

EXPLORING THE CONCEPTIONS ABOUT TEACHING ENGLISH AS A  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE OF TWO EFL TEACHERS IN THE RURAL  
AREA OF PEREIRA (RISARALDA)

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## RESUMEN

El estudio tiene como finalidad observar las concepciones que tienen dos profesores de inglés del área rural de Pereira Risaralda. El objetivo general de este proyecto fue explorar esas concepciones acerca de la enseñanza del inglés en dos instituciones del área rural de Pereira y como objetivos específicos: 1) Comparar estas concepciones expresadas en su discurso con su práctica en el salón de clases y 2) Explorar las concepciones de los profesores participantes en su discurso.

Esta investigación cualitativa se realizó a través de observaciones y entrevistas a ambos profesores participantes y a varios estudiantes. Los datos fueron analizados con el Software SQR NVIVO® v10.

Los resultados dieron información muy importante en relación con las concepciones que tienen ambos profesores. Se pudo evidenciar que hay una infravaloración en cuanto a las capacidades de los y las estudiantes del área rural; que la concepción de los profesores participantes privilegia las actividades receptoras sobre las productivas; que existe una divergencia entre el discurso y la práctica de los docentes observados y que estos mismos profesores, tienen la concepción de que hay muy poco interés por aprender inglés por parte de los estudiantes del área rural y que no lo ven necesario para su futuro.

## **ABSTRACT**

A great amount of the Colombian population lives in the rural area in difficult social and economic conditions. Education can bring them the development that they need to improve those living conditions. That fact makes it important to know the way in which English is taught in this area.

The purpose of this study is to explore what the rural teachers' conceptions are in order to see what their impact on the teaching practice is.

A qualitative study was designed in which the instruments to collect the data were observations and interviews. The data was analyzed with the software SQR NVIVO® v10.

Four main findings were obtained: Firstly, the teachers studied have the conception that the students from the rural area are less capable when compared with the students from the urban area. The second finding suggests that participant teachers seem to consider the receptive skills of a greater importance than the productive skills. The third finding points towards the existence of a divergence between the teachers' discourse and their teaching practices and the fourth finding reveals that the participant teachers have a conception about the low interest that rural students have about the importance of learning English.

This study has significant pedagogical implications in the sense that teachers and teachers training programs should be aware of the relevance of conceptions on teaching practices since they powerfully impact what we do in the class.

Likewise, this research has implications for further investigation since it was found that there is a lack of studies in this area in relation with the English teachers that could influence the design of teacher training programs to impact the conceptions of this population.

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*Frank*

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*I want to thank a lot of people that were there for me all the time during this long process, **my family, my fiancé, my pastor and my friends** to all of them thanks a lot, God bless their lives.*

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## INTRODUCTION

What teachers do, strongly depends on what they think, their conceptions about the world will impact on the way they teach, Richards and Lockhart (1994, cited by Carmona, 2010) consider that teachers' conceptions are at the root of teachers' decisions and professional practice. The context where they teach seems to influence the methodologies implemented; teaching is somewhat "idiosyncratic" as long as teachers' personalities determine the way they use the tools to develop the students' skills for learning a foreign language.

In that order of ideas, this study shows the process followed to explore two in-service rural teachers' conceptions in relation with their teaching practice and their impact on what they do. This study will be divided in the following sections:

In the statement of the problem the necessity to investigate the rural teachers' conception and their consequences in the teaching practice is justified considering the necessities of the Colombian contexts and the regulations of the MEN.

The theoretical framework that includes the most relevant theories and studies in relation with the teachers' conceptions.

Likewise, the most relevant research studies about the topic and relevant concepts are presented in the Literature review.

Additionally, the methodology and the type of study as well as the instruments used to collect the data are included in this study.

The findings obtained from the data analysis and their discussion in relation to the most relevant theories presented in the theoretical framework.

And finally, teaching and research implications are described in which it is evident the importance of this study for the implications that it has for investigations in the field of English teaching.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The necessity of being communicatively competent in a foreign language has influenced the Colombian context since this ability may help Colombian citizens have better job opportunities, or obtain scholarships, among other advantages (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006). Such necessity, and the fact that English is the current universal language, have led the Colombian government to the establishment of different programs with the purpose of fulfilling the needs of students and society concerning the ability of communicating appropriately in English.

The Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN), which is in charge of educational policies, created, in year 2004, the Plan Nacional de Bilingüismo (PNB) with the aim of assessing communicative language competences of Colombian students, defining standards of proficiency in English and training pre-service and in-service English teachers who will be entrusted with carrying out the governmental policies.

Since the start of the PNB hundreds of teachers around the country and the rural area have undergone professional development courses that include both linguistic skills and methodological updating. Thanks to these programs, the teachers' training and preparation have been improved.

The latest program implemented for the improvement of rural education in Colombia is the "Proyecto de Educación Rural" (PER) that started in year 2002. With this program the government tries to guide the teachers towards the implementation of flexible

educational models with materials and methodologies adapted to the necessities of the students from this context, replacing the traditional models designed for urban students (Rodríguez et al, 2007, p. 4).

However, although it is important for teachers to have sufficient skills, and participate on intensive training programs, there are other factors which are crucial on the teaching practice. As it is mentioned in the *Lineamientos Curriculares para el área de idiomas extranjeros en la educación básica y media*, it is expected that the programs implemented by the government for improving the English language teaching around the country, have an effect not only on the teachers' professional development but also on changing their conceptions about their practice (MEN, 2006) due to the fact that the teachers' attitude towards their practice, their conceptions, beliefs and underlying theories tend to shape the nature of their instructional practices (Ramirez et al, 2010).

In relation with this, Stern (1983) cited by Johnson (1992) states that teachers' conceptions about the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) are widely linked to the methodologies they use. Thus far, there is no doubt that these teachers' conceptions have a great influence on the teaching process and that these conceptions are affected by many factors such as the conditions where English is taught, the methodologies applied and the influence of internal factors such as attitudes and experiences, among others.

Howard & Major, (N.D) as Anbukani & Padmini, (2010), highlight the influence of the context in the teachers' conceptions, their theories and their practices within a classroom. Howard & Major (N.D) stated that the context will impact the way the teaching and learning occurs. In relation with this, Anbukani & Padmini, (2010), affirm that rural

English teachers underestimate their students' capabilities since they avoid assigning "their students any challenging tasks, complaining that these students (from rural institutions) would not do such tasks. Due to this attitude of the teachers, the students are not given enough opportunities to show or develop their potential".

All what has previously been discussed highlights the importance of knowing the conceptions of the rural educators in relation with the teaching of English, so that programs specifically designed to impact those conceptions may be implemented.

For this reason, this study will explore the conceptions of two teachers of English from rural schools of southern Pereira, and how those conceptions are reflected upon their teaching practices. The following research questions will guide our investigation:  
*What are two EFL teachers' conceptions about the teaching of English in the rural area?*  
*How are the teachers' conceptions reflected on their teaching practice?*

We expect that this study will contribute to teachers' reflection upon their conceptions and how they model the way they teach. The study can also be of interest for Teacher Training Programs, which are in charge of the development of the future teachers, taking into account that the focus on teaching education has changed through the time and now, there's more awareness on the importance of teachers' attitudes and beliefs and there's also a growing need to examine those teachers' conceptions supported on the idea that it is important to understand how teachers make sense of situations and ideas in the classroom by relating them to past experience.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- ✓ What are the conceptions about the teaching of English of two EFL rural teachers?
- ✓ How are these teachers' conceptions reflected on their teaching practice?

## **GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

- ✓To explore two EFL teachers' conceptions about the teaching of English in the rural area.

## **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

- ✓To explore the participant teachers' conceptions from their discourse
- ✓To compare those conceptions expressed in their discourse to their practice in the classroom



## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Teacher's training is a fundamental process for improving teaching practices and through them, education. However, there are many factors that may affect the teaching process, to name a few, the teacher's performance in the classroom, their theoretical background and its reflection on their practices, as well as teachers' conceptions on the teaching and learning process, among others.

Those factors are therefore a reason for researching and for many years, the research about teaching conceptions has been a subject of investigation since to know the conceptions that guide and determine what the actors of the educational process do, is a fundamental element to improve and maintain educational quality (Peña and Morales, 2006).

The section will deal with the following concepts: *teaching practice, views of conceptions, teacher's conceptions, and approaches on the field of conceptions.*

### **Teaching practice**

Through experiential knowledge Kumaravadivelu (2003) in his book *Beyond Methods* affirms that it can be seen that "the entire edifice of education is constructed on the foundation that teaching can contribute to accelerated and accomplished learning". He also states that there is no doubt that all the process of education involves several players, "educational administrators, policy makers, curriculum planners, textbook writers." However, the players who have a direct influence on learning are the teachers (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

In other words, although many people contribute to the process and accomplishment of learning, the most influenced role is the one played by the teachers. What teachers do on their practice and the results obtained are the evidence of that decisive role.

Most of the researches done on teaching and learning have centered on the teacher and his/her role in the teaching area. Kumaravadivelu (2003) highlights teachers' role on the teaching and reviews three traditional/historical roles for them: passive technicians, reflective practitioners and teachers' transformative intellectuals. Within the first role, the teacher is a passive consumer of knowledge, produced by experts and who carries out a number of activities to achieve the learning aims and whose main role is to discipline on specific points of teaching (Cárdenas et al, 2010); the second role, reflective action is according to Kumaravadivelu citing Dewey (2003, p. 10) prompted by a conscious and cautious "consideration of any belief or practice in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads". Finally, the third role refers to the teacher which involves the previous roles and are integrated to the socio-politic conscious development and a historical view of the teaching in regarding not only his/her role in the classroom but also in the society (Cárdenas et al, 2010).

Thus the teacher's role is very important in the teaching practice since it is involved with interpersonal and intrapersonal situations, conscious and unconscious reflection, taking into considerations the prior knowledge and maintaining a peaceful atmosphere to discipline on specific points of teaching. That process guide what teachers do in the teaching practices and determine what the conceptions are to accomplish the goals of education.

## **Views of Conceptions and their importance in the teaching practice**

A simple definition found in Oxford Dictionary about conceptions is: “the way in which something is perceived or regarded”. But there are several researchers that have gone beyond of this definition in order to have a better understanding of conceptions; Pratt (1992, p. 204 cited by Devlin, 2006) defines conceptions as specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena. Those conceptions are simple views of how we perceive the world with the lenses of our conceptions, and the way we reflect them is the way how we understand the world.

Thus the conceptions constitute actual “theories” about the social and nonsocial world. They are considered relevant elements such as values, ideologies and prejudices and it has been also demonstrated that they are a great relevance to explain the human behavior (Myers 2000, cited by Vera, 2012).

In the same line, Pozo (2006, p. 34 cited by Ramirez et al, 2006) mentioned that the term conception has changed over the time; firstly, it was said that it was the way how any situation is perceived by the individuals; subsequently, it was said that they were beliefs built through experiences and interaction with others; and finally, it was found that the term conception is related to implicit theories which are mental constructions that each person performs in the social environment in which he/she works.

That process is a natural feature of teachers, who have their own personal view of the teaching and learning process. Marcelo (2000) cited by Pizarro (2010) says that teachers have their own set of conceptions about how it is the teaching and the learning

process development. This shows that conceptions are somehow an intrinsic factor from teachers' mind and For Kwan (2000, cited by Devlin, 2006) conception of teaching is one where the teacher's job is conceived.

In this respect, Richards (2001 cited by Pizarro, 2010) considers that in order to have a clear idea of how teachers approach their work it is necessary to understand where the conceptions they operate come from. In addition, Pizarro (2010) affirms teachers' conceptions do not emerge by themselves, but from the influence of something else. According to this author, Brindley (1984) states that these conceptions, are generally built from their teaching practice or as Freeman (1992) cited by Pizarro, 2010) states from their experience as English students.

It can be deduced that conceptions play an important role in the teaching process and in the students' learning development. Teachers' conceptions are closely linked to teachers' strategies applied in their practices since they influence students' motivation and achievements (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development-OECD, 2009).

Richards and Lockhart (1994), cited by Pizarro, (2010) consider that teachers' conceptions are at the root of teachers' decisions and professional practice. According to these authors, conceptions constitute what is called "the teaching culture", in which the conceptions and the teachers' background are related to what teachers do in the classroom.

In addition, Pizarro (2010) citing Pajares (1992) mentions that some studies have shown that the conceptions of English teachers have more influence in the way they plan a lesson than their background knowledge which impact directly on the decisions they make in their teaching practices within the classroom.

## **Teachers' Conceptions**

The conceptions that teachers have about education, about the content delivered, curriculum characteristics and the conditions where they teach, all of this will carry them to understand, interpret and take decisions that may affect what they do on the pedagogical practice Peña and Morales (2006).

There are several conceptions that English teachers have about the teaching practice; concerning the rural context in an article written by Moreno (2012) who considers that in the rural area the conditions of the institutions do not allow the students to have the same opportunities that the urban students have but in an interview done by her to an in-service rural teacher. The in-service teacher interviewed mentions that to work in rural institutions is the best, teachers learn to love the school, the students, the parents no matter what the circumstances are, and “the goal is to help the rural students to fit in the society” Moreno (2012). Conversely, Anbukani & Padmini (2010) state that in-service English teachers in rural areas have a negative attitude towards their students. They also affirm through their study, that the in-service rural English teachers think that their students will never improve. Thus based on these teachers' conceptions, the students are not given enough opportunities to show or develop their potential.

## **Approaches about conceptions**

As previously seen, several views about conceptions are stated by different authors; along these lines, we will briefly describe some approaches about the teaching and learning since these approaches are necessary and fundamental to describe teachers' conceptions. The first approach is metacognition which is according to Hacker (1998) the "knowledge of one's own cognitive and affective processes and states as well as the ability to consciously and deliberately monitor and regulate those processes and states". It means that those processes are the knowledge we have about our own abilities and our own experiences which are then put into operation that take place in the teaching process.

The concept of metacognition was first proposed by (Flavell, 1985) (1970-1976) who defines it as "the knowledge about our own cognitive processes and other factors related to them"; it will contribute to the project on terms of identifying what those cognitive and affective processes are and how are they reflected on the teaching. The second approach is related to implicit theories which according to Pérez et al (2006, p. 79) are complex representations that show different aspects depending on the vision and the inquiry done. In addition, she explains that implicit theories are a mixture of implicit ideas and principles reflected on teacher's actions. It means that implicit theories are a set of principles that restricts our way of understanding and interpreting the teaching and learning situations we faced. The last but not the least important is the teacher's profile and practice analysis whose objectives according to Perez et al (2006 p. 56) are to analyze teachers' planning and teaching action through teachers' thoughts and reflections over their own practices.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section we will present significant research articles related to different aspects of our field of study, since it is necessary to give a context for the research, outline gaps on previous research, and in order to justify the research and show that even there are other studies related to this topic, this study is not a replication study of them. The following studies have shown important findings and have dealt with relevant issues concerning the conceptions within the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Farrell & Lim (2005) reported a study titled “*Conceptions of Grammar Teaching: A case study of Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices*”.... Its main goal was to investigate and compare the beliefs and actual classroom practices of two experienced English language teachers with regards to grammar teaching in a primary school in Singapore. Areas where practices converged with or diverged from beliefs about grammar teaching are examined and discussed as well as the factors that have influenced the teachers' actual classroom practices. The findings suggest that teachers do indeed have a set of complex belief systems that are sometimes not reflected in their classroom practices for various complicated reasons, some directly related to context of teaching.

Likewise, Johnson (1994) in a study done on a state from the U.S.A titled “*the emerging beliefs and instructional practices of pre-service English as a second language teachers*” whose main objective was to research on pre-service English as a second language (ESL) teachers' beliefs about second language teachers and second language teaching from narrative statements made about their beliefs, from teachers' intentionality to teach in a particular way, and from teachers' perceptions of their instructional practices during the practicum teaching experience. The findings indicate emerging beliefs based on



conflicting images of teachers and teaching that require access to alternative images of second language teachers and second language teaching if pre-service teachers' beliefs are to shift and mature beyond their limited apprenticeship of observation and, ultimately, reconstruct a model of action that is appropriate for effective second language instruction.

In addition to those studies, Helen Meyer in a study done about conceptions called "*Novice and Expert Teachers' Conceptions of Learners' Prior Knowledge*" (2004) had as its main objective to identify the conception of in-service teachers, expert and one year experience teachers about the concept of prior knowledge; the findings revealed that the novice teachers hold insufficient conceptions about prior knowledge and its role in instruction to implement effective teaching practices while experience teachers hold a complex concept of prior knowledge and use it to do effective tasks during instructions; another finding showed that teachers need to know more about the students' prior knowledge and draw upon students' life experiences and conditions.

In the same line, there is a rural study about conceptions named "*Rural Teacher's beliefs: a pending task for educational research*" by Vera et al (2010). Its main objective was to make hypothesis of the possible personal variables of the teacher that could explain the results of the learning process shown in the rural education. The article conclude that it is necessary to do research on the rural teacher's conceptions, from the educational perspective, because of the direct consequences on the learning process of the students because the majority of the studies have been done on the urban area including several universities and private high schools; that is why this study will be focused on the rural area. In that sense, the research on the rural area will allow to infer general problems related to academic performance evident on the rural area, which may be related to

teachers' conceptions that illustrate the low expectations towards the students or related to the traditional pedagogical models.

Additionally, Ramirez et al (2010) in a research about conceptions called "*Conceptions of Teaching Practice of the Students from 4th Semester from the Childhood Pedagogy Degree*"<sup>1</sup> its main objective was to know and describe the conceptions of pedagogical practice and how are they reflected on the speech and actions. It was possible to identify teacher's conceptions about their actions and how are they reflected on the teaching practice through different dimensions: procedural, disciplinary, ethical and political; It was found that the most important for the students is to provide knowledge regardless of the method; additionally, it was found that the students perceive the theory apart from the practice, it means that the practice is the application and reflection of theory; in addition, the students conceive the teaching as a way for maintaining and control the classroom discipline showing that the traditional models are still used in the postmodern era.

At this point, Vera et al (2010) mentions that it is important to make emphasize that there is a big interest to know about teacher's position against the processes of innovation and improvement of education which show weaknesses and they are very limited but it is crucial to determine what the conditions to achieve specific goals in education are.

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<sup>1</sup> Document originally from Spanish and translated into English

Several researchers have sought to identify and describe the teacher's conceptions and the results have aspects that sometimes have been ignored but they have had a close relationship with the learning process of the students and even more in the rural area which are very limited given that those studies have focused on the urban area, high school and higher education (Vera et al, 2010).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Research is to investigate about a problem of an area of knowledge with the purpose of establishing the facts that are affecting it. For a study done in the social science field, one of the most common methods of research is the case study since it is an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in the real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 2003).

### **Type of Study**

This study will be a qualitative descriptive interpretative case study, which is defined by Merriam (1988) as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit”. The study looks at two rural teachers’ conceptions and thus it is a multiple case study, defined as Stake (2000) as a research on a particular situation where the focus is on more than one individual, detailed view will be reported and conducted in a natural setting. Thus, this study will research on a social situation that could be affected by the reflection of teacher’s conceptions within a classroom.

According to Flyvbjerg (2006), a case study should be descriptive which is focused and detailed and questions about a phenomenon are carefully articulated or explanatory since it investigates phenomena characterized by formulated hypotheses that can be tested. Since our case study will strive to document the procedures of a particular event or events it should be considered a descriptive research in order to answer the questions presented.

## **Context**

This study will be conducted in a rural area located in southern Pereira. Two official institutions were selected for the study. For the purpose of maintaining their anonymity we will refer systematically to them as Cristobal Institution and Policarpa Institution during the whole report.

Both schools are rural public institutions and they are located in different areas of Pereira city. One of them is located in southern Pereira and the other is in southeast of the same city. **Cristobal** Institution has a commercial emphasis and was founded in 1976; the aim of the school is to provide secondary education to the students from this area, and the government provides all the resources required for the normal operation of the institution. It has a total of 16 classrooms distributed in two floors in a building. There is an among of twelve teachers for 6th to 11th grade and one of them, is in charge of the area of English for a defined quantity of 150 students.

**Policarpa** Institution has a productive emphasis intended to the production and distribution of agricultural products giving economical support to the institution. It was founded in 1986; it has a total of 12 classrooms which are distributed around the campus of the institution in isolated buildings. There are a total of 16 teachers, one of them, in charge of the area of English for a defined quantity of 280 students from 6th to 11th grade. The institution is mainly supported by the government and the students from this area are benefited with the education given on it.

The economy around both institutions is based on the agricultural field; the students' parents depend on the farm administration, coffee growing, cultivating food crops, just to name a few. For some students, receiving education turns very complicated since most of them live far away from the main road, limiting their access to any kind of transportation, in some cases, they should walk for more than 45 minutes to find a bus or a Jeep which is the principal mean of transportation of the area.

### **Setting**

In one hand, the learners from 6th to 11th grade (approximately 25 students per group) belonging to the **Cristobal** institution have English classes three hours a week, which are taught by two teachers who hold a B.A in English language from Universidad de Caldas.

On the other hand, learners from 6th to 11th grade (approximately 30 students per group) from the **Policarpa** institution attend classes 2 hours per week taught by a teacher who holds a Master in Early Childhood Education with an English specialization from the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira and she is in charge of the English area from all grades.

### **Participants**

The main participants of this research project will be randomly chosen so that the findings obtained could describe specific cases and avoiding possible alteration of the information with different sampling. We decided to take two in-service English teachers and 3 students per each institution as the sampling, understanding that a sample of a research “is the process of selecting units (e.g. people, organizations) from a population of interest, so that by studying the sample we may fairly generalize our results back to the

population from which they were chosen” (Trochim, 2006). We will observe the participants in the 11<sup>th</sup> grades since we consider of a greater importance to observe what is happening at the end of the middle academic education.

Mario (pseudonym used to protect his real name) from Cristobal institution has lived in Pereira for 15 years but he is originally from Cali. Currently, he is 32 years old and has been an EFL teacher for about 8 years after obtaining the B.A In English teaching. From the same institution, three students from **11<sup>th</sup> grade** were chosen (pseudonyms have been used to protect their names). They were called as Ana (16) and Lina (17) who have studied all their lives in the rural area, and Jhon (18) who has had the opportunity to study in both contexts (rural and urban).

The other teacher, Diana (pseudonym used to protect her real name) from Policarpa institution has lived all her life in Pereira, she is 27 years old and holds a M.A in Early Childhood Education, and has been a teacher for about 6 years, however, she was assigned the area of English for all the grades (6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grades) only two years ago. In the same line, three students from 11<sup>th</sup> grade have been randomly chosen (the researchers used pseudonyms to protect their names). They were systematically called as Paul (17), Caro and Paty (both 16).

### **Researchers' role**

Two observers will perform the observations of this study and will record them through field notes, the actions performed into the setting, in other words, the observations will be descriptive. In this study, the researchers will be complete observers which involve

the researchers without participating in the activities; it is considered as a “hidden role” considering Lang & Lang (1953) cited by Lindlof & Taylor (2002) who express that “the more remote from the action one can get, the more complete an observer one can be”.

The researchers will conduct approximately five observations per each institution and one interview per each participant. It is intended to interview the participants that may shed additional light on answers to the research questions. The interviews will be recorded (with the permission of the interviewee) and it will be asked to use direct quotes from their interviews; subsequently, the recordings will be transcribed so that the researchers can take it to the analysis session. It is important to highlight that the interviews will be carried out at the end of the academic year due to the lack of time to collect the data.

### **Data collection methods**

As any research it is necessary to collect data, Merriam (1998) explains that “any and all methods of gathering data from testing to interviewing can be used in a case study”. The methods used to gather data play an important role in the process of solving the research questions since those methods must provide the necessary information.

This qualitative descriptive interpretative case study will handle two relevant sources for collecting data, which are, observations and interviews. The main objective of collecting data using these two methods is to investigate the problem related to the teacher’s conceptions and how they are reflected on the classroom of the rural public institutions.



Observations, simply defined as the examination of behaviors and relevant facts and they are therefore recorded. In this study, the observations are intended to record those situations so that they help the phenomena to be analyzed.

Other data collection instrument is the interviews and it is intended to provide information about the participant teachers' conceptions. The main task is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say related to what they do in their teaching practices.

It is not our intention to draw generalizations from the findings of this particular case study, but simply to advance in the description of the selected problem, determining and describing those rural teachers' conceptions from their views and possibly reflected on their acts in their teaching practices. These methods mentioned before will help this study obtain certain results which will be analyzed in order to find answers to the questions established in this research as well as evidence of the conceptions used by two in-service teachers from the rural public institutions in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

### **Data analysis**

The analysis of the data involved reading and coding the different sources of evidence provided by the instruments applied (observations and interviews) in relation both with our research questions and with the concepts and ideas provided by the theoretical framework and the literature review about conceptions.

Next, patterns existing in those codes were identified and they provided us with the findings for this study.

We want to highlight that all this process of coding and pattern finding was performed by using the program QSR NVIVO® v.10, a qualitative data analysis software produced by QSR International and intended to help academic researchers organize and analyze unstructured data; this useful software allowed us to classify, sort and arrange information, and examine the relationships in data by summarizing it and providing links to the evidence codified. In short, the program facilitated immensely the process of data analysis as well as the writing of the report.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In order to complete the study in a proper manner, an oral permission was requested from the principals of the rural institutions. In addition, the in-service teachers in charge of the 11<sup>th</sup> grades were informed through a letter and they expressed interest for the study to be conducted.

Finally, the researchers were careful about protecting the identity of the participants as well as of the educational institutions by using pseudonyms while collecting data, considering information, and writing of the document.

## **FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS**

On this chapter, the results from analyzing data which are related to the conceptions of two rural participant teachers and their impact on the teaching practices are to be presented.

### **1. First conception: Rural students are less capable of learning than urban students**

After analyzing the data collected through the different instruments, it could be noticed that the teachers seemed to have a strong conception in relation with the natural capacities of the rural students for learning. The two teachers observed in this study appeared to think that rural students are less capable of learning than urban students.

One of the teachers mentions explicitly that the students do not acquire English as he would like to and the other teacher describes the students as “limited”, and supports her conception of the students’ inability for learning English in their problems even with Spanish.

This notion was also confirmed by the students themselves, who expressed in their interviews that they feel that their teachers underestimate their capacity and do not expect much from them.

Finally, this conception was also identified in the data collected during our own observations of the English classes, where it could be noticed that the tasks provided by the teacher were very simple and repetitive for the age and the level of the students and did not allow or expect them to be communicative.

A piece of evidence that supports this finding is the following excerpt from Mario<sup>2</sup>'s interview

***“¿Cómo la captan?, pues no de la manera que yo... uno espera, ¿sí o no? Pero uno trata pues de trabajar”.***

As it may be seen in the teacher's answer, he appears to be slightly frustrated or disappointed about the way in which students improve in the acquisition of the language. The teacher's acceptance and resignation to this state of things can be read in his following words: “pero uno trata de trabajar”.

Another piece of evidence that illustrates this conception is the following sample from Diana<sup>3</sup>:

***“Allá es un poco complicado, porque pues ni siquiera a veces emplean bien el Español a veces como obligarlos a emplear el idioma Inglés es difícil” (...)*** ***“porque ellos son muy limitados ¿cierto?”***

With this statement, the teacher clearly shows that she considers her students as “limited” people in terms of learning. This conception seems to arise from their linguistic difficulties in Spanish, since she mentions that fact as a reason for avoiding the use of English in the class.

It can be consider these excerpts to be very illustrative of the teachers' conception in relation with the capabilities of the rural students which is also perceived in the data

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonym used for teacher from Cristobal institution

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym used for teacher from Policarpa institution

coming from the students' interviews that corroborated that the students perceived in some degree that their teachers do not have high expectations about their academic achievements.

This is a piece of excerpt from the interview done to Paty<sup>4</sup>, one of Diana's students.

*“Piensan (the teachers) que no van a salir adelante (the students), van a salir a las fincas a trabajar, a coger café y todo... No tienen las mismas oportunidades.”*

In this piece of excerpt it can be noticed that the student is very conscious about the teacher's conception considering that they will not succeed in life, as she explicitly says: *“Piensan (the teachers) que no van a salir adelante (the students)”*. This can be one of the reasons why the level of exigency is not actually what it is expected by the students in accordance to the following excerpt.

A piece of evidence from Lina one of Mario's students:

*“Pues uno piensa como que es el nivel de exigencia, entonces yo creo que allá en el área rural como que no era tanta (...) es que la clase no se prestaba mucho para eso (speaking), porque la profesora no nos exigía.”*

It can be observed in this answer that Lina<sup>5</sup> considered the teacher's level of demand very low, particularly when compared with the level required at the urban area, since this student had the experience of living and studying in both environments.

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4 Pseudonym used for one of the students from Policarpa Institution

John<sup>6</sup> another Diana's student seems to have the same appreciation about the lack of academic exigency:

*“En cambio allí, en otros colegios que yo he estudiado, pues no, siempre como.... Siempre como cambiaban las cosas, son más exigentes y allá (rural institution) no se les exige casi a los estudiantes”.*

With this answer, John explained that in his learning experience as student that has passed both through a rural school and an urban school, he could notice that the level demanded in both learning scenarios was not the same, and that at the rural setting the level of demand is lower.

The evidence provided by these two students is particularly significant since both of them have had the opportunity to study in both contexts: rural and urban schools.

In relation with this finding, there is not much conclusive evidence coming from the observations because the only context in which the teachers were observed was the rural context and there is no evidence of the teachers' behavior in the urban context to compare with; thus we cannot draw conclusions on how is one behavior different from the other. However, it could be interpreted that the lack of exigency of the teachers could be due to their lack of confidence in their students' capabilities.

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonym used for one of the students from Cristobal institution.

<sup>6</sup> Pseudonym used for another student from Policarpa institution.

Extra evidence in relation with this lack of exigency of the teachers comes from the observations of the classes taught by the two participant teachers. As the data will show, the type of activities presented by the teachers and their level of difficulty can be considered as too low for the level of English mastery observed in the students.

Excerpt from first Mario's observation:

*“The teacher gives the students a worksheet with the information of the past perfect. They have to copy that information on their notebooks (the structure and general rules of this tense) and translate the examples to Spanish so that they learn the pattern of how the past perfect is formed and its meaning”.*

This excerpt illustrates the kind of activities performed in the class; as we can see from this description, the students are asked to copy and translate information from a worksheet regarding verbal conjugation and grammar structures. This activity shows a traditional grammar oriented model with no communicative goal, however, taking into account the evidence presented at the beginning of this finding where the teachers expressed their lack of confidence in their students' capacities, it might also be interpreted as the use of too simple activities in order to prevent potential frustration in students derived from too exigent tasks.



The same pattern can be observed in Mario's second observation from a listening exercise:

*“The teacher has brought a listening activity about an important hurricane in U.S. The students have to listen and organize a series of events from the listening in a chronological order. A few students are focused on the activity. They start enthusiastically but at the third playback, they seem to be tired and unmotivated. The teacher does not seem to realize it and plays the record a 4th and even a 5th time, while he is busy completing the exercise himself, although most students seem to have finished the activities already .”*

This excerpt is very similar to the one previously presented. Again, it can be seen that a potentially challenging task is changed into an excessively simple activity because of too many playbacks. It remains uncertain if the playbacks are due to considering that students are not capable of completing the activity in a lower number of times or to the fact that the teacher did not prepare his class properly.

In conclusion, it seems that both teachers observed employed repetitive and simple activities or tasks with the students such as filling gaps with the correct form of a verb, translation of full texts, sentence completion, ordering sentences from input heard after multiple playbacks (6 times, that could be considered an excessive number), or reproducing the model given by the teacher in fixed dialogues, etc. These types of activities did not lead to discussion or encourage students to go beyond to express themselves. They allowed little space for creativity and real communication, but also

eliminated the chance of making mistakes. It seems that the activities that Mario used are more a drilling about grammar or pronunciation than communicative activities with any significance for the students.

Although the data coming from the observations may be considered on itself weak, we consider that when seen in the light of the other evidenced presented, it contributes to give support to the finding.

Along the same line, different findings of existent research are connected to the finding previously described. Howard & Major, (N.D) and Anbukani & Padmini (2010) highlight the influence of the context in the teachers' conceptions, their theories and their practices within a classroom. Howard & Major (N.D pg. 3) state that the context will impact the way the teaching and learning occurs. Anbukani & Padmini, (2010), affirm that "rural English teachers underestimate their students' capabilities, complaining that these students (from rural institutions) would not do such tasks. Due to this attitude of the teachers, the students are not given enough opportunities to show or develop their potential".

There is not any doubt that the data collected corroborates what existent research has shown; the context where English is taught plays an essential role for determining the teachers' conceptions reflected on their teaching practices and there is a clear underestimation in the capacities of rural students by the teachers observed who consider that the students are not able to come up with complex tasks and thus do not offer them opportunities to demonstrate what they can do.

## **2. Second teachers' conception: The most important abilities to develop are the comprehension abilities.**

The data analyzed shows that both teachers agreed on their conception that receptive skills (reading and listening) are more important than the productive ones (speaking and writing).

This can be interpreted as a misunderstanding of the concept of communicative competence, since modern approaches to foreign language value equally the four skills and consider equally important to be able to produce and understand, especially since the skills hardly appear in isolation in real communicative situations. Focusing on particular skills rather than on others may result in developing an unbalanced speaker who has great strengths in some communicative abilities and important weaknesses in the others.

In some cases, teachers tend to give more relevance to those skills in which they feel more comfortable or stronger or as Freeman (1992) cited by Pizarro, 2010) states it comes from their experience as English students. In this sense, being aware of this particular conception may help teachers to avoid privileging some abilities and help them to form more communicatively competent students.

This finding is supported by the following excerpts from the evidence collected during the interviews from the teachers and the students.

On one hand, in Mario's interview, he demonstrates a preference for listening, since he considers this skill crucial for learning English. However he mentions that he tries to work with all the skills.

***“Uno trata pues de trabajar todas las habilidades comunicativas del Inglés, (...) para mí, yo creo que esa es primordial, uno saber escuchar. (Listening skill)”***

From this excerpt it can be seen that the teacher clearly explains that all the skills have relevance on learning English and that he tries to work all the skills, but it is also noticed that he has a strong conception about the special importance of the listening skill, because he believes that to know how to listen is crucial for learning another language.

On the other hand, Diana leans more on the side of reading. For her, the main goal to achieve with the students is the improvement of the reading skill. We can see her conception on the following sample:

***“De hecho siempre el objetivo de las clases, siempre fue mejorar la comprensión lectora, porque eso es lo que van a ver en las pruebas saber, entonces siempre se trabajó esa competencia”***

In this sample the teacher mentions clearly that the emphasis of the English classes is reading comprehension, considering that the National standardized test “*Pruebas Saber*” that students must take at the end of the Secondary Education Cycle is oriented towards the reading comprehension skill. What the teacher does it is known as a “negative washback”. As it will be remembered, it is the influence of tests on teaching; in other words, a teacher teaches a lesson depending on the test the students will take.

This teachers’ conception is also confirmed by the students in their interviews, where it is mentioned by some of the interviewed students that the principal focus of the classes is to develop the reading (Diana’s students) or the listening abilities (Mario’s students).

Piece of excerpt from Ana<sup>7</sup> one of Mario’s students:

*“Lo principal que él se enfocaba era la comprensión (...) Él pues de...  
De esas (skills) la que más trabajaba era el [sic] escucha”.*

In her answer, the student clearly highlights that the teacher focuses the classes on listening comprehension, which presents a correlation with the teachers’ conception and his speech. In the same way, Caro<sup>8</sup>’s answer, one of Diana’s students is aligned with her teacher’s conception.

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<sup>7</sup> Pseudonym used for one of the students from Cristobal institution.

<sup>8</sup> Pseudonym used for one of the students from Policarpa institution.

Excerpt from Caro's interview:

*“Pues la lectura, la utilizaba demasiado (...) Leer un texto, el contenido, que es lo que se trata, qué es lo que contiene (...)”.*

With this answer the student affirms that the classes were mainly oriented to the reading comprehension and being aware of certain parameters for reading comprehension such as reading the text, and understand it through skimming and scanning.

Although the participant teachers and the students interviewed agreed on what skill the classes are mainly focused on, during the observations there was no much evidence about it neither from Mario's classes nor from Diana's. Mario expresses that for him the crucial skill is listening, but, in the 5 lessons observed, **only once** did he bring a listening activity. On the other hand, Diana believes that the most important ability to develop is reading, but in 5 lessons observed she just gave one reading task to the students.

Most of the activities observed in the classes were grammar oriented, either translation of sentences from L2 to L1, gap filling exercises dealing with verbal tenses and similar exercises during the classes observed.

Unfortunately, there was not much evidence from listening exercises done by the teacher during 5 lessons observed, as it was mentioned above.

Next, the evidence coming from the observation of both teachers' classes will be presented:

Sample from Mario's second observation:

*“The teacher has brought a listening activity about an important hurricane in the U.S.A the students have to listen and organize a series of events from the listening in a chronological order. A few students are focused on the activity. At the beginning, they seem motivated but at the third playback, they seem to be tired and unmotivated. The teacher does not seem to realize it and plays the record a 4th and even a 5th time, while he is busy completing the exercise himself, although most students seem to have finished already.”*

In this sample, the listening activity presented does not seem to have a communicative goal; on the contrary, it is receptive, repetitive and seems to lose the students' attention.

Sample from Diana's fifth observation:

*“Teacher starts reading the article and asks students to underline unknown words; while the teacher is reading the article loudly, the students underline the words and search them on the dictionary... The document is divided in four paragraphs; the homework is to give a subtitle to each for next class.”*

In this excerpt, we can see a reading activity oriented to the learning of new vocabulary; once again, evidencing that the productive skills are being let aside. The focus of the lesson was merely receptive and neither in class nor out of class activities led to communication.

To conclude, this conception seems to be ingrained on the teachers' mind. The way in which teachers learned and the way they were taught influence greatly the way in which they teach as Diana considers the influence of her learning process determined the way she teaches, it is clearly evident when it was asked the following:

*-¿Cree usted que esa experiencia como estudiante de inglés ha influido un poco en su práctica docente?*

*- claro influye en mi práctica pedagógica porque para aprender Inglés me tocó pues que estudiar, entonces uno siempre trata de transmitirle eso a sus estudiantes.*

Such reality is highly evident on the existent research.

Pizarro (2010) cited by Hobbs (2011) affirms that teachers' conceptions do not emerge by themselves, but from the influence of something else and goes further when she says "Teachers tend to teach as they were taught" Hobbs (2011) quotes Pizarro's words ,explains that since teachers use their input learnt in the class (Chap. 8). Thus, the participant teachers' conception demonstrates that teachers tend to teach in the same way they learnt.



### 3. Divergences between discourse and practice

After analyzing the data collected in relation with our second research question: *How are the teachers' conceptions reflected on their teaching practice?*

It was found that there seems to be divergences between the teachers' discourse and their classroom practices.

Both participant teachers agreed that being an English teacher is more than simply "teach a specific" topic. In Teacher Diana's words: ***"Además de un facilitador, tendría que ser un gran motivador"***.

However, the divergence starts between what teachers say and what they really do in the classes, because that motivational role is not evidenced in the teaching practices observed in the classroom nor is it recognized by the students in their interviews.

Mario also talks about the role of the teacher as a motivator. We can see his worry about considering different types of learning styles in the following excerpt taken from his interview:

***"Hay unos que les gusta mucho por ejemplo el trabajo de guías, otros les gusta mucho el trabajo virtual, otros les gusta mucho la parte oral [...] Y uno trata de ser dinámico, yo trabajo mucho lo que es la Power Point [sic] y esas ayudas en sistema porque a ellos les gusta mucho trabajar en eso."***

From Mario's words, it could be interpreted that Mario is worried about the students' likes and interests and considers them in the planning of his classes.

Likewise, Diana affirms in her interview that she considers students' interests in the planning process.

Fragment from Diana's interview:

*“Conocer los intereses de los estudiantes para lograr motivarlos y ser generador de proyectos, porque a ellos eso los motiva [...] plantear la clase por proyectos, que... eh... como la función inicial no sea conocer el idioma Inglés, sino conocer un tema que a ellos les interese, y a través de él ya desarrollar toda la gramática y todo el idioma Inglés, eso les llama a ellos la atención”.*

We can notice that Diana expresses her interest in knowing her students' likes or centers of attention for creating new projects and thus enhancing students' motivation.

However, despite the teachers' words, that consideration for students' interests and learning styles is not evidenced either in the students' answers or in the data from the observations, showing a deep gap between the teachers' speech and their acts.

The following extract from Lina, one of Mario's students, gives evidence to the notion previously stated:

*“Como les dije ahora, él tenía un plan de aula y él se tenía que ir por el plan de aula, pero cuando sobraba tiempo o... pues la clase, pues ya veíamos todos los temas [...] jugamos STOP en inglés eh... también lotería en inglés que es muy dinámico, hacíamos un PLUS también entonces [...] eran extras, solamente cuando sobraba tiempo, cuando teníamos tiempo lo hacíamos del resto no”.*

Lina mentions that the activities to engage the students only took place when they had free time. Thus, when there was no extra time, based on what the student says, the classes appeared to be traditional and monotonous.

Likewise, Paul<sup>9</sup>, one of Diana's students, provided the following data:

- *¿Les pregunta el profesor de temas que les interesaría ver en la clase?”*
- *“Pues no, ella siempre llegaba con las copias, con la planeación de ella, nos decía que hoy íbamos a ver esto, nos traía las copias y a resolver”*

As it can be seen in the student's words, it could be said that the classes were oriented to the completion of worksheets.

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<sup>9</sup> Pseudonym used for one of the students from Policarpa Institution.

Likewise, Ana, in her interview says that the classes were always the same to the point that the students felt tired and bored with the monotony, and they asked the teacher to find another way of learning:

Excerpt from Ana's interview:

*“Nosotros le dijimos al profesor que nosotros ya estábamos cansados [...] pa’ [sic] que no todo fuera lo mismo, [...] que no todo fuera como siempre lo mismo, que siempre los temas en sí, en sí [Sic] No. Uno ve los temas pero referentes de otra forma, pa’ [Sic] que fuera más sencillo de aprender”.*

These answers illustrate the divergence from what the teachers affirm to do and what actually seems to happen in the class.

During our own observations we confirmed the students' words, because the majority of the classes were apparently monotonous. It was identified that students rarely stood up from their chairs or were exposed to communicative exercises. Most of the work was focused on doing grammar oriented exercises (e.g. filling gaps, reordering sentences, drilling, etc) as it can be seen in the following piece of data.:

Evidence from the third observation of Mario's classes:

*“The students have finished a reordering sentence exercise and the teacher checks the answers, he says: “Ok. Next page” and the students complain saying “queeee, ¿Uy vamos a trabajar mucho hoy?” The*

*teacher continues the class avoiding students' complain. Next exercise is about meaning. Students have some words and some sentences with the meaning of those words, but the words are in disorder. Students need to match the words with the meaning. The time class is over and the students give the folder used for the classes to the teacher and teacher says: "next class, next class". He means by saying this, that next class they will finish the exercise." But, he will not collect them today.*

During the analysis of this observation and taking into account students' complaining "*queeee, uy vamos a trabajar mucho hoy.*" "*The teacher continues the class avoiding students' complain*". It can be observed that the teacher does not try to implement a strategy that will call students' attention and engage them in the task. He continues with the same type of exercise during the whole lesson, and he even says that due to lack of time they will continue next class with the same exercise, "*the time class is over and the students give the folder used for the classes to the teacher and teacher says: "next class, next class". He means by saying this, that next class they will finish the exercise*". We can safely assume that he doesn't plan to bring a new type of exercise next class.

Aligned with the same teaching model, Diana seems to have the same style for teaching English, in contrast to what she expressed in her interview: "*A teacher should be a motivator*"

Excerpts from Diana's first and second observation:

*“The teacher asks the group to take out the worksheet, which is the document that the whole group uses to carry out the lessons [...] the worksheet contains exercises focused on present perfect, some of them are gap filling exercises, reordering sentences or sentence completion”.*  
*[Second observation] “The class is grammar oriented since it is focused on the worksheet given by the teacher. It is not comprehensive or productive”.*

With the information above taken from two observations, it can be noticed that Diana despite her discourse where she explicitly mentions that an English teacher must be a motivator and know her students' likes and preferences employs very traditional activities in the class, with no space for creativity or for a variety of learning styles (kinesthetic, aural, visual. etc) in which students could explore different ways for learning.

To conclude and understand this third finding, Pizarro (2010) citing Pajares (1992) mentions that some studies have shown that the conceptions of English teachers have influence in the way they plan a lesson. Taking into account this statement it can be deduced that the teachers' conceptions is not only what teachers say but what they do in their teaching practice but their speech is only that, it remains as the teachers' discourse, what really shows the conception is the practice.

#### **4. Low interest among rural students about English (Participant Teachers' Misappreciation of students' motivation)**

There is not any doubt that motivation is very important for learning a language. When students are motivated, they learn more; they do the activities autonomously, and are able to continue their education for many years. Such motivation could be intrinsically evident in students' mind but one of the most influential roles is the one played by the teachers, many educational researches have focused on the effectiveness of teachers' behavior to promote students' motivation. According to Brophy (1986) a teacher should guide, be the model, be enthusiastic, reinforce and induct interest so that students can behave positively when performing any task.

Having in mind the relevance of being motivated as a learner and the teachers' role in this concern, there is no question that the teachers' behavior in the classroom influences the students' learning process. In a study about motivation and effects of teachers' behavior done by Skinner and Belmont (1993), it was found that teachers' interactions with students predicted students' behavioral and emotional engagement in the classroom. In other words, teachers' motivation within the classroom has a powerful impact in students' learning process. The study also showed that when teachers are less involved with students, students not only miss the motivation but also notice the teachers' reluctance. This appreciation tends to shape both what teachers' belief from their students and what the students come to expect from their teachers.

In that sense, we found significant data related to this prompt and its consideration emerged after analyzing that data collected, it was found that the participant teachers have

the conception that the rural students do not appreciate learning a foreign language (in this case, English). In fact, both participant teachers clearly mentioned in their interviews that the students do not consider English as an important asset for their future. However, the students interviewed deny the teachers words; moreover, they see the potential of English for their future.

When the students were interviewed, they affirmed that they considered that English does play an important role for their future and they also manifested their conviction about the relevance of being communicatively competent in other language nowadays.

The most significant evidence for this finding was drawn from the observations that were carried out during the study. The researchers observed that although the activities could be considered monotonous and quite traditional, the students participated actively and showed motivation and enthusiasm.

A piece of evidence that supports Diana's conception about her students' motivation comes from her answers to the interview:

*- ¿Ven sus estudiantes la utilidad de este idioma o que lo van a utilizar en el futuro?*

*-Para nada... ellos... de hecho ellos dicen para qué vamos a aprender Inglés si no lo necesitamos, si no lo vamos a ver, si eso no se aplica. [...]  
igual en el colegio hay estudiantes que saben mucho, que les gusta, que están interesados, pero son pocos frente pues a la cantidad que están desmotivados.*



From Diana's answer, we can observe that she is convinced that the students do not perceive English as important for their future (job opportunities, travel experiences, learn about other cultures, etc). Her words: "Para nada" portrayed an absolute conviction about the issue discussed. She also affirms that even she can perceive there are some students that want to learn the language, it is not the same as the students that are demotivated "son pocos frente, pues a la cantidad que están desmotivados".

In the same line, Mario, the other participant teacher also affirmed that students do not consider English useful for their lives.

Fragment from Mario's interview:

*-¿Pues usted considera que a ellos les interesa el inglés, que le ven alguna utilidad, que lo van a utilizar en el futuro? ¿Cómo los ve usted?*

*-No, no, en esa parte si estamos mejor dicho mal, grave, empezando por los padres de familia, porque los mismos padres de familia se quejan que ¿por qué le hablamos en inglés a los estudiantes, que para qué, qué por qué?*

Considering his answer, it is evident that the teacher not only believed that his students lacked motivation but also that his work was not appreciated by the students' parents. We would like to highlight the particular selection of vocabulary done by the teacher when he said that "los padres de familia se quejan que ¿por qué le hablamos en inglés a los estudiantes, que para qué, que por qué?" We can see that the teacher feels that his work is not appreciated by the community.

As it can be observed, both participant teachers agreed on their conceptions about students' motivation. However, the evidence coming from the other data collection instruments, contradicted this belief. In the observations as well as in the students' interviews it can be noticed that students were not only interested but conscious of the importance that English might have for their future.

A piece of evidence from Paul's interview one of Diana's students:

*- ¿Y cree usted que es importante (el Inglés) para su vida?*

*- Ja!!! Claro... Saber otra... Otra lengua aparte del español porque igual...*

*O sea, ya ahora, lo que se está viendo es que ya se va a necesitar para todo el inglés...*

In this fragment of the interview done to the students it can be observed that the student thinks that the importance to learn a language goes beyond having a good grade, because as he said English is a language that we will need for everything in our lives.

In her interview, Lina one of Mario's students expressed the following:

*-Pues para lo que yo... Para la carrera que yo quiero si, es muy importante.*

As in the case of Paul, Lina is sure that she needs this language for her life. She has plans of continuing her education and is aware of the importance of English.

Another piece of evidence related to students' interest and motivation for participation in class activities comes from the observations done at both schools. We present next an excerpt from an observation of Cristobal institution:

Observation 5 from Cristobal Institution

*They seem motivated and the presentations were well prepared because some of them are dressed up with costumes... At the beginning of the presentations most of the students observe quietly, the other are studying their song. After some presentations, the whole class start to enjoy the activity, because all of them are paying attention to their classmates' presentations, even some of the students are singing their classmates' songs.*

Among several observations we wanted to mention the excerpt above, where you can clearly see that the students besides worrying about doing well, are motivated to sing the songs of their classmates, which shows that they really have a motivation to learn this language because they try to learn things that are not actually part of the task but that will help them to improve their English.

As it can be observed through all the information above the participant teachers have a conception about the students' motivation for learning the English language. Both teachers clearly stated that the students are not motivated to learn English even though other instruments said otherwise. This conception of the participant teachers is very important in the sense that it can influence the way they face the teaching practice in the rural context.

We think that if you believe that your work is not valued then obviously you will pay less attention to what you are doing. This can be interpreted as the Pygmalion effect which means that the conception you have about someone can influence in the performance of that person (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). In this case the Participant Teachers' Misappreciation of students' motivation can influence the way they are teaching English.

## PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Colombia has a significant part of its population dispersed in the rural area. Being able to provide educational opportunities for the students in this situation is of the utmost importance for the development of the country and the improvement of the living conditions of that population.

The Colombian Ministry of Education, through the document *Lineamientos Curriculares Para el Area de Idiomas Extranjeros en la Educación Básica y Media*<sup>10</sup> (2007) recommend that the teacher training programs not only work on the professional development but also on the conceptions that teachers have about the teaching of English (MEN, 2006) since it will be reflected on how English is taught.

The information collected and the existent research revealed that the teachers' conceptions in a rural institution play an important role in their teaching practices. It was showed that the rural teachers tend to "underestimate" the students' capacities; in consequence, the level of exigency is sacrificed. Hence, English teachers should reflect on the way they teach and consider optimistically the natural capacities of students to learn a language.

For this reason, the findings of this research have important pedagogical implications to be considered.

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<sup>10</sup> Guidelines for the teaching of English in elementary and secondary schools designed and published by the MEN.

First of all, since the conceptions of the teachers about their practice have such a great impact on the activities they do with students and the educational opportunities they provide them, teacher training programs should promote deep reflection in pre-service teachers so that they can explore what they think, what they know and what they really do in the classroom in order to ensure the best educational experience for their students.

On the other hand, our research shows that the teachers observed present oversimplified activities to their students, due to the fact that they have a particular conception about their possibilities. This will impact negatively their development of communicative competence. That is why exploring in depth our conceptions about the students we work with may help to avoid those biases we may have and provide a better learning experience for our learners.

Finally, we consider of great importance observing what we do and having a peer observing us so they can provide accurate feedback on the idoneity of what is being done in the class in terms of students' reactions, the type of activities or tasks applied in the practices and the way they are posed, etc. In other words, to observe and identify factors that are not perceived when teaching takes place, so that we can gain new ideas and perspectives about teaching as well as to improve the teaching ability.

## **RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS**

We consider this research area of great interest and relevance in order to impact the teaching practices that are being applied in the field of teaching English as a foreign language.

Considering the influence that our conceptions have in our teaching practices and the scarcity of studies on this area and particularly in the field of teaching English as a foreign language, new investigations should be carried out in order to help transform the educational system.

Since our research only observed the teachers in the rural area, we consider of great interest to be able to observe teachers who labor in both contexts, rural and urban, in order to investigate if the methodologies employed vary according to the context they are in or not.

It could also be useful to investigate about the conceptions of the new teachers who are graduating from teachers training programs in order to see if those programs will be successful in impacting the methodologies that are being employed in the field.

Finally, it would be interesting to explore the results in National standardized test (*PRUEBAS SABER*) of students from the rural when compared to students from similar socio economic status in the urban area in order to assess if there are significant differences among the two populations and evaluate the impact that the methodologies employed by the teachers might have on those results.

## CONCLUSIONS

As a first conclusion, our study showed us that it is really necessary to reflect and explore more the conceptions that the teachers have in relation with the teaching due to the influence that conceptions have in their teaching practices and therefore, their impact in the teaching process where the students are exposed.

As a second conclusion, we could see that the participant teacher's discourse and the way they think seem to be divergent when compared with what they actually do on their teaching practices.

Third, the teachers studied seem to underestimate the students' capacities so that their potential is not developed despite the fact that students are aware of that perspective that teachers have about them which could lead to a disinterested attitude towards learning a foreign language.

And finally, it is really necessary to have a good lesson planning and to make a rigorous assessment with the aim of assuring the effectiveness of the development in all the skills since despite the teachers' discourse, the classes were very monotonous and did not lead to communication.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### Interview done to the two teachers participants

1. ¿Podría describir lo que es un profesor? (Para usted, qué es un profesor de inglés y cuál es su papel en este contexto en el que estamos?)
2. Para usted, ¿cuáles son las características de un buen maestro de inglés? (¿Qué tipo de conocimientos y habilidades cree que son importantes en un maestro de inglés?)
3. ¿Considera usted que el rol del profesor de inglés en el área rural es el mismo que en el área urbana? (¿Porqué?)
4. ¿Cómo fue su experiencia como estudiante de una segunda lengua? ¿cree que esa experiencia ha influido en su práctica docente? (durante todo el tiempo en que fue expuesto al lenguaje)
5. ¿Cree que los estudiantes de una escuela rural y una escuela urbana tienen las mismas oportunidades en términos de aprendizaje? (¿Porqué?)\*
6. ¿Cómo son sus estudiantes? (¿Considera que les interesa el inglés, que le ven utilidad, que lo van a utilizar en el futuro?)
7. ¿Cómo cree usted que los estudiantes perciben lo que enseña y la manera en que lo hace? (Nos referimos a la metodología con la que enseña, en qué forma está influida por los estudiantes, por el contexto)
8. ¿En qué tipo de actividad grupal o individual cree usted los estudiantes se desempeñan mejor? ¿Por qué? (¿La tiene en cuenta para su clase?)\*

9. Ver si es necesaria esta pregunta: ¿Trata ud de incluir la(s) habilidad(es) que mencionó en todas sus clases? ¿Cómo lo hace?
10. ¿Existen políticas o prácticas escolares que influyen en cómo el Inglés se enseña en su escuela?
11. ¿Considera ud que planear las clases es importante para el desarrollo del curso? (¿Porqué?)
12. ¿Cómo planea ud sus clases? (¿Qué elementos cree ud que influyen en la planeación de su clase? ¿Varía el tipo de actividades?)
13. ¿Trata ud de utilizar en sus clases el equipo con que la institución cuenta? (grabadoras, video beam, sala de computadores?\* (Por qué?)
14. Para ud ¿Qué habilidad(es) es más importante que sus estudiantes desarrollen (¿Por qué?)
15. ¿Cree usted que dar retroalimentación a los estudiantes de su desempeño en una actividad es importante? ¿Por qué?\* ¿Como lo hace? (tareas orales y escritas)
16. ¿Qué uso hace del Inglés en las clase?

## **Appendix 2**

### **Interview done to the students participants**

1. Cuéntenos un poco sobre su experiencia de aprender inglés (¿Cómo lo ha aprendido, cómo le ha parecido y donde?)
2. Cree usted que es importante para su vida? (Por qué?)
3. ¿Cómo cree usted que debe ser un profesor de Inglés? (¿Qué cree usted que un profesor de Inglés debe tener siempre en sus clases?)
4. ¿Ha observado usted si el profesor le dedica el mismo tiempo a las cuatro habilidades? (speaking, writing, reading, listening)

5. ¿El profesor les explica qué actividades van a hacer durante el periodo, la semana o la clase? (¿Les explica el por qué lo hace?)
  
6. ¿Cómo les corrige el profesor las actividades o tareas realizadas durante o fuera de clase? (¿Les dice simplemente la nota, les hace comentarios, les comenta cuáles son las cosas que deben mejorar y cuales son sus fortalezas?)
  
7. ¿Les habla el profesor sobre la importancia del Inglés o sobre lo que puede representar para su futuro?
  
8. ¿Les pregunta el profesor de temas que les interesaría ver en clase? Sí sí, para que cree que es útil? Si no, cree que sería útil?
  
9. ¿Qué uso hace el profesor del Inglés en clase? (¿Para que lo utiliza? ¿Cuando lo utiliza?)
  
10. ¿Utiliza el profesor diferentes instrumentos para dar la clase?(grabadoras, video beam, sala de computadores) que actividades se realizan con estos?
  
11. ¿Cuál habilidad cree usted que es más importante? ¿Cuál trabaja más el profesor en las clases?
  
12. ¿Qué tipo de actividades hacen en clase, individuales y/o grupales? Cómo se siente en cada una usted? (En cuál aprende mejor?)
  
13. ¿Cómo piensa usted que es aprender en una área rural en comparación con una urbana?