education teacher, I told my colleagues that we can give Gym classes that Physical Education is easy, but English is not. However, it was not achieved.* (Jiménez, 2022, p. 23).

Celmira remembered those times with regret and expressed that this issue was controversial:

> *When I worked in the afternoon shift three teachers liked to teach English, they rotated the courses and taught the class. Oh, that is when I remember! If only the school principal had listened to some primary school teachers who suggested requesting teachers of Technology and English, because we could teach Physical Education. […] Finally, I do not know what happened, he requested a teacher of Technology for the emphasis and a Physical Education teacher as support* (Torres, 2022, p. 71).

In summary, the resolution of approval number 2208 issued by MEN on July 30, 2002, approved the merger of UE and MC schools. It was the result of the implementation of the educational Opening Plan created by President Gaviria, as discussed earlier. This merger significantly impacted the lives of teachers, students, administrators, and parents within these two educational communities. Before the merging, MC School organized schedules considering the sharing knowledge among friends. Students had English teachers, music, and physical education. After the merger, the school principal overseeing both branches had to allocate workloads with a standardized number of hours per teacher. Moreover, in Celmira and Aura's stories it can be noticed that primary school teachers' voices were silenced. Despite expressing the need for English teachers for their students and actively requesting their inclusion, their appeals went unheard by the school principal.

The following section corresponds to how English classes have been administered since 2012 up to now. Annex 8 illustrates a timeline with the dates of *our* arrival in UE School.

ELT Currently in UE Public School

Knowledge is embedded in the culture of the people.
Knowledge comes through in the lives of the people.
—Una Nabobo-Baba, Fijian

I would like to depart with the passage above as it aligns well with the objective of this chapter which is to make public *our* ways of thinking, being, and doing (Arbon cited in Meyer, 2013, p.95) regarding English teaching. This trilogy was included because this study has unfolded through narratives that were initially created separately, but in the end, converged into a unified whole through multiple voices. Doing research embraces lives as a whole including *our* academic, professional, and personal dimensions. Holographic Epistemology: Native Common Sense, as articulated by Meyer Malunani (2013) enlighten this holistic way of knowing by demonstrating how various epistemologies, though distinct remain interconnected as they constitute part of *our* lives.

Table 9 comprises this interconnectedness supported by physical, mental, and spiritual ways of knowing, being, and doing. This study aims to contribute to the well-being of the community it serves, reflecting a commitment from the outset to explore the intangible aspects of humanity often overlooked in academic inquiry, yet integral to the essence of our lives.

Body	**Mind**	**Spirit**	**Source**
Perception	Conceptualization	Remembering	*Yoga*
Techne	Episteme	Phronesis	*Aristotle*
Technical Rationality	Hermeneutic Rationality	Emancipatory Rationality	*Henry Giroux*
Consumer Intelligence	Re-Creative Intelligence	Creative Intelligence	*Molefi Asante*
Objective	Subjective	Cultural	*Karl Popper*
Instinct	Intelligence	Intuition	*Hale Makua*
Life	Mind	Joy	*Upanishads*
Emotion	Feeling	Awareness	*Spinoza*
Ways of Knowing	Ways of Being	Ways of Doing	*Veronica Arbon*

Table 9 *Holographic Epistemology: Native Common Sense*
Source: Meyer Malunani, 2013

The spirit understood from diverse viewpoints as remembering, phronesis, emancipatory rationality, creative intelligence, culture, intuition, joy, awareness, and ways of

doing constitute the destination of this journey. The latter is a response to how "other ways to know, which are not scientific or Western prevail in daily practices" (Santos, 2010, p. 51). Therefore, Meyer's words have exhorted me to place research in one´s lives: "The Big Three exist: *See* the science in it, *think* it through carefully, and then *inspire* the world with the quality of your participation. Please, most of all *ulu ka le'ale'a* – create *joy in the process"* (2013, p. 100). This research journey has been profoundly rewarding providing *us* with a valuable opportunity to reflect upon *our* quotidian lives when teaching English.

Let us delve back into the main question: What do *our* stories tell about the Teaching of English language in a public primary school? These findings are grounded in *our* stories regarding English teaching emphasizing in the period of time between 2012 and 2021 marking *our* collective journey since the moment *we* met together at UE School. To elucidate how meanings emerged from the stories about English teaching Figure 18 was designed and named our *stories matter.* It symbolizes our ways of being, knowing, and doing: a heart represents our ways of being, a brain signifies our ways of knowing, and a mandala embodies our ways of doing. *Our* stories are told with these three components at the same time, rather than being separate. These three pieces intersect and each one has as its core *our* human essence represented within *our* stories.

Interpretation underwent peer-review, underscoring the significance of *our* stories as repositories of *our* ways of being, knowing, and doing regarding English teaching. They constitute "biographical stories that humanly construct (feel, think, act) a reality" (Bolívar, 2012, p. 17). Consequently, the answers to the research questions were organized acknowledging "the recognition of the heterogeneity plurality of ways to know, (one of those the modern science) and in the dynamic and continuum interconnections between them without interfering in their autonomy. The fundamentals of the ecology of the ways to know relies on the idea that knowledge is inter-knowledge" (Santos, 2010, p. 49). Accordingly, each element of this figure has its name: *English is the boogeyman (the heart), taking charge of / escaping from ELT (the brain),* and *personal epistemologies (the mandala)*. Subsequently, each component of this figure will be explained.

Figure 18 *Our Stories Matter*

English is the Boogeyman

English is the boogeyman relates to the "imaginary being with which children are frightened" (RAE, n.d.), instilling fear in *us*. In *our* stories, this fear manifests as insecurity in speaking due to concerns about pronunciation accuracy, fear of inadequately teaching students and potentially harming their learning, and uneasiness emerging from students realizing *our* own gaps in knowledge and therefore, undermining *our* image of knowledgeable professionals. Despite aspirations to learn English and significant investments of time, money, and energy in courses, many of us have found ourselves stuck at introductory levels, leading to frustration and, at times, anxiety.

Emary thinks and feels that English language and its teaching are the boogeyman: “a terrifying or dreaded thing” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Correspondingly, the title of her story was the inspiration to name this section. She described her relationship with English teaching as follows:

> *“I have looked for ways to avoid teaching English lessons; for me, English is the boogeyman, if someone asks me: - “What is the boogeyman?” I will answer – “English”* (Emary, 2022, p. 95).

In the same vein, Claudia Patricia, Yami, and Caro have also felt fear when facing the act of teaching English. Figure 19 *English is the boogeyman* illustrates what *we* have felt. For instance, Claudia Patricia narrated how insecure she felt when speaking English, Yami reflected on the way she harmed pupils, and Caro was afraid of mispronouncing words. She described how terrified she was when she had to teach English, and her worries about losing her image in front of her pupils.

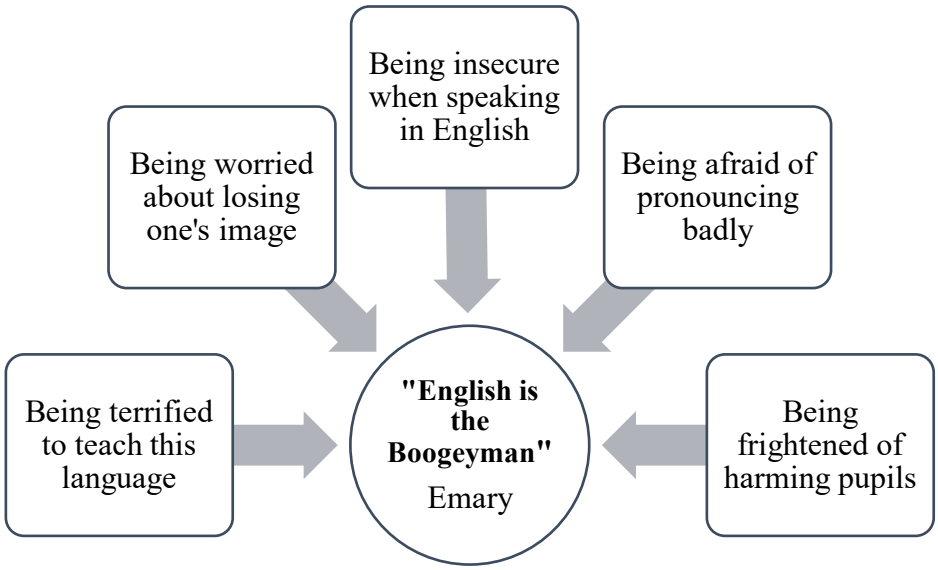

Figure 19 English *is the Boogeyman*

Being Insecure When Speaking in English

Claudia Patricia described her learning and teaching experience regarding English language as follows:

> *The first time I studied English was in ninth grade with a super cool teacher, she was pretty. Although our encounter with English was late, I understood her lessons very much. I liked the dynamic classes. The beginning was hard, but the teacher and her*

methodology made learning easier. She worked a lot with songs, I remember one, and I do not know if I am pronouncing it well: 'three little birds', the one of the three little birds, 'don't worry'. Oops, I always remember this! And the story of 'shoemaker' shoemaker? 'Shoemaker'. The classes were dynamic, and she taught us didactics: to teach the parts of the house, we had to make a model, everything was like that because as it was a Normal School. We also received English classes in the complementary cycle years twelve and thirteen, in the technological one.

I did two levels of English at SENA; I paid for a course at a language institute downtown. I learned a little more English. I see it written and I understand what it says, my problem is pronunciation, I think it is just insecurity. […]

I think that all the teachers or I have always said it, if I am appointed to the primary section, I assume and I know that I must take any course from first to fifth with all the subjects, therefore, I must be prepared. For example, in English, as the pronunciation is complex for me, I listen, I try to understand and sometimes in San Google, I look for how a word is pronounced before going to do it. I do it and I feel that we all must do it. […] (Rodríguez, 2022, pp. 74-75).

In a similar study conducted by Butler (2004), the author found that:

> Many primary language teachers lack confidence in their own target language skills, especially their spoken fluency and pronunciation. For example, low levels of confidence were detected among primary teachers about their readiness to teach English in primary schools in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan (Butler, 2004 cited in Pinter, 2011, p. 148).

This current study shows how *we* try to overcome fears of facing ELT by enrolling in courses to learn English.

Being Frightened of Harming Pupils

Yami shared her worries about the damage teachers can cause to their pupils. She expressed:

If the principal or coordinator tells me: "teach English", I will do it because I have some foundations. If they tell me to teach Mandarin I would say: Oops, what am I

> *going to do!?, I am going to get frustrated and I am not going to teach well. I confess that I spent several years teaching children to pronounce bad pencil in English, years harming children, because that is harming children: telling children that pencil is said /pensil/ and after a long time I understood that the pronunciation was /pensl/; I may sound contradictory, because it seems essential to me that children learn English. Not everyone has the ability, not everyone will be able to offer a quality product to students* (Yami, 2022, p. 294).

Being Terrified to Teach This Language

Some of us also expressed fear of undertaking the teaching of English. The notion of teaching this subject represented a source of anxiety and nervousness that resonated with the perception that it was not possible to teach the language. Caro remembered:

> *I was terrified to teach English! Terror. Teaching English was terrible to me. […] I was very scared, I was afraid to pronounce badly, that one would teach students to mispronounce words. Pronunciation is what I feared the most"* (Caro, 2022, p. 36).

Being Worried about Losing One's Image

The sentiments of fear derived from the perception that by not knowing the language, students would realize the gaps in knowledge and perceive *us* as unprofessional or not qualified. In this regard, Caro recalled:

> *I remember looking at the curriculum and not knowing what the verb TO BE was like, I thought: 'What a shame that one is already teaching and being an adult but does not know what the verb TO BE is!' I watched the videos and did not understand either. The videos explained it well, but one is closed, and one thinks this language is supremely difficult to learn. That mental barrier limits one's advance and one says: I cannot! That is very difficult!* (Caro, 2022, p. 37).

In the same fashion, after taking an English language course during her master's, Caro pointed out:

> *Now, I like the English class! I like kids getting excited when they understand. When they ask me and I do not know, I am afraid they will see that I do not know. Of course, I tell them: "I do not know, it is time to look in the dictionary". I turn to that reply*

> *because you do not know everything. I like that they get excited, that they learn, that they say: 'that teacher knows' I realize that I do know some English; but the fear of being wrong persists in me* (Caro, 2022, p. 49).

The observations above resonate with the notion that "Teachers are expected to handle their emotions, have at hand a solution for everything, and are simultaneously compelled to hide any emotional constraint because they could appear weak or powerless in front of learners" (Castañeda-Londoño, 2021, p. 93). In this context of English teaching, the previous discussion entails a range of emotions experienced by teachers: insecurity when speaking English, fear of mispronunciation, and anxiety about potentially hindering students' progress due to perceived shortcomings in speaking or pronunciation skills. Moreover, there is apprehension about teaching the language itself and concern over losing credibility, which stems from uncertainties about one's own proficiency in English.

To finish this section, Sandra Patricia dreaded thinking about teaching English to third, fourth, and fifth graders:

> *I remember as if it had been yesterday when we were in cycle two and Mireya, the coordinator, told us that each of us should teach English. That was terrible, Enny also put her hand on her head in bewilderment. What anguish! We managed to convince Sandrita to teach English in our courses and Mireya to allow her. We made it, for that year, we were saved! What are we going to do next year, in third, fourth, or fifth grades? I can teach basic things in first and second grades once a week, but in third, fourth, and fifth grades, what are we going to teach the colors again!?* (Rincón, 2022, p. 275)

Caro, Claudia Patricia, Emary, and Yami shared their fears when teaching English to their pupils. Sandra Patricia was afraid of teaching third, fourth, and fifth grades, while the rest of *us* did not mention anything about this situation. Two main actions regarding English teaching emerged namely teaching this language or finding ways to avoid this task.

Taking Charge of / Escaping from ELT

The question of how *we* have coped with English teaching can be elucidated through the actions *we* take when facing English teaching. *Our* feelings, learning experiences, skills, and beliefs about English influence or shape *our* actions when taking the responsibility of teaching this language. *Our* stories revealed that most of *us* take charge of English teaching in cycle one (preschool, first, and second graders). In contrast, there is a tendency to avoid teaching English in cycle two (third, fourth, and fifth grades). Teaching English to Cycle One is often approached with comfort, as it involves teaching basic vocabulary and simple, formulaic expressions for greetings and farewells. However, *we* acknowledge that these lessons do not meet students' educational needs. This means that teaching English in cycle two is perceived as a task that should ideally be handled by someone who has received formal education in English, or at least by a teacher who knows how to speak this language, a teacher with native-like pronunciation.

Figure 20 corresponds to actions/doings when facing English teaching. Each box contains the ideas drawn from *our* narratives to describe either the strategies or activities done to teach this language or evade it. Each action is presented through expressions or ideas taken from *our* stories accompanied by *our* names and followed by a comprehensive account in the form of a verbatim excerpt.

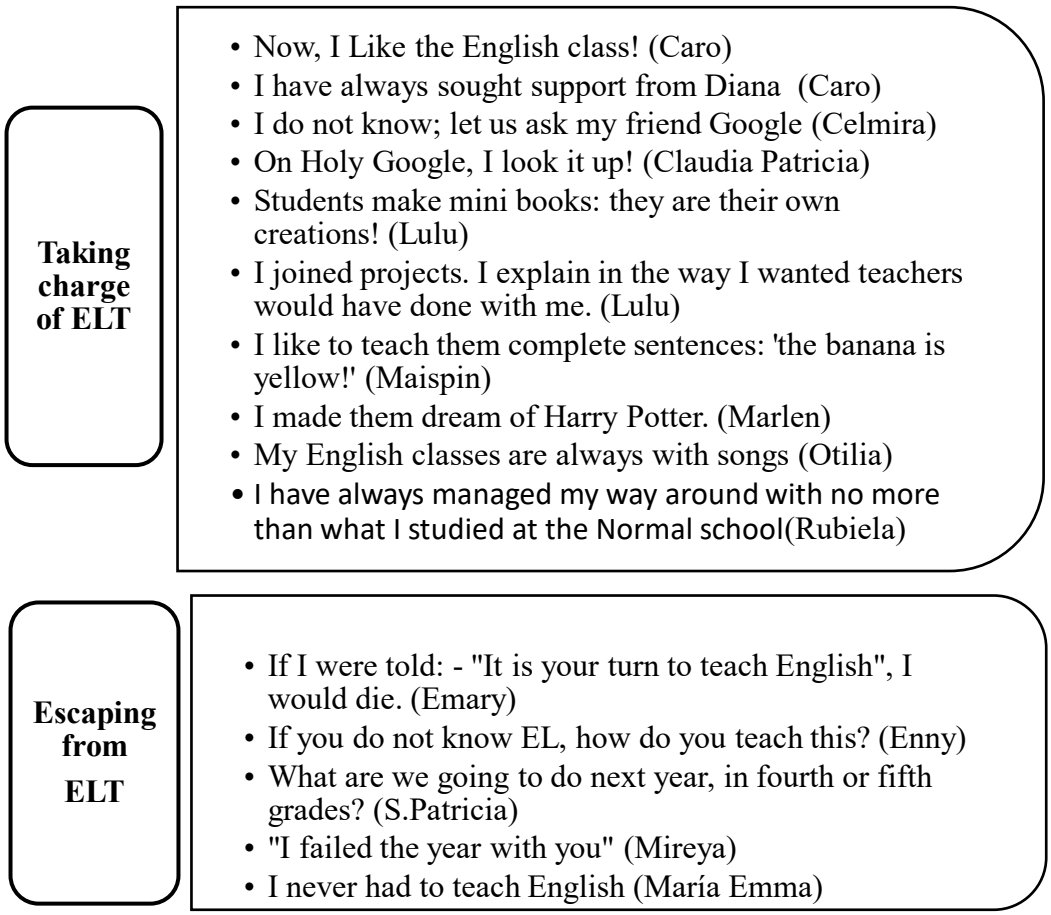

Figure 20 *Actions when Facing English Language Teaching*

Taking Charge of ELT

This section focuses on those among *us* who have taken charge of ELT in *our* school. Accordingly, Caro, Celmira, Claudia Patricia, Lulu, Maispin, María Emma, Marlen, Otilia, and Rubiela "assume control, command, care" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) of English teaching. Thus, their stories were included to elucidate these actions. The following lines detail these experiences.

Now, I Like English class.

Caro details the transformation in her emotions, thoughts, and actions regarding teaching English after studying the language during her master's degree as a requisite. Initially, she was terrified to teach English and transitioned towards looking for ways and people who assisted her in preparing and delivering amazing lessons that engage students with the language:

For the English class: I check the curricula, look for a support video, an activity that complements the content of the video, and then do a closing activity with the vocabulary we learned. I look on the Internet for activities that fit the program because at school there are not many English books and, in my house, either, ha, ha, ha. I find varied activities on the Internet. In class, the first thing I do is the dynamics of the greeting, and the introductory part, all in English. Then, I play the video. It helps them to better understand the images and to develop listening skills. They are looking, listening, repeating, watching, listening, and repeating. Next, I check the pronunciation, because maybe one also sometimes fails, I am always guided by the videos. Finally, I put the activity, they are developing the guide and the activities, the crossword puzzles. I do not always leave homework and in the next class, we reinforce what we have worked on.

I have always sought support from Diana to prepare for my English classes. She explains the resources of the British Council. That webpage is very advanced for me, she tells me what each activity is for, where there is material to print, and the videos with interactive activities. She designed some primers to teach English in primary school and gave me one for third grade and one for fourth grade, I share them with Lulu, and I have them in the school. These primers were created considering the syllabus of the school where she works. The PEI in her school is focused on bilingualism. The primers have several activities of the same theme, children like these very much. For example, animals: there are the names of animals above and below animals with numbers, children must place the number that corresponds to the name of the animal. In the labyrinths they look for the path from the name of the animal to the drawing of the animal; in the word search they look for the names of the animals and then use those words in short sentences: 'I am the king of the jungle'. The children had to translate using the dictionary, of course, they already knew 'I am' which is 'I am', so they looked for how jungle and king were written. Thus, they wrote the name of the animal and reinforced the writing of the name of the animal in English. Children must use the dictionary, which is a great help for them, I do not know if it will be okay or not to use the dictionary, but I rely on the dictionary. That is what I work on. I look for playful activities: word searches, and crossword puzzles, but what children like the

most is watching videos. Unfortunately, Diana is sometimes busy. The other day I asked her for help to work on the verb 'I Can' and she replied a week later. I had already made the guide. I turned in the video and the activity about what I can do and what I cannot do. Another interactive video: the monster 'has three eyes', and the children do not repeat in English but translate into Spanish 'The monster has three eyes' 'The monster is red' and the children shout, "That is red" and the color is red. They need to be repeated in English. I insist, I do not know if it will be okay, but that is what I do.

In 2015, I moved to the morning shift. Although we organized classes with the third and fourth grades, neither Lulu nor I wanted to teach English. It was my turn to teach English! The crucial moment was with children when I had to face the English class, they told me: "Take, it is your turn to be the English language teacher". To my delight, everything happened almost simultaneously! I started the English course on Saturdays and started teaching English only in my course. I already had some basis and I perceived that my children liked this subject. I did well in class, and I felt, 'Ah, this is cool!' At that moment, I already understood and could pass it on to them. I like English right now. I know. I can explain it to my children, I can make them like it and understand it. So, I began to like English when I learned, since I understood that it was not so difficult, since I realized that it was easy. With the course, I was motivated, I understood, and my mind changed: from not liking anything to liking it. Now, I like the English class! (Caro, 2022, p.p. 46 - 48).

"I Do Not Know; Let Us Ask My Friend Google."

Celmira discusses her experience with fifth graders and the fact that not being a specialist in the English language helps mitigate her insecurities. By acknowledging her limitations, she feels free to explore Internet resources to prepare for her classes:

[...] I tell my pupils' parents: - "Learning is on the Internet, and it is everywhere", children do not need to come here to learn; 'for good or for bad one does not know it all'. If a child asks me something that I do not know, I say, "I do not know; let us ask my friend Google", we open it right there without pain, and here I have my friend

> *Google. They laugh, "The teacher is so funny". I tell them: "Dear, I am not the library, and you can learn more".*
>
> *For English classes with my pupils, I practice greetings at home, the basics, because obviously, they are challenges and without fright because I say it is something I must do and face it. I have to empower myself more than what I handle. For example, if you tell me to work on socio-affectivity I handle it easily. English, I know is difficult for me, then, I practice it at home, I rely on videos, YouTube tutorials, and pronunciation, in class I tell students: "Now we are going to review the video so that it looks better; as I do not know much, we are going to reinforce the English thing, we are going to review it with the videos". Students receive this well. They accept this well. Sometimes, the fourth or fifth graders ask me: "Teacher, how is this pronounced?" when I do not know I say: "[…], I do not know. Let us Google it!" I do not put so much mystery to that, I do not know everything. I am not a specialist in English, I rely on that. On one occasion, a friend who worked in a college asked me to receive his students to do the internship at school, he would come here to the school and teach my students.* (Torres, 2022, p. 71).

On Holy Google, I Look It Up!

This section explores how Claudia Patricia despite feeling insecure when speaking or pronouncing words in English, has managed to teach this language to her students. She expressed:

> *[…] For example, the pronunciation in English is complex for me, I listen, I try to understand and sometimes on Holy Google, I look at how a word is pronounced before going to teach this. I do it and I feel that we all must do it.*
>
> *With the students I have this 2021, even if it is virtual, we do commands in English, they already know the date, every day of the week, the months of the year, and the numbers up to 30 (because they are the ones, we use to say the date) in English. I think we should all prepare for that because knowing a second language is very important.* (Rodríguez, 2022, p. 78).

Students Make Mini-Books: They Are Their Own Creations!

An advantage I had in this study was my membership within the community. For instance, listening to Lulu's story immediately made me remember how much I enjoy students making presentations in English in Lulu's class, because they seem to be happy, and they make me travel back to my years as a teacher.

> *English classes with my pupils are usually like this: First, we study the vocabulary, then we use these words to create sentences. It is what I am doing lately with all the issues. As different topics come into the curriculum, we learn the vocabulary and then we translate it into sentences. I do it in two ways: I give them the sentence in English, and they translate it into Spanish or vice versa. In the end, I tell them, that as we have already studied the vocabulary, they are going to write ten sentences using what we have learned. In the socialization of knowledge(s) week, we reinforce what we studied: I distribute in rows what the children are going to write so that so many works do not repeat themes so that there is variety. Each student makes a mini book: the decoration is up to their creativity! For the stage of socialization of knowledge(s) I like students welcoming their audiences and making a short presentation of the course in English. We start with a dialogue; I give them the pronunciation and the writing; and then, students practice. I always tell them: "Calm down, pass, it does not matter if you make a mistake or if you pronounce badly." The presentation and invitation to see our stand in English [2020] was made by Alan who volunteered to present and did this very well.* (Lulu, 2022, p. 153).

When listening to Lulu's story, I remembered at once the scenes during the academic week dedicated to seeing students' work. At the beginning of the day, Alan showed me his mini-book. I was happy to see his lovely work, I corrected some spelling mistakes and congratulated him for his work. He smiled at me. Lulu actively participates in projects aimed at improving language skills, encouraging her students to join and persistently continuing despite obstacles. Her dedication and perseverance are truly admirable:

> *Since 2016, Caro and I have been working with the Fábula Project Foundation, first with the Spanish reading project, and in 2019 we included the English project at the suggestion of Olga, the director of the foundation. I like it, we connect with students*

who are from England, as they are in the last semesters of their careers, and they teach us different topics. The sessions were two days on Tuesday and Thursday, I always tried to enter, and I felt happy because not only did the children learn but I did too. I liked to hear their pronunciation. In the beginning, the teachers read a story in English, the activities they did were on comprehension, and the students did not understand, it was very complex. I found it heavy, very difficult, and very advanced for my students. However, we saw and listened to the story. I reviewed all the material, translated it, took out short sentences, and elementary structures, and invented simple activities to be able to explain to the children and do what teachers from England had given to us. I decided to include English three times a week in my schedule. At the end of the year or period, the English teacher of the Fabula project, evaluates, and asks for advice to improve, and with what we tell her, she improves her practice every time. I told them that the activities were very advanced for my students, and now it is easier, to work with sentences. You must make sure that the children understand and that you understand too, to be able to explain to them. Another cool activity was when Olga brought a printed sheet with images, written in English and Spanish, and gave one to each student, they put together the bilingual book without using scissors, and they made the book in class. That was very cool for them!

Before the pandemic, students liked this project, they were struck by the way they communicated because it was different, novel, and being able to interact with people from other countries. They were excited and said: "Oh, look I talked to her, who is from England! From Antioquía[82], or other departments. On some occasions, we were watching and listening to the story very animated, and suddenly the image froze, and we could not go back in. Then, we looked for the same story on the Internet and sometimes we found it. When we could not find the story, we saw another one so that the children would not be bored. Also, when the English were slow to connect, we started talking to the children and the teachers from other places, and we liked that. Despite the connection problems, it was insisted and on the days we had sessions we stayed a little later, the children already knew and there was no problem. The children

[82] A department located in the northwest of Colombia, people from there are referred as "paisas".

> *were fascinated by seeing themselves on the screen. This year 2021, I have hardly worked, I have done two or three activities no more because the one who does the English part for students' guides is Patricia, I have sent her the stories and the activities that the Fabula project had sent me by WhatsApp, which included the picture with what you are going to learn and the audio in English and Spanish.* (Lulu, 2022, pp. 151-152).

Lulu puts her whole self into teaching (English in this case), combining both her knowledge as a teacher and her practical knowledge in the classes. She describes her practice stating that "*I try to make the whole course understand; […] I try to make everyone understand, if someone does not understand I call her/him and explain personally. I wish [teachers] had explained me like this!"* She recalls her high school experience to validate her current actions as a teacher.

I Like to Teach Them Complete Sentences: 'The Banana Is Yellow!'

Another experience intersecting the actions *we* take when teaching involves Maispin's experience. She describes some of her lessons with her preschool students and she also gives an account of what her pupils know and can do.

> *I first teach my children greetings in English, to introduce themselves in English, to say 'Hello, my name is...'; this year I was teaching them 'Hello boys and girls my name is...', 'bye, bye' and the greetings. I think it is hard to get to teaching so many things in a single year. I also tell them things in English so that they get used to it for example, 'Everybody ready, yes, or no?' then they already know how to say /YES/, they already know how to answer. I like to teach them complete sentences: 'The banana is yellow!' so that they do not stay only with the isolated word 'banana', there is the lost banana. I put on songs for them so that they learn the parts of the body by listening to the songs. On one occasion, I made a bingo cardboard game with English vocabulary. We played at the tables then I said: 'glove', here teacher, not 'here' 'here', then I would go and give them the little cards. This year [2021] because of the pandemic, we cannot manipulate things so, this activity can no longer be done. That is what I do in English in the classroom with them, I try to change their dynamics.* (Maispin, 2022, Pp. 171-172).

I Never Had to Teach English.

María Emma never taught the English language before entering UE School which is why her story is called: *I never had to teach English.* However, she explains how she has faced English classes in cycle one (first and second grades):

> *(After passing the competency evaluation) I chose to work for UE School where I was assigned fourth grade, I worked with teachers Ingrid and Hector. I taught social studies and another subject, I do not remember what it was, because it matched with the classes that the provisional teacher, I replaced taught. Now, for the English classes of the children of cycle one, I look for videos, I rely a lot on videos, images, courses, and audio. I like to use graphics, images, and coloring guides. In cycle two I have dedicated myself to social studies only...* (Gómez, 2022, p. 164).

In María Emma's story, it can be noticed that she did not have to teach English in cycle two, but when she was assigned first and second grades she had to teach this language for the first time, so she used materials she likes and understands. Something similar happened in Marlen's case.

I Made Them Dream of Harry Potter.

In the case of Marlen, she strives to motivate her students by transforming the classroom atmosphere. She creates activities tailored to her students' interests, making learning more engaging and relevant for them.:

> *About two years ago, I do not remember if it was Enny or Maria Emma who told me that considering that humanities is only one area, Spanish and English, I should take the area by myself, that is, I give Spanish and English classes. I liked the idea. I said yes, 'nice'; I do not like students learning only the colors. That is so rigid. I know it is basic, I know it is important. So, I invented the classes, thinking about how to motivate children to learn English. I taught them the colors, and the numbers in another way because I think that in English if I understand a word, I can translate it. I know they like Harry Potter, so I told them we were going to see a Harry Potter movie in English for a period, every eight days. On the day of the movie, we were carrying popcorn; they had to copy what they could from the film, it had English subtitles, nothing in Spanish. If they did not finish it, I would allocate some time to the next class to*

understand because they had to tell me what had happened in that little piece. Some boys who studied English at SENA with their parents tried to write to me. For example, when the bird flew they wrote: 'the bird, the bird, fly' they looked for the word, they thought. That activity helped them a lot, to recreate their imagination and try to read and understand what they were observing.

We would watch the movie and then write the text. They would begin to translate without learning the basic vocabulary (colors, numbers). They would begin to make sentences. For example, we would watch the movie, then we would find out the story of Harry Potter, where he lived: 'I was in England', let us see why it says 'was' that word 'WAS' what does it mean? Why does that word go there? I asked them to go into the verbs. "This is a verb, and it is in the past, right?" Then, I put them to make games with cardboard and pallets, with the verbs, they had to put together sentences with the verbs, the pronouns, and the verbs. They had to write as if they were Harry Potter, the boys started writing their story by saying, "I am Harry Potter". We managed to write a full text, a paragraph about Harry Potter, they were happy to be able to translate it without using the dictionary so much. We were looking at the words "Here it says such a thing, what do you think city means? – They would reply "City, ah good"- "What does this mean?" We were looking at words with meaning. Students liked it. The next quarter I worked with Shakira, with songs in English by Shakira as I knew they liked Shakira too. For the last term, they had to invent a book with the story, they could choose Harry Potter or Shakira, and this was the work for the last term. Cool! They made a little book where they recreated their lives and their stories. One turned out to be the Harry Potter of Boyacá, of Somondoco[83]*, of Somondoco! ha, ha, ha, I laugh Somondoco! The boy asked his mother and she said, "Somondoco," ha, ha, ha. I was (born) in Somondoco'. I loved it when Maria Emma asked me intrigued: "Why would students like the English class so much?" I said, "Is it because we are watching the Harry Potter movie?" and her response was, "Ah, rightly so!" I liked it when they said they had English because it was my idea and they liked it very much: I made them dream of Harry Potter* (Galvis, 2022, pp. 182-183).

[83] Somondoco is a small town located in the department of Boyacá in the Andean region of Colombia.

Marlen transformed her classroom into a space where students can feel comfortable and in a different environment to study English. She used popular culture to make students' involve in her classes. It seems that this strategy is useful and interesting for her students. Otilia also use songs to teach English.

"Songs in English Are the Center of My Classroom Practice."

Another practice when teaching English involved Otilia's emphasis on two main goals. On the one hand, she sought her pupils to enjoy singing a song and, on the other hand, that they could understand the main ideas present in the lyrics. She asserted:

> *It seems important to me that children conceive themselves as capable beings of learning other languages which is why my English classes are always with songs. I do not work on an English notebook and when I do activities in English, I do not work with isolated words, but I use songs. It works for me because children like this, sing, and they capture structures* (Otilia, 2022, p. 244).

Otilia uses songs to make students understand messages in English and to make easier the process of building up self-confidence on her students. At this stage of life feeling that one is capable to understand and to communicate in another language is essential in learning development. Finally, Rubiela admits that what she teaches is what she learnt at high school.

"I Have Always Managed My Way Around with No More Than What I Studied at The Normal School."

Rubiela believes she received high-quality English classes at the Normal school because, at university, she merely reviewed themes. Nonetheless, she feels that her students deserve even better English instruction. She stated:

> *I know that English levels need to improve a lot more every day; however, I have not tried to do any courses, I have always managed my way around with no more than what I studied at the Normal school. In the degree, I had good English teachers, and I learned quite a few things from them in two semesters. It was very basic English, rather a review of everything we had studied in the Normal school […] Some years I have had to teach English and it has been very basic: household objects, school supplies, animals, etc. Now, when I get the English class, I try to make the children learn something and most of all I focus on them watching videos and listening to*

> *conversations in English. I feel like I am taking things away from the kids in that part of English that should be explored more* (Hernández, 2022, pp. 257-258).

In conclusion, Celmira, Claudia Patricia, and María Emma use Internet tools such as Google, affectionately referred to as a "friend" or "Saint", to verify word pronunciation. They also select YouTube videos according to the topics they are teaching their pupils. Otilia likes songs to explore students' capabilities to grasp main ideas. Caro combines the Internet with assistance from a friend and uses some primers to prepare English lessons. Maispin and Rubiela rely on what they learned in high school and higher education. Marlen changes the classroom into a cinema to provoke students' writings about their favorite characters. Finally, Lulu adapts materials and promotes students' contact with native speakers and children from Colombia by participating in the Fabula project. She overcomes difficulties and gives feedback to improve the project. It seems that administrators of the Fabula Project have considered Lulu's recommendations. This is to say that multiple ways, tools, and resources have been found to teach English. These varied methods, tools, and resources illustrate the diverse approaches to teaching English.

Escaping from the Teaching of English

Some of *us* sought strategies to avoid teaching English, as it was perceived as an undesirable task. Emary, Enny, and Sandra Patricia evoked moments in the UE School when they had to face English Language teaching. They described their feelings, thoughts, and the actions they took to do their job. Additionally, I include a fragment of my own story, recounting my attempts to implement some workshops with my colleagues.

If I Were Told: - "It Is Your Turn to Teach English", I Would Die.

Emary reveals that after avoiding teaching English for a long time, she started to teach English at UE School in cycle one (first and second grades) and she has learned with her students:

> *I know the basics, the minimum, I avoided teaching English whenever I have older students. In first, second, and third grade I managed it because it is the basics, from time to time I always looked for a partner, a support, and I changed classes: "I give you this lesson and you give English classes to my pupils." The truth is that I feel bad teaching something that I do not have the foundations or the knowledge my students*

deserve. Something that has marked my life is English, because I do not have a good English level, I never had it. I do not like English. I have already closed myself to this language. I cannot learn English. I cannot, and I cannot. If I were told: - "It is your turn to teach English", I would die (Emary, 2022, p. 93).

In 2019, I arrived at UE School and there I had to teach English to first graders […] I taught simple things, some colors, and numbers. In 2020, we worked on Spanish and mathematics mainly. We taught English from time to time. I have had to rely on the videos, thank God that has improved and there are very didactic videos, in class I put the video, and we listen, repeat, and pronounce. I am also learning with them. I am not able to pronounce what I do not know. All these years of experience, I have looked for ways to avoid giving English lessons; for me, English is the boogeyman, if someone asks me: - "What is the boogeyman?" I will answer – 'English'... (Emary, 2022, pp. 94-95).

If You Do Not Know [English Language], How Do You Teach This?

Enny admits that she declined to teach English in cycle two (third, fourth, and fifth grades). During that period, she and her colleagues were able to organize subjects according to their skills and interests. Now, she prepares dynamic English classes for her first graders, who are excellent learners.

In UE School, in third, fourth, and fifth grades we were all reluctant to teach English because it is difficult. If you do not know, how do you teach it? Marlen, Maria Emma, and I were in fifth grade for three years. Marlen teaches Spanish and English, she loves teaching Spanish and English, Maria Emma loves social studies and I love math. This year (2021), with little first graders, I have tried to teach dynamic English classes so that they like it. I have downloaded guides on the colors and parts of the body. As I am an award-winning teacher, because I have a smart TV set in my classroom, we have been listening to songs related to the colors, of the topics that I have reviewed, there have been a few days that we had classes at school [because of the pandemic].

I like to play songs on the computer when we are working on art or whatever. I like to play Michael Jackson's songs or others that they have not heard that catch their attention because they are in English. One day, I played relaxing music in English to

> *catch their attention and they exclaimed "What is he saying? This is another language! This is not my language!" They are so small, they are sponges, they take everything super-fast, and they ask me: "Teacher, do we start with the red color?" And I replied, "With the red one". They remind me. I do not know if I do it well, the truth is that I do not know within my experience, I do not know if I do it well.*

What Are We Going to Do Next Year, In Fourth or Fifth Grades?

Sandra Patricia narrated her moments of distress when she was told to teach English in cycle two (third, fourth, and fifth grades). She also detailed how she sought to avoid this responsibility because she thought that she did not have the knowledge required to teach this subject.

> *I remember as if it had been yesterday when we were in cycle two and Mireya, the coordinator, told us that each of us should teach English. That was terrible, Enny also put her hand on her head in bewilderment. What anguish! We managed to convince Sandrita to teach English in our courses and Mireya to allow her. We made it, for that year, we were saved! What are we going to do next year, in third, fourth, or fifth grades? I can teach basic things in first and second grades once a week, but in third, fourth, and fifth grades, what are we going to teach the colors again!?* (Rincón, 2022, p. 275)

"I Failed the Year with You."

When writing my story, I had the chance to reflect upon my actions regarding the English language in the school. I realized that somehow, I had also escaped from ELT. I mean I avoided giving teachers some tips for their English lessons during my very first days as a coordinator in the school:

> *The principal suggested that I take the opportunity to do some class sessions with the teachers of the two branches and shifts to give them tips or strategies for teaching English to the students. My mistake was not to have chatted with the teachers, and not to have asked them if they wanted, if they were interested in participating in the sessions. After a couple of meetings, I gave up. I felt examined. I was asked to pronounce some words in English and the meaning of others. In the second session, one of them commented: - "I do not bring materials, as students do", I exclaimed – "I*

> *failed the year with you", and I thought that this situation never happened to me with my teenage students, most of them passed the subject, if a student failed English with me I felt that I had also failed the year with him/her because I had not been able to teach him/her* (Castañeda-Usaquén, 2022, pp. 210-211).

Emary, Enny, and Sandra Patricia concur that facilitating English instruction for first and second-graders is achievable through adequate preparation of teaching materials. Enny's preference for American music led her to incorporate songs and videos into her lessons for first graders, a method she believes enhances their learning significantly. Conversely, when tasked with teaching English to third, fourth, and fifth graders, they express apprehension and actively seek strategies to avoid this responsibility. This insight emerged recently during a discussion with Sandra Patricia.

To sum up, emotions, feelings, beliefs, experiences, the command of the language, and so many more factors make each of *us* make decisions or actions concerning English teaching in a specific context. *Our* family lives, in school, in university with friends, every relationship that *we* establish with another person, with books, with nature, with pets shape *our* ways of thinking, interpreting, feeling, and acting in this world, so each of *us* has a personal epistemology constructed with others, and collectively, these contribute to creating *our* community's epistemologies. In the following section, *we* will discuss *our* thoughts, feelings, and proposals regarding English teaching.

Making Public *Our* Personal Epistemologies

"The epistemological diversity of the world is yet to be built."
(Santos Boaventura, 2010, p. 48)

This journey has been shaped and understood through the guidance of teachers, friends, conferences, books, experiences, and feelings, reifying the notion that "we do not think alone" (Fast & Kovach, 2019, p. 25). *Our* perceptions, memories, mental and emotional processes, introspections, ways of approaching and living English, its learning, and its teaching are shared through *our* narratives, where *we* articulate events, feelings, and personal insights about English teaching. Suárez and Rivas (2017) remark, "Every story that each subject tells of her/his reality represents her/his knowledge of the world and her/his intervention in that world" (p. 9- my translation). Moreover, Maturana (2017) posits that everyone constructs

theories, and I would add that we communicate these theories through *our* stories. Olsen (2016) and Cruz Arcila (2018) agreed that personal epistemologies are engendered from experiences shaped by research and social sensitivity.

Neoliberal educational programs transform public schools into market-driven institutions (Hursh, 2006), where competition often overshadows collaboration and mutual support and the *other* is silenced (Maturana, 2001). Understanding the coloniality of knowledge within English Language Teaching (ELT) is crucial (Hsu, 2017) for comprehending *our* experiences. One approach has been to listen to and make public *our* life stories. In essence, they constitute sites of being, thinking, feeling, and doing that deserve to be acknowledged. When *we* share *our* stories "we talk of our own lives. Life storytelling gives us direction, validates our own experience, restores value to living, and strengthens community bonds" (Atkinson, 2002, p. 122).

Adapting definitions from Merriam-Webster (n.d.) regarding philosophy, theory, and epistemology to this study, the stories *we* shared encapsulate *our* fundamental beliefs about the way English should be taught. These beliefs constitute the principles, policies, or procedures proposed or followed as the foundation of the teaching practice. As Cárdenas et al. (2010) suggest "professional knowledge of teachers refers to all those personal theories defined as the beliefs, values, understandings, and assumptions that a teacher constructs and materialize in his/her pedagogical practice" (p. 59). Thus, *our* stories provide an account of the nature and grounds of knowledge regarding English teaching built upon *our* personal, academic, and working trajectories, as well as *our* experiences with English, its learning, and its teaching.

Coupled with the previous discussion, Rendón (2009, as cited in Castañeda-Londoño, 2021, p. 84) proposes an "epistemology of wholeness," emphasizing an approach to knowledge that acknowledges our complete humanity including mind, body, and emotion within academic pursuits. This framework underscores how these epistemologies have been shaped by *our* lives as learners and as English teachers. Additionally, "Knowledge is shaped by teachers' informal and formal educational spheres such as personal life experiences (Li, 2020), learning and teaching experiences (Wang et al., 2019), academic background (Schaik et

al., 2018), and participation in professional development activities (Golombek, 2009; Xu & Connelly, 2009, as cited in Talaee et al., 2023, p. 407).

Figure 21 is a matrix that illustrates four key aspects about ELT in *our* school. The first issue addresses *our* thoughts and feelings regarding what teachers, students, and *ourselves* need for effective language learning. It includes meaningful language practice, content creation and fostering interdependence in classes. The second element outlines teachers' profiles including their capacities to being motivators, who empower students to learn the language; experts in the language, who can effectively communicate and have been prepared to teach children. The third component corresponds to the uncertainties regarding English teaching methodologies. It underscores the potential to establish 'support' communities to learn and practice the language. Finally, the implementation of English teaching to children in public primary schools is critically examined, highlighting challenges such as unequal access to higher education opportunities, shortages of qualified English teachers, and the state's goal of fostering bilingual (Spanish/English) proficiency among students in *our* school.

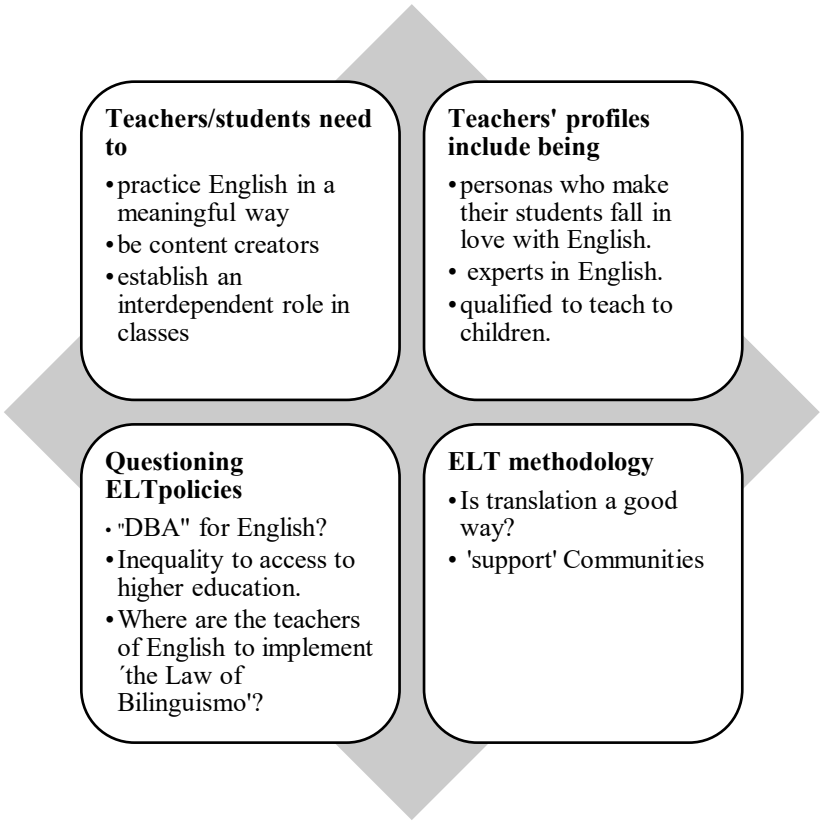

Figure 21 *ELT to children in our school*

Connected to the previous discussion, our reflections and proposals regarding what students and teachers need, the ideal teacher's profile, and some methodological concerns or uncertainties about English teaching to children are articulated through excerpts from *our* narratives. This process of introspection has left *us* puzzled about the implementation of the law of bilingualism and the programs aiming at teaching English to preschoolers and elementary students at *our* school. *Our* narratives prompt significant questions and uncertainties about policy effectiveness and the resources needed to ensure equitable access and quality education for all students.

What Do We and Our Students Need?

Aura, Caro, Enny, Jeimmy, Jenny Viviana, and I think and feel from *our* different perspectives and roles that practicing speaking and listening abilities are the ones that *we* need to work on constantly. *We* feel that without regular practice, *we* will forget this language.

Aura Aleida thinks that practicing the language is one of the keys to learning English:

> *English is to practice, if I do not practice it daily, if I take a course and I simply stay with the class, I will forget this language. I do not think I had put enough effort into it. When did I realize that I needed to know English? When I went to the United States, I asked myself, 'How did not I finish that course?' One goes anywhere English is spoken and does not even understand a command. Nothing. They asked: "What are you going to drink?" and one is lost. We arrived in New York to do a tour and like any tour here in Colombia. They explain when they did anything as a tribute and so on...; one 'hum!' [doubting] all in English. There were hearing translation aids. I put them on and my God! NO! It is not the same to go looking and listening at the same time because one understands what they are saying. With the headphones it was not possible, at that moment, my feeling led me to think 'I do not care what they are saying! After all, I do not even care what they are saying! I do not even care why they did that; 'I was annoyed' because I did not understand anything! I took off my hearing aids and started looking. To complete when they made jokes; everyone laughed! and I looked everywhere because I did not understand, 'hum!' I wondered what the joke would be* (Jiménez, 2022, p. 27).

Caro explains the fact of forgetting the language if you do not practice:

> *There are several things that one forgets if one does not practice. For example, the /s/ is added to the verb when it is in the third person. I had already forgotten and now that we are studying with the children the verb 'to like' I remembered: "Oh, you must add an s, to the verb that is in the third person!*" (Caro, 2022, p. 49).

In the same vein, Enny talks from her experience as a learner:

> *Everything is practical, it must be practiced, there is no other way, otherwise one forgets. Sometimes I wonder what people do to speak fluently. Nice! I have many anecdotes with English, there, making the fool of myself, little by little I must learn, and it is never too late.* (Chaves, 2022, p. 109).

Jeimmy also shares her view on her role as an English teacher:

> *Being an English teacher for me was very nice, but I think if you do not practice this, you forget. It has been many years since I have given English classes, and there are things that I have already forgotten.* (Gómez, J. 2022, pp.125-126).

Finally, in my story, while being a coordinator I tackle the lack of having 'real' situations where I could speak and listen to English. I wrote:

> *"I began my [doctoral] studies. At the beginning, I felt like 'a fly in the soup', in my daily work I did not need English, and I had not spoken in this language for a long time". Then, I felt uncomfortable because I did not speak as fluently as my classmates did* (Castañeda-Usaquén, 2022, p. 213).

Regarding students' roles, my experience as a teacher highlights the fact students always play an essential role. Classes were not possible without them, and there was an interdependent relationship between teachers and students:

> *I consistently ensured that my students were happy in class, that they liked English, and that they were content creators. At the end of each period, I would ask them for suggestions to improve the class* (Castañeda-Usaquén, 2022, p. 209).

To sum up, we agree on the importance of having opportunities to practice speaking and listening to English in meaningful ways to maintain *our* proficiency, as opportunities to

communicate in English are scarce in *our* daily lives. Additionally, both teachers and students can engage in content creation, as exemplified by Lulu's students with their mini-books.

What Would Be the English Teacher's Profile?

Aura, Celmira, and Enny remarked on the importance of having an expert English language teacher. While Jeimmy points out that the teacher should have pedagogical knowledge, Caro, Otilia, and Yami emphasize the human dimension of the teacher, someone who makes feel his/her students capable of learning. Aura strongly agreed with the notion of having an expert English teacher for her students. She discusses:

> *I have always fought for that, to have a specialized teacher. I already realized that English is fundamental and more in these times all technology and everything comes in English. You need an expert person who is dedicated to English, and who prepares English classes for preschool because English must be in preschool, and it is important to start from there. I spend a lot of time in my classes on reading, writing, and math, English just from time to time. I teach animals, vowels, letters, family, and numbers. That should not be the case, just isolated words that I know for a child will not be of any use!* (Jiménez, 2022, p. 28).

In the same line of thought, Caro asserts that "*It is very key to find a teacher who motivates you, who shows you that things are not as difficult as you think, that you are capable of achieving it, of doing it*." (2022, p.31) Celmira has the same perception:

> *For English teaching, if there was someone specialized it would be better. One does not know how to pronounce it well. One does not have the practice very consolidated; I say this for me. I say that children should learn English, of course, it is a tool for social, cultural, and economic development. In primary school, the child has the freshest mind. what would be good is if they learned with a person who has the vocal and expressive tools of what English is...* (Torres, 2022, p. 72).

After expressing her admiration for one of her workmates who genuinely enjoys teaching English, Enny concludes: "*Thus, there should be a teacher who knows how to teach English so that children could learn a little more*"(Chaves, 2022, p.106). Jeimmy adds that preschoolers learn easily and that the education process is more effective with teachers who

have a strong grasp of pedagogy. She asserts that such knowledgeable teachers are essential in the classrooms.

> *My students learn in the first class. They do not need me to say it again or repeat it. **All** preschoolers learn. Not this group or the previous one, no, **everyone**. I do not know if it is because we sing, or if it is because this is for preschool. They learn super easily, you do not have to repeat, to say things again and again. I believe that English teaching is fundamental, because now everything is in English, you need English for everything. It is good that children become familiar with this language that they see it as normal. If English was taught from preschoolers to eleventh graders, students would not have to do any courses. I think so...*
>
> *I believe that it is not so much what I am going to teach, but the pedagogy that I have to do it. In my case, it was easy to teach high school children because I was a preschool teacher before. It is very different if you are a high school teacher and going to teach in preschool, that is very difficult, almost no one can, but if you are a preschool teacher and you are going to teach in high school, you usually do this very well. Firstly, it is pedagogy, and secondly, the love for what one does. I see my partner, who does not know English, she often approaches me and asks me "Jeimmita, how do you say this word?" She takes notes and looks for videos. If she does not know how to pronounce well, she puts the video and teaches them; There, I say 'What a good teacher!' The children learn from her because even though she does not know, she is giving the children the subject and the children learn, she writes to them in the notebook and assesses their students' work. There I discovered that it does not matter that I must teach something that I do not know. I believe in doing what one loves. If one does what one loves, one looks for the way to do it. And if one has the pedagogy, it is even better. It does not matter if you tell me we must go and teach there on an island, a topic I do not know, I will look for what I need to teach; I put together the plans, I leave and teach it because I have pedagogy. Different from you knowing, but not having pedagogy. […] The pedagogy that I applied, was the pedagogy that I had learned for preschool. I used it for English teaching, and I always apply this to my teaching. I assume, that it was the same pedagogy, I think in the experience of*

professional life. If you have pedagogy, you can teach whatever. But, if you know something and you do not have pedagogy, you cannot teach anything. The students will not understand you. It is very difficult for you to communicate knowledge. That is what I believe and what I have lived (Gómez, J., 2022, pp. 124-126).

Sandra Milena points out the commitment every primary school teacher embraces:

Oh, I would love for children to study English from preschool! I know that many do not like to teach English because it is difficult. We are not all talented enough to learn a second language, but at least we start to approach and recognize the importance of learning a second language. I think it would be great if we could contribute something. It must be a little unfair and a little selfish on my part to think: "if I get into something then I have to know what I am getting into" If I am an educator and even more to teach children, I know that those first years of study are so important for them. For example, learning to read and write is important, if you do not teach this well from the beginning, students will have problems in the future. We are primary school teachers and in one way or another we have to handle all subjects, we are not experts in natural sciences, we are not experts in social studies, geography, or mathematics, and we do not know how to solve equations, but we must know that basis that will make the child in the future develop easily. We can recognize our students' abilities, and if with what we teach them they recognize that they have the ability to speak in English in the future they will do it. If on the contrary, they realize that they are not good at English they could say no. It is important that we manage and we can give our students that basis, it is not expected that students become bilingual at once, there are schools specialized in that, then they will have their teachers. Although we are not specialized in English, we can give them that first basis at least that help them and benefit them in something (Camargo, 2022, pp. 264-265)

Yami highlights the influence of the human dimension of primary teachers on the students.

Of course, beyond the learning of a subject, it is the human being, today, September 23, 2021. Once again, I checked it, the way you get to the classroom, is how the students respond to you. If you arrive calm and happy, you have calm and happy

> *students. But, if you arrive upset with shocking emotions so will the children, because that is transmitted. You do not tell them anything, but they will perceive this. One must love this and be happy doing it otherwise one hurts a lot of people* (Yami, 2022, p. 295).

> *From my lived experience, I believe that English teaching can be mandatory because it would be perfect for children to come out bilingual, but an expert teaches English, a person who loves to do it, who knows how to do it because a person who does not know how to do it can generate traumas in pupils' lives and can block important learning processes and even their dreams for having forced them to learn a weird subject* (Yami, 2022, p. 294).

Ideally, an English language teacher for children should be someone who loves teaching young learners, is proficient in the language, and possesses strong pedagogical skills:

Loving the profession and the act of teaching children imply the combination of heart and reasoning (Guerrero-Arias, 2010), the integration of the heart and the head to overcome difficulties (Fals Borda, 2017), accepting *the other (students)*, this is that teachers listen to their students (Maturana, 2001), finally all of us (teachers and students) are constituted by body, mind, and spirit (Meyer, 2013) , we are not only heads that learn. This means that *we* remark the human dimension of the teacher, the student and of the job.

Proficiency in speaking the language is a quality highly valued in *our* context, and this was mentioned in many of *our* stories, that is why a person who can communicate using English and who is able to understand oral messages is the expert who should teach English to children. Most of *us* are aware that we are teaching the simplest aspects of English to students, such as words in an isolated way, and grammar. However, *we* used many tools offered by the Internet, Google, You Tube to avoid making mistakes, and / or to teach the pronunciation of the words accurately. All of this, pursuing to speak English like a native speaker.

Pedagogy is also a key factor in *our* stories, I would rely on Jeimmy's perspective:

> *I think in the experience of professional life. If you have pedagogy, you can teach whatever. But, if you know something and you do not have pedagogy, you cannot teach anything. The students will not understand you. It is very difficult for you to*

> *communicate knowledge. That is what I believe and what I have lived* (Gómez, J., 2022, pp. 124-126).

This can be also connected with some of *our* teaching activities at school, especially with the strategy of sharing knowledge, this is a space created at the end of each term for students to share what they have learned with students and teachers. When sharing knowledge(s) *we* agreed with López Gopar (2009) on the idea that students can play the role of teachers, and we teachers can play the role of learners. This can be a step towards the pedagogy "Other-Wise" (Palermo, 2015) and the coexistence of multiples ways to know (Santos, 2010). Thus, *we* are creating paths to teach English with what is on *our* hands.

Let us explore what methodologies could be effective when teaching English to pupils, having in mind that most of *us* have not enrolled in any course of methodology to teach English to children.

How to Teach English to Our Students?

Otilia proposes the creation of communities that bring language to life. Yami highlights the benefits of working with small groups. Meanwhile, Enny expresses uncertainty about the translation method and feels lost in methodological terms. Otilia suggests,

> *I would like, for example, that in schools we have communities, I mean, that the responsibility for children learning to speak English does not rely only on the English language teacher, but there is a cultural context where children realize that there are different languages and that in their school for 'X or Y' reason English was prioritized. That native languages children learned from a young age were valued. In Colombia, there are a lot of native languages. Going to an indigenous community to speak produces the same feeling as going to an American, Portuguese, or any other community, that admiration: - "Hey, you speak differently from me and I do not understand you!" Unfortunately, society has shown us that English is better, like super wow and I think this is not so true. English is one more language, English shows us culture as there are many others existing, and one should have the possibility to choose which one or which ones you like the most and have many opportunities to learn them. To that extent, it seems to me that public policies could generate a much more enriched, much more favorable sociocultural contexts, such as some clubs, a cool*

space, that allows the one who enters willingly to challenge oneself with another language. That does not only have to do with the grammatical part as public schools prioritize, especially because it limits those who want to learn the language. I think it is easier to learn from a cultural perspective that can then be complemented with grammar. The clubs do not apply only to English, I wonder why in public schools they removed arts. I remember that when I studied, I had music and arts teachers.

To me, it seems important that children conceive themselves as capable beings of learning other languages that is why my English classes are always with songs. I do not work on an English notebook and when I do activities in English, I do not work with isolated words, but I use songs. It works for me because children like this, they sing, and they are capturing structures. I think that for this age, in preschool the most important thing is that they feel capable and do not experience the feeling that I had in college that when having the possibility, I did not explore the ability, because I felt incapable. If the child from a young age sees that s/he can learn the song and then s/he achieves it then when s/he will face anything new, the attitude will be: "I can."

I want the children who are interacting with me to be amazed with languages. I greet you in Spanish. However, I tell you that in other languages we also greet each other: if we want to say good morning it can be said in French, in Italian, in English and there are many other languages that I do not know. If you want to look for it, you already know how to look for it and you already know that on the Internet you get everything you want. That outlook was the result of the pandemic. I sensed it. Having to plan classes depending on the Internet, and what is in the virtual space helped me share that idea. In these last days of 2021, I told them: "Well ready, we already greeted each other in Spanish, we already washed our hands, and we already disinfected our table, so now, Sara, greet me in Italian". The first day was a surprise! Children were capturing the difference between languages and you could already tell them, greet me in French, greet me in Italian, greet me in English and they already knew the difference between the three languages (Otilia, 2022, pp. 242-246)

Similarly, Yami asserted:

> *Children are very spontaneous, like Juan Camilo who today told me: "Teacher, I am happy" because he had finally been able to solve a math problem. Working with small groups, now in alternation, is another story, I think it is phenomenal! I have been able to be more aware of the children, I have discovered who draws cute, who is creative, and who flows, and this has been super beautiful. We are inviting the whole group and from my course are coming 24 or 25 children that are still a good group to work with. One manages to make personalized things and reviews. "Oh, surprise! Kids are writing super pretty, super tidy. The number of students greatly influences the teaching-learning processes* (Yami, 2022, pp. 295-296).

Caro, Enny, and Maispin tackled some methodological issues, they expressed their uncertainties about the best way to teach English to their pupils. Caro wondered about the age to start studying English, and the way to teach it. She was also curious about the difference between being a teacher in a public charter school and in a public one, where there is not any English teacher as support. She mentioned:

> *What I teach them is the basics, what I know. The numbers, the colors, the animals; almost not to construct sentences in the simple present, with the verb TO BE. With the group on Saturday, I began to have more tools to teach my pupils, but I feel that I do not have the didactics. At school, I stick to the curriculum, because one is supposed to go hand in hand with all grades. I personally do not like that curriculum because in the first period there are greetings, numbers, family members, they are isolated themes. There is nothing integral. In numbers, what does one study? the numbers from one to one hundred; in the family: mom, dad, uncle, brother, and that was all, that was the topic of the family; in school supplies: book, notebook, pencil. We work in vocabulary, but we do not see the relationship of vocabulary with a context. It is not proposed like this in the curriculum. Each one sees the vocabulary and works with it in a different way. I do not know if my classmates deepen in the vocabulary. I have not seen major changes to the English syllabi. The problem is that at the beginning of the year one adjusts with colleagues the project or area to which one belongs to. I think it is a deficiency that we are not all there, strengthening the syllabus, looking at whether it is really useful or to adjust it. Basically, we are under the criteria of the teacher who*

adjusts it. For example, in the syllabus for the third period is Halloween so I do not know if you work the vocabulary of the pumpkin, the cat, the witch or in 'Merry Christmas' if it is the Christmas tree. I do not see the point in that part, I do not like the English syllabus. Ideally, it should have a sequence from first grade, if you are going to work from first grade. However, in cycle one the strength is reading and writing. Students started third grade knowing the date in English, third graders start from scratch. If one is going to work on the verb 'have', then with that verb you can include the vocabulary of the members of the family and thus integrate the vocabulary with the simple sentences in the present, you can go a little beyond isolated vocabulary. In addition, I saw something that I found very interesting: the basic rights of learning English. It seems to me that they are proposed from the outset. When I checked the third-grade standards oops, oops, we are in first grade or hopefully in second one. I do not criticize my colleagues because for me it is more important that children finish primary knowing how to read and to write in Spanish correctly. Reading and writing do seem fundamental to me for third graders, as mathematics does.

I have doubts because since I am not a graduate in English: How good should it be that only vocabulary is taught in primary school? 'Is it just vocabulary?' I do not have the experience, but I say from what I see. And the fact that first graders would only focus on reading and writing in Spanish and they reached third grade in English without knowing anything. In some bilingual schools, where the level of English is high, first graders study what fifth graders do here. One wonders how viable it is for such a 'young' child to handle all that and not the Spanish language that is his/her mother tongue. Teachers, who are in charter schools seem to be working in a private school and not with the SED, right? They have a subject, Science, natural sciences in English, in third grade! But how? Perhaps, in first grade the vocabulary is a little bit more basic, one says good, but in third grade all the topics that there are, wow! It is very difficult for me; maybe, because I am not in that bilingual context and the population is different (Caro, 2022, pp. 44-46).

Furthermore, Enny adds that she is uncertain about the effectiveness of translation as a suitable practice for teaching the language. She asserted:

> *Sandrita Camargo is dedicated, she is teaching English two or three times a week and the children are super participative in classes. I am teaching English to my little ones from time to time, I think it is super cool, I am going to imitate Sandrita's classes because her students are very happy. She has always loved to teach English. It is difficult for other people to learn English, well because I do not know how to teach this language. I do not know if it is okay to tell them – "Show color red, how do you say 'rojo' in English?" Associating Spanish with English, I do not know if it is okay to do it. You do what you can; I do not know if it is okay or if I just say 'red' and I do not need to tell them it is 'rojo', I feel lost with that* (Chaves, 2022, pp. 105-106).

Maispin expresses her concerns regarding the methodology for teaching English to preschoolers: "*No one has ever told us to follow a specific methodology to teach English to preschool children. Now, with the policies that want schools to be bilingual I ask myself 'how do we teach English?*'" (Maispin, 2022, p. 173).

From the previous, *we* look for ways to teach English effectively what Cárdenas et al. (2010) call "professional knowledge which include personal epistemologies of teachers refers to all those personal theories defined as the beliefs, values, understandings, and assumptions that a teacher constructs and materializes in his/her pedagogical practice" (p. 59) combined with "body and emotional knowledge" (Castañeda- Londoño, 2023). In other words, *we* have constructed ways of being, knowing, and doing when playing the role of teachers of English. Every class is an opportunity to learn with and from students.

Questioning ELT Policies

Not only did *we* propose alternatives for teaching the language on what *we* considered facilitated language teaching in *our* context, but also challenged existing policies that shaped *our* teaching praxis. Aura expresses her concerns regarding the bilingual program for Bogotá:

> *I do want an English teacher for my children! [This has not been possible] with Bogotá Bilingüe Program. They failed in that part, because for this they should have appointed their teachers, their experts in English for all the schools. Romel tells me: "No mom, in public schools English was not taught at all. You learned nothing in a public school, it was very minimal what you are taught in English." Romel learned some English in*

> *Australia and here, I put him to do several courses in a language institute. Sometimes, I ask him things, and he translates the ideas. When Romel studied high school, English did not have so much emphasis* (Jiménez, 2022, p. 29).

Caro talks about teachers' emotions when remembering her first experience teaching this language. She questions what the SED has not done yet. She recognizes that the SED has not appointed English teachers to implement the bilingual program in all of the public primary schools.

> *I do not agree that primary school teachers must teach English because I lived it. Teaching something that one does not feel-good at. One feels that one does not know, and that is discomforting. You transmit that on to the students. It is not going to be a quality education. One is not going to do it right. Years ago, if they had forced me to teach English, I do not know what I would have done, what I would have taught them in English. Fortunately, my two workmates helped me, otherwise, I would have taught my students in a wrong way! I think that many times you do not learn in primary school because you did not have a good teacher who would make you fall in love with the subject. If you do not like English, you will not make your students fall in love with this. I find it very difficult; English is not so easy. English is more about vocabulary, it is more about formulas, I do not know if it is called formulas or rather it is like a grammatical structure that English has. I do not agree with the fact that we should teach English, although, I agree with English being taught in primary school. It does not seem to me that all primary school teachers have to teach English, that they assign you fifth grade and say: "It is your turn to teach English and look how you manage!" I am a preschool teacher who never studied English in my career, but must teach English in fourth grade. When I studied the degree, I never had English lessons, it was not mandatory! It would be good if the SED sent specialized English teachers, who chose teachers specialized in that subject, who looked for the specific profiles for that subject...* (Caro, 2022, pp. 55-56).

Aligned with the previous discussion, Claudia Patricia also expresses her concerns regarding English language syllabuses:

> *Recently, Caro and I were reviewing the English curricula, and this must be fixed, adjust a lot of things! we are off side a little comparing it with the Basic Learning Rights - DBA of English. We both agreed that there are some things that we were leaving out, that we had not considered. However, there are some objectives that are too high for the level of English in which we are in school, we still do not achieve what is for fifth grade, which is having conversations with them, because students have not had an English process. Without having good English from first to fifth grades, it is very difficult to be at the level. The standards that are being proposed in the English DBAs are high* (Rodríguez, 2022, p. 78).

Accordingly, Claudia Patricia and Caro questioned regulations such as the suggested curriculum for English and the Basic Learning Rights of English: Transition to Fifth Grade (MEN, 2016), because they presented unreachable goals for *our* context. Going back to Nuñez (2020) who claims that this is not a suggested curriculum, kindergarten, and primary public-school teachers are subordinated to what policymakers rule for English teaching. *We* are under the pressure of following orders concerning what to teach or how to teach this language. In this train of thought, Enny reflects upon the syllabus for the English language:

> *One day we commented with someone, with a teacher, that one should… that we should all know how to teach English, because there is no one to do it, or that the SED should send a specialized teacher who knew how to teach in English so that the children could advance a little more. We were very sure that the next year with the next teacher, who came, they would study the colors again and there would be no continuity. In the school, there is no super structured curriculum of English for primary, or perhaps there is. However, we are not interested in this one, because it is part of humanities, one focuses on what I have to plan for Spanish classes. I never look at the English curricula, I do not really. […]* (Chaves, 2022, p. 105).

Enny demands a well-structured English syllabus but acknowledges that her primary focus is teaching Spanish. Consequently, she has not yet reviewed the program. Otilia emphasizes the importance of creating communities of speakers and argues that English should not be a prerequisite for access to public universities. She also questions the policies supporting teachers' postgraduate studies:

It seems to me that for languages in general, communities of speakers could be generated to support them. In public schools there should be such groups where there are expert speakers of the language that one can use to strengthen students. Something like what I experienced in the master's degree, there were expert people who helped the other and therefore that person did not feel that the language was an exclusive factor, but as something that one could achieve. It was cool the people who achieve it, because several motivational factors are generated. On the other hand, putting it as a prerequisite in a country where education, especially public education has never generated minimum conditions. So, people who have graduated from public institutions have a minimally 'competitive' level in relation to those who graduate from bilingual schools or private schools where they have a better level. I wonder how one can explain the fact that English is required for enrolling in graduate studies with financial support provided by the State. The conditions are not favorably given, and I continue to insist that it becomes an exclusionary factor (Otilia, 2022, p. 242).

Furthermore, Maru emphasizes the importance of having language lessons at an early age:

I would think it would be good if English was taught in primary school, it is a language that is no longer a luxury; rather, it is simply essential. If you have those first basis since elementary school, it is not going to happen as it did with me; that I did not know, I finished eleventh grade, I got my high school diploma and I did not know any English, zero grammar and pronunciation even less. […] Perhaps, if one from a young age begins to be motivated and give some brushstrokes in English. Not only that grammar may be the beginning, but that you begin to make it part of your life. Not as something forced, as I had to learn it, from one moment to the next. It would be important, and it would be very good, that there were teachers, that we had teachers because we can also do it, heh, heh, heh, that we had that commitment to strengthen that language since it is a necessity (Maru, 2022, pp. 191-192).

Sandra Patricia discussed:

In one of the teachers' meetings, I said: "if they made me choose between physical education and English, I would prefer English all my life", because respectfully

> *physical education I can guide it in first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grade. I can watch some videos, I can read, just like what has to do with dances, with aerobics, I can do it, I can guide a physical education class, but this cannot be done with English. With technology, in the end with videos one can learn and I can transmit it; but this is also a class that requires a teacher with a specialty. For example, the Basic Learning Rights for English, in the role and in the projection that the SED wants are very well thought out because it is necessary that children have that recognition and that approach to this language from preschool, from a very young age they will learn it very easily. What they do not have in mind nor organized is that obviously this subject or this class should be guided by a person who has knowledge of the English language. If we do not have it, what are we going to be able to teach? I cannot teach something I do not know. In my case, that I have been frustrated several times, that I have tried to learn, and I realized that I do not have that ability. I think that the support that comes for the institutions is a teacher or an English teacher, who is dynamic, knows how to teach, transmit it in a playful way; not that teacher who takes out a booklet or the English sheet and puts the children to answer as long as s/he talks and talks because the children are going to be the same. I believe that English should be learned like Spanish is learned, in a more dynamic way that they [teachers] explain to one, that they pronounce to one, that one listens, that one understands, that it is a very playful activity* (Rincón, 2022, pp. 276-277).

Sandra Patricia also expressed her fears of losing her job due to new policies regarding ELT to children:

> *Something I am afraid of, is that I have thought that if in all the institutions of the SED they put as a requirement to continue working the primary that teachers had to know English and have this certified, many of the teachers, including myself, would leave the SED because we would not have the language (requirement) to be able to teach in primary school. It would be frightening for the SED to say: "those who do not have English have their contracts canceled!" Sometimes, I have thought about it: "Oh my God that cannot happen!" I pray to God that this will never happen. What we do need is that the SED really sends an English teacher who prepares her/his beautiful classes*

> *and that the children really have a process in preschool, first, second, third, fourth and fifth grade. Anyway, there is uncertainty, several years ago, I wanted to move to the Cundinamarca School, but to know English and to have the level certification were prerequisites, so I gave up.* (Rincón, 2022, p. 278).

Yami believes that students should receive English lessons from preschool with a highly-qualified teacher. She states:

> *According to the law, I would find it spectacular if English lessons were taught. At the level that is if children really start from pre-kindergarten to have English lessons or some kind of contact with this language, to develop 'listening', to develop skills. Obviously, when they reach eleventh grade, they will have a super level. How great that an expert person would teach it! Someone who knows how to do it! One who loves to do it! We, somehow, have autonomy to be in our classroom because paper can handle everything. Let us see, let us do a study here in MC, how many of us give English classes to children the way this must be done, how often it should be, with the workload it should be, with the quality it should be? Paper may say that it is mandatory, although we look here, who among us does it?* (Yami, 2022, pp. 294-295).

Overall, English is perceived as boogeyman for some of *us* in the context of teaching this language. *We* experience anxiety about mispronouncing words, potentially harming pupils due to inaccurate pronunciation, and not being a teacher who has the enough knowledge or skills to teach one's students. While *we* take on the responsibility of teaching English in preschool, first, and second grades, many of *us* tend to avoid teaching this language in third, fourth, and fifth grades. This is due to *our* perception of lacking the necessary tools to offer quality education in this area, despite *our* studies and efforts to learn this language.

Our diverse ways of being, thinking, and doing regarding English learning and teaching underscore the importance of meaningful practice, content creation, and establishing interdependent roles in the classroom for both students and teachers. *We* believe that the 'ideal' English language teacher for primary pupils should be a 'persona' who has the required qualifications in language, has passion for teaching young learners, and is capable of conveying this passion to students.

We are uncertain about the most appropriate methodology to teach English. For instance, the role of translation in the classroom remains a debated topic. *We* Suggest creating a community focused on practicing speaking and listening from a sociocultural perspective outside the classroom setting. *We* are also concerned about *our* students' future, given their poor performance on State tests that assess English proficiency. Moreover, the implementation of the Law of Bilingualism in public preschool and primary schools raises critical questions. *We* wonder about the incorporation of qualified teachers to implement the Law of Bilingualism in *our* public preschool and primary schools. Despite the advice of scholars who suggest "hiring English teachers who are professional qualified to teach in the elementary grades" (Clavijo, 2016, p. 7) the government has largely ignored these recommendations. As Bastidas and Muñoz (2011) note "the Minister of Education has refused to appoint qualified teachers to teach English in the Colombian elementary schools mainly for financial reasons" (p. 107). This situation persists despite the issuance of the Law of Education 115 (1994), the National Standards for English Learning (2006), and the Law of Bilingualism (2013), highlighting the lack of progress over the past three decades.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusions and Further Journeys

Life is never ours; it belongs to others [...]
I am another when I am, my acts are more mine
if they are also everyone's, so that I can be I have to be another,
come out of me, seek myself among others,
the others who are not if I do not exist,
the others who give me full existence,
I am not, there is no me, it is always us.
Octavio Paz, Piedra de Sol, 1957 (Original in Spanish)

We shared *our* thoughts, doubts, certainties, questions, emotions, feelings, experiences, challenges, struggles, hopes, dreams, expectations, fears, interpretations, and ways of being, thinking, and doing through *our* stories. *We* discussed *our* academic and working trajectories in relation to English, its learning, and its teaching. This research journey explored *our* personal epistemologies concerning this language. The study revolved around real people living English teaching language in real classrooms with real students, where coloniality and neoliberalism have institutionalized teachers' subservience and homogenized knowledge.

At this point in the research journey, *we* aim to elucidate the hypogeum represented by *our* stories. This metaphor illustrates how *our* open and confident conversations have shed light on the prodigious hypogeum of English teaching to kindergarten and primary students of a public school without a teacher with a formal degree in English teaching. *Our* stories require your interpretation, dear readers, as their significance is inherent upon the meanings you derive from them. As Octavio Paz's poem suggests "it is always us". The insights, feelings, thoughts, and interpretations drawn from our narratives are presented in three sections: our views as learners, as teachers, and as individuals.

From *Our* Views as Learners

Our stories reveal that most of *us* did not receive English classes during *our* childhood between the 1970s and early 1990s. Attending English classes was a privilege, typically accessible only to children enrolled in private institutions. In other words, English classes became commodities to attract clients. Consequently, English language was almost nonexistent in the curricula of public primary schools at that time.

Aura Aleida, Claudia Patricia, Lulu, and Rubiela studied at Normal schools in various departments of Colombia, while Nidia and Sandra Patricia attended the same Normal school in

Bogotá. Aura Aleida, although missing her family, was privileged because her father afforded her expensive boarding school. In contrast, Rubiela had to work since she was studying primary to help with her family expenses. Celmira, unfortunately, could not study at a Normal school because of money constraints. Securing a place in Normal schools, which were state-supported, was challenging. Despite this support, the boarding schools associated with these Normal schools remained exclusive, limiting access for many students.

Between 1974 and 2001, spanning three decades, *we* pursued secondary education. Claudia Patricia viewed the reform in Normal schools as marvelous, and she felt elated by the changes it brought. Conversely, Rubiela was relieved to obtain her diploma in 1996, just a year before the reform was implemented. This disparity in views was largely influenced by financial considerations. Rubiela needed to start working as soon as possible due to financial constraints, while Claudia Patricia desired to study for two more years to earn a diploma in technological studies, which had always been her dream.

Most of the activities *we* remember from learning English language in high school involved memorizing long lists of verbs, reciting short dialogues in front of the class, filling in blanks, and copying sentences from the board without understanding their meaning. Studying the conjugation of the verb "*be"* was a tedious task, as encapsulated in Maru's story titled "*I was fed up with verb To Be*". In this regard, Díaz et al. (2023) reported that pre-service teachers during their practicum found

> a noticeable gap shown by teachers was related to the traditional methodologies used by their mentors, which they echoed in their classrooms. At the beginning of their teaching practice, their classes emphasized learning grammatical structures and isolated vocabulary lists. At times, this focus lasted long until they realized the emphasis should be on communication (p.71).

This highlights how *our* English teachers predominantly focused on grammar, structural rules, verb list memorization, and especially the conjugation of the verb "to be". While *we* often resorted to cheating, we also put in significant effort, studying hard and sometimes hiring private English tutors to help us pass remedial tests. However, there were insufficient opportunities to practice speaking, listening, and creative writing skills.

Some of *our* English teachers were memorable as they used popular songs with their lyrics into language teaching, promoted theater plays in English, and tailored their lesson plans to align with their students' interests. They also developed supplementary material such as primers, booklets, and word puzzles. For instance, Jeimmy titled her story "*I imitated what I liked*" because she replicated her high school English language teacher's classes. Similarly, Maispin's first English lesson mirrored her own high school learning experience. These teachers not only incorporated elements of popular culture (Giroux & Simon, 1988) and the cultural world (Dussel, 2012) into their teaching but also engaged with their students' everyday lives.

Claudia Patricia, Maispin, Rubiela, Sandra Milena, and Sandra Patricia had the impression that the English lessons during high school years had more practical applicability over the ones offered at the university. In other words, they all expressed a preference for their classes at secondary school over the ones at university. For instance, Rubiela's story is titled "*I have always managed my way around with no more than what I studied at the Normal school."* Additionally, Yami highlights the influential role of teachers in shaping classroom dynamics through their actions and behaviors, serving as role models for students Caro further emphasizes that teachers can make their students love or hate a school subject.

Many of *us* studied the career that *our* families could afford, often opting for the most affordable options in the market, rather than *our* dreamed degree. Marketization of education was introduced in the education of future preschool teachers. Aura Aleida, Caro, Emary, Jeimmy, Jenny Viviana, Maispin, Marlen, Maru, and Nidia studied this career in private institutions. To finance our education, many of *us* worked while attending classes at night or through blended and distance learning formats. During this time, English did not hold a prominent role in undergraduate curricula; in some programs, it was offered as an elective rather than a mandatory subject required for graduation. Thus, English in *our* tertiary education was in the buds.

In the same train of thought, within the landscape of graduate studies, proficiency in English became a widespread requirement, prompting teachers to seek out programs that either waived this requirement or facilitated the acquisition of English certification. Five of *us* opted for a blended modality as the core of the master's, with face-to-face English classes

scheduled Saturdays. Notably, neither the language course nor the English proficiency test fees were included in the standard tuition. This dynamic underscored how graduate education increasingly pressured educators to achieve at least a B1 level of English proficiency. The English language test, as a requirement to admit teachers for graduate courses, spurred teachers to carefully select universities that offered training, and 'guarantee' to finish their studies successfully. Sometimes, it implied sacrificing their preferred options or accommodate their teaching praxis according to students' needs. This strategic adaptation reflects a survival strategy: pursuing studies aligned with market demands to achieve personal objectives or waiting until finding a graduate program that does not require English certification. Consequently, passing an English language standardized test has been a significant obstacle that teachers must overcome to obtain their degrees, regardless of the time, money, effort, emotional investment, and personal sacrifices involved in this pursuit.

When prioritizing studies, Otilia discusses that English language is not a subject that she wants to prioritize as her commitments with students, school, and work are far more important than complying with a requisite to access to doctoral studies. Her narrative titled "*It was not possible right now either*" reflects her decision to give up the idea of enrolling in a doctoral program funded partially by the State as it is more important what she could teach her students than investing time studying a language she has limited interaction and does not align with her learning goals.

Similarly, some of *us* raise a valid concern about the fairness of placement tests administered to select students for graduate programs granted by public universities. These tests often disadvantage candidates who have not had the opportunity to study in bilingual schools, attend international language centers, or live abroad, as these experiences typically provide greater exposure and proficiency in English. As Otilia claimed, "*How can it be explained that to study a graduate supported by the State would be English language proficiency a requirement? There are not favorable conditions and I insist on that this is an excluding factor"* (2022, p.241). This underscores a systemic issue where the educational background and opportunities available to teachers can significantly impact their access to higher education opportunities. In essence, while placement tests are intended to assess

language proficiency and ensure academic standards, they can inadvertently perpetuate inequalities by disadvantaging candidates from certain educational backgrounds

Regarding English classes, some of *us* described them as enjoyable opportunities for interaction and building friendship. In contrast, when it comes to taking tests, particularly English proficiency exams required for graduate studies, many have documented feelings of nervousness and fear during. This anxiety stems from the realization that their degree attainment depends on achieving a B1 level of proficiency in English. In the same vein, many of *us* view the requirement to demonstrate proficiency in English through certification or language courses for access to graduate studies as unnecessary and counterproductive. This language proficiency is often irrelevant to their interests and teaching, serving more as a barrier than a facilitator.

Some of *us* have dedicated significant time and money to studying English investing in expensive courses. However, after reaching the second level, many have felt disappointed, unable, and stuck, as Sandra Patricia cogently exemplifies in her story "*Neither forward nor backward*". This sense of being unable to make progress despite efforts invested reflects a common challenge faced by many. Indeed, there are numerous motivations for learning English, each serving different purpose such as improving one's skills in teacher's job, getting a better income, and fulfilling meaningful aspirations in *our* personal lives.

From *Our* Views as Teachers

Teaching English in kindergarten, first, and second grades is often perceived as a rather simple task, involving basic vocabulary lists and simple expressions for greetings and farewells. However, despite this approach, there is a lingering wondering whether these efforts may be sufficient. The dynamic changes drastically when faced with teaching English to third, fourth, and fifth graders. Many of *us*, including Emary as depicted in her story titled "*English is the boogeyman*," express fear and apprehension towards teaching English at these higher levels. This fear stems from concerns about inadequate language proficiency, the risk of making mistakes, damaging one's professional image, delivering ineffective lessons, or redundantly covering material already known to students. These concerns have resulting in the request for qualified English teachers in *our* school.

In navigating the challenges of teaching English, *we* have resorted to strategies such as exchanging classes with workmates to avoid teaching English. For instance, Caro preferred to relinquish math classes, which were her favorite ones, in exchange for avoiding her task of teaching English to her students, which inspired the title of her story is "*Give me what you want, but English classes.*" In contrast, when teaching English teachers engage in finding strategies, materials, and assistance to plan classes. YouTube videos have emerged as a particularly valuable resource for creating interesting and informative classes. Claudia Patricia's story, titled "*On Holy Google, I look it up!"* illustrates this reliance on the internet to resolve pronunciation doubts and discover resources for preparing English lessons.

Even among teachers who prefer to avoid teaching English but are assigned to do so with first and second graders, they acknowledge that teaching formulaic expressions and isolated words is not aligned with an effective language learning process. Teachers who take on the challenge of teaching English to third, fourth, and fifth graders often rely on resources like YouTube and seek assistance from others for materials. They recognize their limitations while striving to do their best for their students. However, despite their efforts, the lack of opportunities to practice English in authentic communicative settings poses a significant challenge. For all of *us* practicing the language frequently is a key factor in the learning process.

Combining *our* learning and teaching, it is evident that while learning English is not a priority for none of *us*, the lack of certification in this language has posed a barrier to pursuing further studies funded by the government in areas *we* believe would improve *our* teaching and benefit *our* students. *Our* teaching priorities are on reading and writing in Spanish, math, and coexistence. *We* recognize the importance of having proficient and passionate English teachers for *our* students. Qualified English teachers can provide *our* students with the confidence and capability to use English effectively. Thus, while English proficiency may not be *our* personal priority, *we* value its impact on our students' educational development and future opportunities.

We propose the creation of spaces for English practice outside traditional classrooms. English clubs and similar community-based initiatives provide opportunities to learn the language within a sociocultural framework, where cultural diversity is valued, as advocated by

Palermo (2015). National standardized tests that include English language components pose challenges and disadvantages for students aspiring to enter public universities. This requirement can perpetuate inequalities, particularly for students who lack access to resources or support for English language preparation. Finally, the experience when learning the language and the teacher's model is key to proposing an other-wise, emergent, and located pedagogy. This is also an opportunity to learn with and from pupils.

From *Our* Views as Persons

Personal aspirations play a significant role in *our* lives, reflecting our spirits and ambitions. In *our* stories, aspirations such as speaking English fluently like a native speaker and understanding films are evident. For some of *us* being bilingual implies sounding like a native speaker, there is a prevailing sentiment that a good English language teacher must meet this standard, Gonzalez & Llurda (2016) disapproved the idea supported by the Colombian Ministry of Education that native speakers are "a quality factor that guarantees access to the original or the best language and culture content for students; and […] a response to the alleged insufficient language proficiency of local Non-Native Speaker of English language teachers" (p.98). However, this aspiration has not been a feasible task in spite of efforts made, four stories explain this circumstance: Jenny Viviana's story titled "*I always wanted to be bilingual",* Maispin's "*I am not bilingual, and I believe that I will no longer be*", Marlen experience "*I studied bilingual secretarial, although I never learned to speak English*", and Yami's "*I have never felt English as my top skill!".*

When *we* need to use the language in contexts different from classrooms, *we* had the opportunity to reflect upon *our* process - what *we* really know about the language, and what *we* can use to be able to communicate or understand in real conversation with genuine objectives. These situations evoke a range of emotions, thoughts, frustrations, and reflections as we strive to comprehend both the process and the outcomes of our years of studying English. Enny's story called "*I suffered my first anxiety attack with English*" vividly illustrates her stressful experience when attending a parents' meeting with her beloved son at a university in the USA and not understanding a word during this significant meeting for her family. This experience prompted her decision to commit to learning English. Thus, conversing with Enny has helped "to remember long ago incidents and recall recent events and to use those

occurrences as a way to explain personal decisions" (Richards, 2011, p. 796). In Enny's case, her determination to learn English stemmed from her promise to her son to understand what will be said at his upcoming graduation ceremony.

Up to this point, the perspectives on English teaching within our beloved school have been articulated through the voices of those involved. These narratives have provided a comprehensive and insightful view of the experiences, sentiments, and reflections surrounding the practice of English language instruction. Certain topics that were not initially included in this document were omitted due to thematic considerations. Consequently, I have chosen to address these topics in the following sections.

What Has Been Left Aside: Mothers' Views

Personal practical knowledge refers to "a type of action-oriented (Van Driel, 2021) and situational knowledge (Clandinin, 1989) that develops throughout teachers' professional lives (Swart et al., 2018) and involves not simply their past and present experiences but also shapes their actions in the future (Connelly et al., 1997; Yinger & HendricksLee, 2012 as cited in Talaee et al., 2023, p. 408). For teachers who are also mothers, enrolling their children in English language courses or bilingual schools is not merely a commodity but a necessity. Therefore, they invest a lot of money in language courses, tests, and even in international careers. Despite acknowledging the commercial nature of these investments, including the high costs of courses and tests, they recognize their privileged position in being able to afford them. This raises critical questions about the influence of neoliberal ideas that prioritize English as the dominant global language. Are educators and families being co-opted into believing that proficiency in English is essential above other languages and skills?

Sandra Milena is worried about the interactions that her husband and her daughter have had in English. The following is an excerpt from her story:

> *My husband is not very good at pronunciation, and the listening skill gives him a hard time. He has traveled to many parts of the world, he has seen the need for English; despite his shortcomings, he has been able to communicate. He wants Amber to know how to handle English well so that she can leave and travel around the world, English is essential for him. Since Amber was a baby, he spoke to her 'with ups and downs' in English: some words and sentences. Sometimes he would say, "Today, it is morning*

> *dedicated to English," He spoke to her all the morning long in English. It seemed to me that he was imposing English on my little girl, that he was putting a lot of pressure on her, I was worried that my little girl might get bored, I want her to enjoy learning English. He realized it when in one of 'the mornings of English', Amber was just beginning to say her first words, her father asked her: - "Amber, do you want ice-cream?", instantly, she looked at him and half a tongue said: - "NO! SPANISH!" She began to cry, it made her angry that she did not understand him...* (Camargo, 2022, p. 266).

Jenny Viviana, in her role as mother, gives an account of her plans for her daughter's studies based on what she has discussed with friends:

> *I deeply want my little daughter to be bilingual, I hope next year I can pay her an expensive bilingual school or a good course. I have been told that she is too young to study English, she can forget because she cannot practice this with her classmates, that I should wait for her to turn 11 or 12 years old* (Téllez, 2022, p. 142).

Personal perspectives converge significantly for teachers who are also mothers, especially when navigating decisions about their children's education. These decisions pose several critical questions: What to do when looking for schools to one's children? How to behave when facing the practice of speaking English at home? How to avoid a 'bilingual school trap'?

Further Journeys

Integrating English into *our* daily lives and educational systems requires intentional actions and supportive structures, even when it may not initially be a priority for *us* personally. What can *we* do? How can this be done if neither practicing nor teaching this language is a priority for *us*?

If the State wants public preschool and primary bilingual children, who are educating these future teachers to do that? Or how is the selection process to appoint English teachers for primary schoolers?

Should English be taught at Normal schools? If so, what for?

What is the purpose of an English language proficiency certificate?

Some Viable Actions within UE School

Our stories make known that some possible activities to transform the way *we* teach English could include:

- Reviewing *our* curricula for English subject collectively.
- Designing lessons for *our* students as a team.
- Creating spaces where *we* can practice (listening and speaking) in a meaningful setting.
- Including English language in *our* projects.

We recognize several actions that *we* envision but are contingent upon administrative arrangements facilitated by school managers. These initiatives necessitate the support and coordination of the school's head, underscoring that their implementation lies beyond our hands.

Firstly, establishing agreements with universities that educate English language teachers to have pre-service teachers in *our* primary school, paying attention to those student-teachers who really like working with young learners. It would be also desirable that the approach to teach English corresponds to a critical, contextualized, 'decolonized' perspective.

Secondly, integrating a specialized English language teacher proficient in working with young learners aged 5 to 11 into *our* primary school staff is essential, alongside technology and physical education teachers. English must be a core component of the curriculum, delivered by qualified educators capable of equipping students with communication skills and fostering creativity. Including English as a foundational subject contributes significantly to students' holistic development and educational growth.

I would like to close this document by allowing the readership to explore Lulu's words concerning the human dimension of the teacher:

> *In short, education is my passion. The love of the children, and their teachings motivate me to keep going. Finding motivating messages, full of love... Being the reference for some of my students is something that motivates me to continue teaching every day with more love and dedication...* (Lulu, 2022, p. 155).

What do inspire us in our work every single day?

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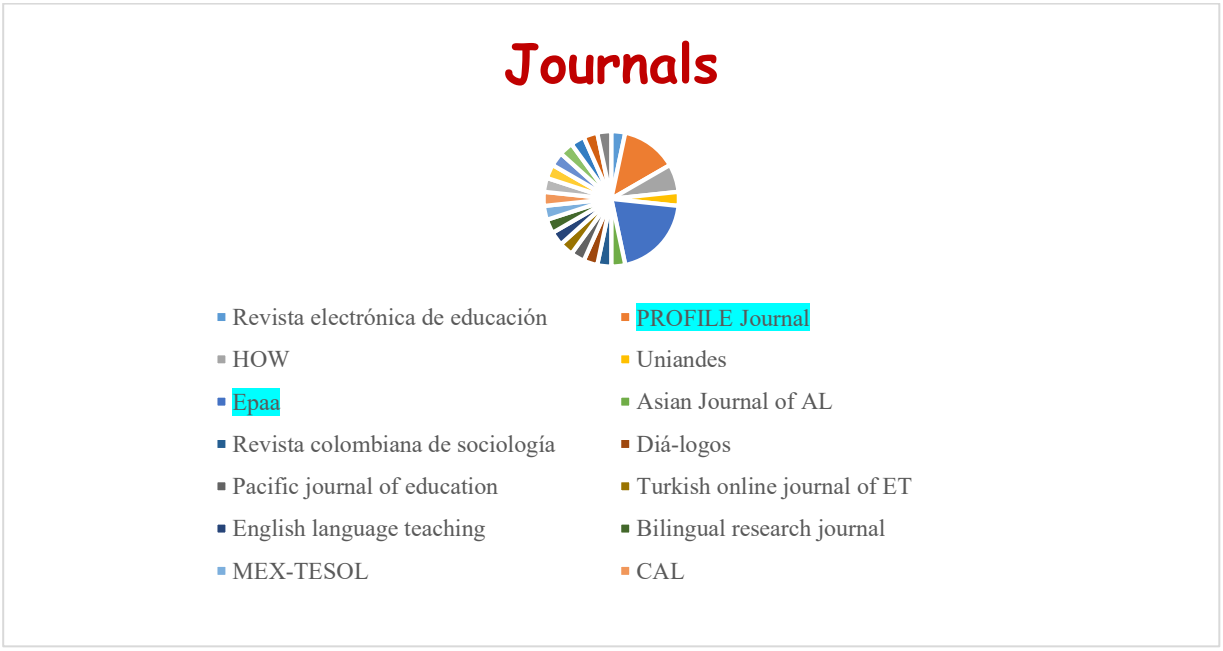
Annexes

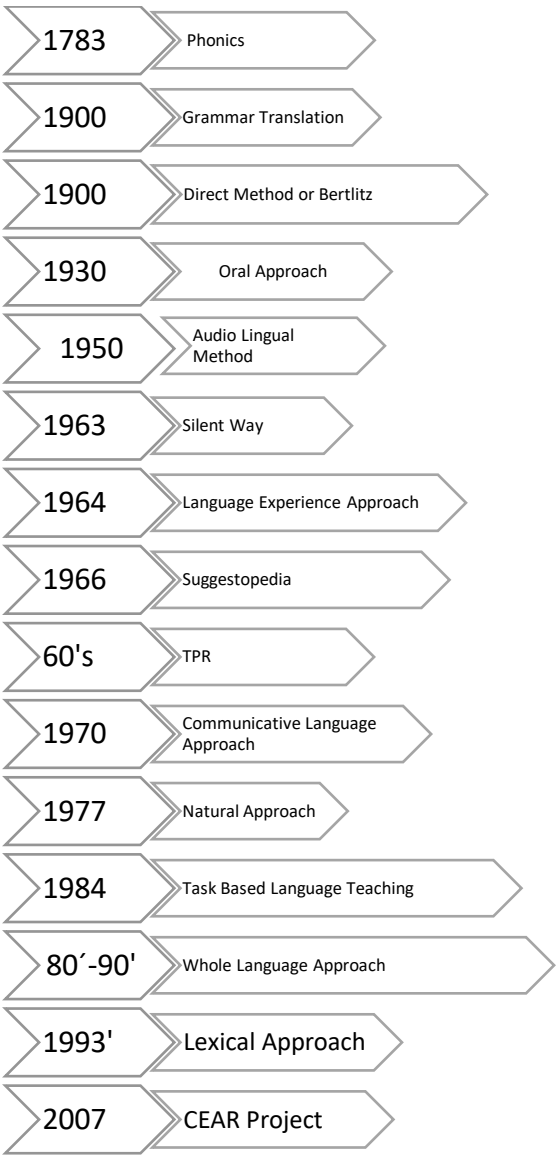
Annex 1 : *A* picture of a hipogeum.

Source: Hipogeo Interior - Búsqueda Imágenes (bing.com)

Annex 2 *Journals reviewed for trends*



Annex 3 *Timeline for ELT Approaches*



Annex 4 *Charter Schools in Bogotá*

This is the list of charter schools in Bogotá.

1. Colegio Jaime Garzón
2. Colegio Miravalle
3. Colegio Argelia - Banco Popular
4. Colegio Calasanz (Buenavista)
5. Colegio Fe y Alegría José María Vélez
6. Colegio Colsubsidio Las Mercedes
7. Colegio La Libertad - Santiago de las Atalayas
8. Colegio Cafam Santa Lucia
9. Colegio Colsubsidio Nueva Roma
10. Colegio Don Bosco V
11. Colegio Colsubsidio San Vicente
12. Colegio Cafam La Esperanza
13. Colegio Colsubsidio Torquigua
14. Colegio Cafam Bellavista
15. Colegio Gimnasio Sabio Caldas
16. Colegio Cafam Los Naranjos
17. Colegio Fe y Alegría San Ignacio
18. El Ensueño
19. La Felicidad

There are five private schools that will keep functioning as charter schools temporarily:
Colegio Don Bosco I, II y III
Colegio La Giralda
Colegio La Salle Juan Luis Londoño

Annex 5 *Schools with Bilingual Educational Model in Bogotá*

- Escuela Normal Superior Distrital María Montessori - Antonio Nariño
- Colegio Bosanova en Bosa
- Colegio Débora Arango Pérez en Bosa
- Colegio Cundinamarca en Ciudad Bolívar
- Instituto Técnico Industrial Francisco José de Caldas en Engativá
- Colegio San José Norte en Engativá
- Colegio Antonio Van Uden en Fontibón
- Colegio Carlo Federici en Fontibón
- Colegio La Felicidad en Fontibón
- Colegio San José se Castilla en Kennedy
- Colegio Integrada La Candelaria en La Candelaria
- Colegio José Manuel Restrepo en Puente Aranda
- Colegio Republica EE.UU. de América en Rafael Uribe Uribe
- Colegio Veintiún Ángeles en Suba
- Colegio Aníbal Fernández De Soto en Suba
- Colegio Venecia en Tunjuelito
- Colegio SaludCoop Norte en Usaquén
- Liceo Femenino De Cundinamarca Mercedes Nariño en Rafael Uribe
- Colegio Luis Ángel Arango en Fontibón

Source: Adapted from Revista Enfoque 2018

Annex 6 *Schools chosen for the IB Diploma Program in Bogotá*

Colegio Grancolombiano

Colegio Técnico Menorah

Instituto Técnico Distrital Julio Flórez

Colegio Instituto Técnico Industrial Francisco José de Caldas

Escuela Normal Superior Distrital María Montessori

Colegio La Felicidad

Colegio Luis Carlos Galán

Colegio San José Norte

Colegio Morisco

Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño

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Note: The schools in bold also belong to the Bilingual Educational Model.

Annex 7 *Invitation to this journey (Consent form)*

Bogotá, agosto 13 de 2021

Apreciada Celmira,

Como sabes estoy realizando mis estudios de doctorado alrededor de la enseñanza del inglés en primaria. Durante nuestro trabajo diario no hemos tenido la posibilidad de dialogar acerca de tu relación profesional o personal con el idioma inglés. Por ello, te invito a que por favor me colabores para llevar a cabo algunas actividades de la investigación, a que te conviertas en mi compañera en este camino y poder compartir tiempo para conversar o escribir acerca de:

- tus experiencias académicas como de vida en relación con el inglés.
- la manera cómo planeas el trabajo de inglés.
- las inquietudes surgidas de las charlas o de los escritos.

Agradezco tu colaboración porque sin ella es improbable poder llevar a cabo este estudio. Por otra parte, todo lo que sea publicado deberá tener tu autorización.

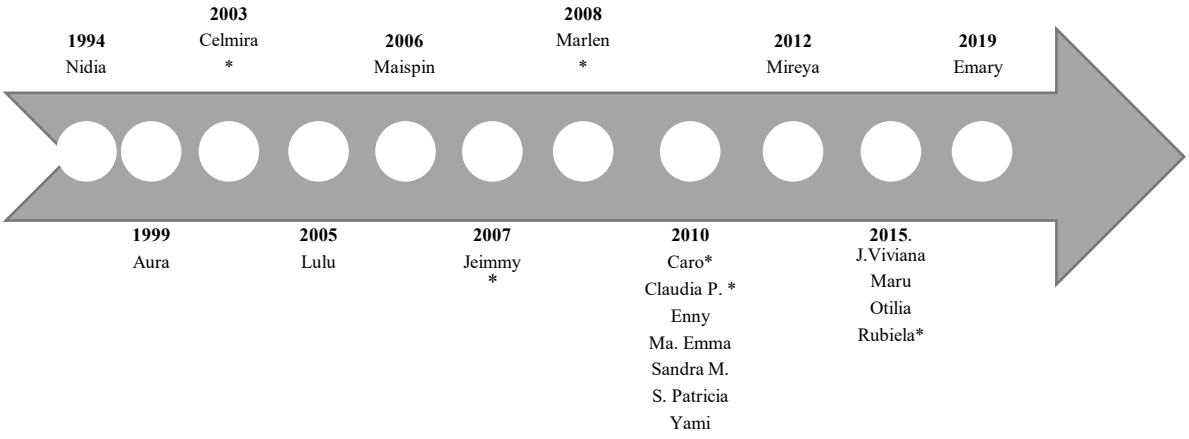
Cordialmente,

Mireya

Yo _____ identificada con CC No. _____ acepto SI_____ NO_____ participar en este estudio. Me gustaría tener como seudónimo _____ (opcional)

Firma: _____

Annex 8 *Our* arrival in UE School



The timeline above displays *our* arrival in UE School. Nidia is the teacher who has been for the longest time in the branch B, MC. Caro, Celmira, Claudia Patricia, Jeimmy and Rubiela started working in the afternoon shift. For Caro, Claudia Patricia, Enny, Jeimmy, Lulu, Maria Emma, Nidia, Rubiela and Yami, UE is the first public school where they have worked.

The names which have an asterisk refer to teachers who were working in the afternoon shift before 2012. Celmira entered as an interim in 2003, in 2005 she passed the enrolment process to work with the SED, and in 2021 she transferred to the morning shift. Jeimmy started in 2007 to work in the school in the afternoon shift, it was until 2008 that she could move to morning shift. In 2010, Caro and Claudia Patricia started working in the afternoon shift; Claudia Patricia transferred to the morning shift in 2014, and Caro did so in 2015. Finally, Rubiela transferred to the morning shift in 2021. Although Marlen was working in the morning shift in 2008, she was an interim who taught Technology in middle school, later, in 2010 she became a primary school teacher in the morning shift.