

**Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions on Governmental Suggested English Curriculum in Rural Areas**  
*Percepciones de docentes en formación del currículo sugerido de inglés gubernamental en áreas rurales*

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## **Abstract**

The analysis of different perceptions allows us to build a general viewpoint to find common factors on a specific topic. This study focuses on pre-service teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation and scope of the Suggested English Curriculum (SEC) in rural areas of Boyacá, Colombia. A qualitative case study was conducted through narrative interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and a focus group. Several points of view were collected and classified into three categories explored from a narrow perspective to generate a broader view of the object of the study along with its respective exploration and analysis. Overall, pre-service teachers perceive it is difficult to achieve most of the SEC objectives in rural areas, given its characteristics and the high expectations from the Colombian Ministry of National Education (MEN due to its acronym in Spanish). Finally, the authors explore pedagogical implications and determine the path for further research.

*Key words:* pre-service teachers' perceptions, Suggested English Curriculum, rural areas

## **Resumen**

El análisis de varias percepciones permite construir una visión general para encontrar factores en común sobre un tema específico. Este estudio se enfoca en las percepciones de los docentes practicantes respecto a la implementación y el alcance del currículo sugerido de inglés (CSI) en áreas rurales de Boyacá, Colombia. Se realizó un estudio de caso narrativo cualitativo mediante la aplicación de instrumentos tales como entrevistas narrativas, cuestionarios abiertos y grupos focales. Se recopilaron y clasificaron varios puntos de vista en tres categorías exploradas desde una perspectiva particular a una general, a fin de generar una visión más amplia acerca del objeto de estudio, junto con su respectiva exploración y análisis. En general, los practicantes de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera perciben que es difícil lograr la mayoría de los objetivos del CSI en áreas rurales dadas sus características y las altas expectativas del MEN. Finalmente, los autores exploran las implicaciones pedagógicas y determinan el camino para futuras investigaciones.

*Palabras clave:* áreas rurales, percepciones de los practicantes, currículo sugerido de inglés

## Introduction

This report on a research project was conducted in the Bilingual Education Undergraduate Program at a private university, and it had the purpose of inquiring about pre-service teachers' perceptions relating to the effectiveness of the Suggested English Curriculum (SEC) in rural schools in Boyacá, Colombia. In the past couple of years, the Ministry of National Education (MEN due to its acronym in Spanish) launched an educational program called *Colombia Bilingüe* [Bilingual Colombia], which proposes the SEC to foster English competences in a foreign language in the national education system. Pre-service teachers' perceptions about the SEC might be crucial to identify possible inconsistencies and subsequently, propose strategies "to enhance the performance of the entire education system" (Echazarra & Radinger, 2019, p. 8). According to Moreno and Pájaro (2018), "the educational community and the government constantly make efforts to improve educational practices; however, these efforts do not always yield the expected results" (p. 27). This statement is relevant for our study since it established the necessity of recognizing the deficiencies of the SEC in the educational field.

The SEC is implemented in some rural schools in Boyacá, Colombia. We, as pre-service teachers, had the experience to carry out our practicum in Boyacá. We noticed that our perception regarding the SEC might help to identify possible inadequacies during the teaching and learning process of English as a foreign language. Some of the issues found in this research were the lack of resources, the high expectations regarding the English level, and the teacher's lack of training in rural schools. This arose our interest to inquire about the perceptions other pre-service teachers had about SEC. Thereby, we conducted a case study, in which we were able to collect and provide better understanding of the participants' experience based on their practicum in rural schools. Hence, we explored pre-service teachers' perceptions framed within a qualitative research paradigm to recognize issues with the implementation of SEC in rural schools.

To fully understand the scope of this study, it is essential to contextualize the particularities of rural education in Boyacá, Colombia. First, we explored the characteristics and possible setbacks in rural areas. Second, we defined perception and the importance of pre-service teachers' perceptions. Third, we described the

characteristics of the SEC. Simultaneously, we determined the relationship among them for the specific purposes of this investigation. For this study, we proposed the following research question and main objective.

### **Research Question**

What are the pre-service teachers' perceptions concerning the SEC, its implementation, and the scope of the proposed objectives in rural schools in Boyacá?

### **Main Objective**

To explore the perceptions of pre-service teachers on the implementation and the scope of the proposed objectives of the SEC within rural school in Boyacá.

### **Specific Objective**

To examine and describe pre-service teachers' perceptions on the implementation of the SEC.

## **Literature Review**

### **Rural Areas**

Rural areas are geographical zones belonging to a nation with specific characteristics that differentiate them from

big cities. *Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas* [The National Administrative Department of Statistics] (2010) established that rural areas are characterized by the dispersed arrangement of houses and agricultural holdings existing within it. It does not generally have the same public service infrastructure as urban areas. Results from a study carried out by the MEN and the Government of Colombia demonstrated that even the quality of education in rural areas is lower than in urban areas (2018). Moreover, schools located in rural areas suffer social imbalances that may particularly affect teaching and learning processes. Bonilla and Cruz (2013) affirmed that as “rural language contexts do not offer appropriate conditions for learning a second language, rural teachers face different professional challenges and have to cope with different needs” (p. 31). Pre-service teachers in rural areas must adapt to the context and are inevitably forced to develop the same skills as regular rural teachers. According to Brown (as cited in Ramos & Aguirre, 2016) “a rural teacher has to be multitasking to teach multiple grades, plan extracurricular activities and fit in the educational environment” (p. 212). This leads us to think that the performance of the teacher would also be unintentionally

influenced by the context. Based on the previous information, it is possible to conclude that the specific characteristics of rural areas and rural schools might impact the teacher's performance, the educational processes, and consequently the quality of education.

### **Perceptions**

The definition of perception will be reviewed along with the importance of studying teachers' perceptions regarding the suggested curriculum. Perception has sparked the interest of scholars throughout history. An accepted definition suitable for the interest of this study could be that of Johnson (as cited in Naidoo & Kapofu, 2020), who stated that perception "may be defined as the comprehension of our environment created from information acquired by way of our senses" (p. 2). According to this definition, we can infer that perception is an individual sensorial and cognitive process through which human beings interpret the world. In addition, Elnaga (2012) mentioned that perceptions are important because they are individual and shape human behavior. In this regard, perceptions grade the way we interact with others and our relationship with the world. Following these ideas, we can conclude that

perceptions are the way people understand the world, and this is enriching for this study because perceptions establish the way we behave and interact.

Regarding the field of education, the participants' perceptions toward the system is also worthy of analysis. Evidence suggests that teachers are one of the most important influences at school on student's academic performance (Hattie, 2003; Rowe, 2003). Likewise, Can and Cagiltay (2006) stated that investigating pre-service teachers' perceptions "will enable us to look ahead, in order to predict the wants and needs of the teaching population in the near future" (p. 311). This is an important finding, in respect to this study, because it is possible to imply that the analysis of pre-service teachers' perceptions may lead to the improvement of the learning process. Thus, we focused on pre-service teachers because they will be active participants in education and potential enhancers of the Colombian education system in the future.

### **Suggested English Curriculum**

It is crucial to explore the Suggested English Curriculum (SEC) that the Colombian national government launched to meet new standards in a foreign language. As a first instance, we must clarify the term

curriculum and then explore the nature of the SEC. According to Wiles and Bondi (as cited in Wiles, 2008) “a curriculum represents a set of desired goals or values that are activated through a development process and culminate in successful learning experiences for students” (p. 2). Since 1994, the National General Law of Education in Colombia has recognized the importance of learning a foreign language, and consequently, the MEN has implemented programs to foster foreign language acquisition and enhance the competences already acquired. One strategy to work on the goal of becoming a bilingual country is the SEC, launched in 2016 as a tool for the pedagogical process of strengthening the development of student’s competences in a foreign language. By exploring the nature of the SEC we could embrace its purpose.

Furthermore, it was essential to comprehend the important role the SEC has had in the educational field since it was designed to develop sociolinguistic competences in the English language. According to the MEN (2016), the SEC proposes four pillars which promote better development of English as a foreign language. The first one is *transversality*, which is divided into four components: sustainability, health, democracy, and globalization. The second is the *socio-*

*cultural* pillar that brings a significant experience for students taking into account the role of social interactions. The third one is *diversity*, where students learn throughout the implementation of different forms of teaching and assessment. The last one, *equity*, guarantees the right to education with the same conditions to all the English learners in Colombia. These themes are the axis of the SEC to facilitate the acquisition of the needed competencies to communicate in English.

Additionally, this governmental proposal expresses that the different institutions and teachers may adapt, modify, or adjust the SEC based on their socioeconomic and cultural necessities. According to Ordoñez (2011), a curriculum “focuses on authenticity and its application depends completely on the teachers’ ability to analyze their own and others’ communicative experiences in order to design class performances” (p. 150). In the same way, the MEN (2016) stated that institutions and professors can make their own changes in the SEC, facilitating a suitable appropriation of the Colombian context (p. 26). This means that institutions and teachers are responsible for modifying and adapting the SEC bearing in mind the context and its necessities. Following these ideas, every educational institution is in

charge of establishing proper strategies to implement the SEC.

### **Research Design**

In this section, we present the type of study, setting, population, and instruments selected to gather and analyze the information. To begin, we considered some authors that guided the research design of this study along with the main characteristics we took into account to develop the investigation such as situating this study as a qualitative research.

The qualitative approach adopted in this paper follows a case study method to collect data and a horizontal/comparative transverse analysis to interpret it. Specifically, we chose to understand the participants' perceptions from their lived experiences in their teaching practicum. Connelly and Clandinin (as cited in Creswell, 2012) declared that “researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people’s lives, and write narratives of individual experiences” (p. 502). By using this type of research, we were able to interpret the relevant information that the participants offered us regarding the implementation of the suggested English

curriculum (SEC) in rural areas. Likewise, Bolivar (2012) said that all qualitative research is indeed narrative research. This study is, therefore, qualitative as it focuses on the experiences of pre-service teachers’ perceptions concerning the implementation of the SEC in rural schools.

Additionally, Kelchtermans (as cited in Bolívar, 2012) established that a horizontal/comparative transverse analysis is interpretive because it provides credibility and confirmability of the data collected. This analysis focuses on similar patterns, experiences, and events that are interrelated in a sequence of themes or times. Thus, this research accomplishes a collective case study method to acquire accurate comprehension of the target phenomenon. Stake (as cited in Creswell, 2012) affirmed that a collective case study involves the study of more than one case to “investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (p. 45). This method assumed that investigating a number of cases led us to better understanding and theorizing the phenomenon (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). The steps to carry out this study included deciding on a focus for study and delimiting the participants, developing the data collection instruments, applying them, and analyzing

the data. In short, the chosen approach and methodology were the most convenient way to explore the relevant information of the pre-service teachers' perceptions about the SEC and meet the objectives of this study.

### **Context and Participants**

A program agreement between a private university and public school in Boyacá from 2019 to 2020 allowed eight pre-service teachers to carry out their practicum within this context. The public school where the practicums were carried out is a non-bilingual school located in the western province of Boyacá, Colombia. It has several rural branches, but they do not have the same resources. Some of the branches have computers, televisions, and speakers, but the others barely have whiteboards and old learning books. In addition, some of the branches do not have a permanent English teacher. The teachers are expected to adopt the SEC in their teaching practices.

Based on the experiences that we had, as pre-service teachers and as researchers in this rural school in Boyacá, we decided to carry out this investigation with eight other undergraduate students who were majoring in a bilingual education program at a private

university. Two of the pre-service teachers did an internship in 2019, and the remaining five applied for an internship in 2020. We chose to include participants who did their practicum in 2019 and 2020 in order to hear the perceptions from the first and second groups of pre-service teachers who had initiated the agreement between the university and school. By selecting participants from two semesters, we were able to connect the differences and similarities in their perceptions. All the participants did their practices in different rural branches, which also helped us have a broader view of their perceptions regarding the general situation. To select the participants, we determined that practicum experiences might provide relevant information in regard to the topic. Then, pre-service teachers from the same program agreement were identified, contacted, and invited to participate through a letter of consent. All of the participants met the requirements, which were to be a pre-service teacher implementing the SEC at the public rural school in Boyacá.

According to the selected population, this inquiry takes into account ethical considerations. Participants were provided with informed consent about the privacy terms, their anonymity, and the purpose of



the present study. Moreover, the participants were free to ask us questions or express their concerns. The data collected on their perceptions was legally protected by article 20 of the Political Constitution of Colombia that guarantees the right to freedom of expression. Participants were informed about the entire research process along with the ethical considerations.

### **Instruments**

To gather the necessary data for this study, we worked with three qualitative instruments: a narrative interview, an open questionnaire, and a focus group. These instruments were applied through digital platforms due to the global health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic during the process of this research. According to Artioli, Cosentino, Taffurelli, Ferri, and Foà (2019), “The narrative interviews can therefore help professionals to better understand people’s experiences and behaviors and get closer to represent the context and the integrity of people’s lives compared to other quantitative means of research” (p. 8). In addition, the authors stated that “narrative interviews are not concerned with the absolute truth of facts, but rather with the meaning of lived

experiences.” (p. 8). In addition, Savva (2014) mentioned that qualitative data collection provides a rich and detailed description of meaning, thereby, providing a deeper understanding of human behavior. Hence, we decided to use a narrative interview to collect the pre-service teachers’ perceptions regarding their experience. We utilized a text and voice messaging application named WhatsApp (WhatsApp Inc., 2011, version 2.3.6), which specializes in cross-platform messaging. Irvine, Drew, and Sainsbury (as cited in Mueller, 2019) said that “Interviews can be conducted electronically via social media platforms” (p. 3). The second instrument was an online open questionnaire through another platform called Typeform, which specializes in online form building and online surveys. This platform enabled us to formulate more focalized questions and get more detailed information. Accordingly, Burns (1999) established that open questionnaires can be used to explore informed opinions and beliefs and provide opportunities for richer and more detailed, but unforeseen, responses. The last instrument, as stated by Acocella (2012), is an “informal discussion among a group of people (...) in the presence of a moderator who leads the discussion” (p. 1126). In this sense, the online focus groups provided us

with the opportunity to further explore the participants' perceptions and create a space for the participants to socialize their experiences. Participants joined two virtual sessions in a platform called Zoom, through which they interacted in real life to lead a group discussion and exchanged their perceptions while moderated by a researcher. These instruments allowed us to collect the data to identify, describe, analyze, and determine relevant pre-service teacher perceptions concerning the SEC in the context of rural schools in Boyacá.

The process to gather relevant information regarding the focus of this study followed three steps. First, the object of study, the population, and the context were defined. The participants were selected according to their experience and willingness to participate. Participants' anonymity was protected by using letters to represent them (i.e., Participant A (PA), Participant B (PB)) along with the specification of the type of instrument applied (i.e., Narrative Interview (NI), Open Questionnaire (OP), Focus Group (FG)). Second, the first data collection instrument was designed, implemented, reflected upon, improved, and applied once more. Third, the findings from the first instrument helped us design the second instrument, which who further explore the

participants' perceptions. It is worth noting that the participants could express themselves in Spanish, their mother tongue, if they wished. Therefore, some of the data was translated to English.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The data revealed significant similarities regarding pre-service teachers' perceptions, which we were able to divide into three categories. The use of three different instruments allowed triangulation to take place because each one of them generated results that could corroborate, support, and enrich the study. Accordingly, we will describe and analyze the collected data in this section.

After identifying the most important aspects, we decided to classify the perceptions into three categories. The first category covers everything related to the perception that pre-service teachers have about the rural area where the SEC is implemented. The second category considers their perceptions about the implementation of the SEC. The third category is about their perception of their performance when implementing the SEC in rural areas. It is expected that, after having characterized the

three dimensions of the pre-service teachers' perceptions, a broader vision and relevant understanding of the achievement of the objective of this study can be obtained.

Research Question	Categories
What are the pre-service teachers' perceptions concerning the SEC, its implementation, and the scope of the proposed objectives in rural schools in Boyacá?	Rural Schools Challenges: Multigrade Students, Lack of Resources, and Lack of Teachers' Training
	Shortcomings in the SEC Implementation in Rural Contexts
	How the SEC Implementation Affects the Pre-service Teachers' Performance

### Rural Schools Challenges: Multigrade Students, Lack of Resources, and Lack of Teachers' Training

In the first category, participants expressed common disagreements in regard to the how the rural context could influence the teaching process. The rural school where the practicums took place follows a pedagogical model named “escuela nueva” [the new school]. According to the MEN

(n.d.), it is an education model that allows rural multigrade, heterogeneity of ages and cultural origins of urban-marginal school students to learn from one, two, or even three teachers. Regarding the conditions of “escuela nueva”, Participant D mentioned the following:

*era todo un reto un salón donde ya hay como 30 chicos máximo 40.*

[It was a challenge to work in a classroom with more than 30 students from different courses] (NI).

Participant D expressed that the large class size was challenging to manage. According to Olaleye, Ajayi, Oyebola, and Ajayi (2017), “the teacher cannot effectively take place in an overcrowded situation because there is a limit to the number of students a teacher can manage effectively well” (p. 117). Participant D further stated:

*El colegio es muy enfático con el tema de la inclusión, entonces la idea es incorporar chicos con discapacidades de aprendizaje, (...) yo no estoy de acuerdo con ese procedimiento porque ellos manejan un proceso de aprendizaje totalmente distinto a los demás.*

[The school is very emphatic about incorporating children with special needs into

a traditional classroom. I do not agree with that because they handle a different learning process.] (NI)

Based on Participant D's perception, we can interpret that there is an inclusion situation in an overcrowded environment that seems to be affecting the pre-service teachers' teaching process, as well as other teachers too. Zigmond (2003) stated that the general education classroom provides students with disabilities along with students without disabilities access to content that does not take into account special needs. Furthermore, teachers may not be professionally prepared to teach special children. Therefore, it is a challenge for regular teachers to adapt the class to students with particular necessities. This contribution is quite important for the current inclusion measures that are being accepted by most institutions. Teachers cannot have an overload of students with different learning levels. At this point, it would be worth asking if multigrade and inclusion is appropriate in institutions that are not prepared for this.

In addition, the educational environment should be predisposed to an effective education process. The lack of resources is another aspect regarding the context pointed out by our participants. Mupa and Chinooneka (2015) stated that "Paucity

of material resources is a factor that contributes to ineffective teaching" (p. 125). The participants discussed different situations related to lack of resources, and they perceived that not everyone has the technological tools to continue advancing in their English process. Participant F and Participant B mentioned the following:

The materials they use are guides and books from 2009 or 2010 in which the methodology is very traditional. (NI)

despite having some materials and audiovisual resources, teachers are not trained to implement them in their classes. (FG)

From these particular perceptions, two interesting issues come to light: the lack of resources at rural schools along with the lack of teachers' preparation to innovate in class. In this way, it is possible to indicate that not only materials play an important role but also the teachers' preparation to implement them is imperative. The government and institutions must therefore take into account teachers' ability and training to include new academic technologies and consequently provide an effective educational environment. Chingos and West (as cited in Mupa & Chinooneka,

2015) stated that “the quality of learning materials such as textbooks is an important ingredient in improving instructions” (p. 125). Another dimension that relates to materials and teacher preparation is pre-service teachers’ adaptation to the context. Participant C declared that she felt the impact of her performance when working in rural areas due to the difference in terms of education, the teaching method, the environment, and even the change in temperature. This perception indicated that in addition to the internal affairs of the school, the particularities of the context also affect pre-service teachers. In this case, the pre-service teachers came from urban areas and had to adapt to rural schools. As Participant A expressed:

*nosotros en la carrera no estamos siendo capacitados para enfrentarnos con desafíos en la ruralidad*

[we have not been trained to face challenges in rural areas.] (FG)

To summarize, the pre-service teachers’ perceptions demonstrated that it is challenging to adapt to the rural context, unmanageable overcrowded classrooms, and lack of resources.

## **Shortcomings in the SEC Implementation in Rural Contexts**

The perception pre-service teachers have about implementing the SEC is linked to the context. The SEC does not appear to be considering the isolation these rural schools face in terms of exposure to foreign cultures. Furthermore, there is little motivation to teach foreign language content if the students do not see the value in learning it. In addition, learning results cannot be measured equally. To illustrate this aspect, Participant B and Participant A stated that:

the curriculum is only in charge of demanding a level without taking into account the real context. (FG)

the SEC requires a level of English that students do not meet. (OQ)

Salazar and Espejo (2017) identified that “English standards themselves seem to be decontextualized from the reality of some Colombian schools; English language is barely used for authentic purposes in rural areas” (p. 4). The participants stated two key points, which are the distance that English has from the rural context and the decontextualized nature of the SEC.

Additionally, another Participant H declared that:

students were not exposed to the target language due to the necessity in their context to learn their mother tongue (Spanish). (OQ)

The lack of exposure to the target language might affect students' motivation for learning a foreign language, even more so when the native language is not fully understood. Richards and Schmidt (2010) asserted that motivation is “the combination of learners' attitudes, desires, and willingness to expend effort in order to learn a second language (...) motivation is generally considered to be one of the primary causes of success and failure in language learning” (pp. 377-378). Following these ideas, it is acceptable to state that a student cannot be motivated to learn English when he or she is so far from experiencing it, and, consequently, the learning objectives will not be reached.

Another major issue is that rural schools are evaluated under the same parameters as urban schools. The Ministry of National Education (MEN) in Colombia adopted the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to determine specific goals in learning a foreign language for the different populations of the

educational system (MEN, 2006). This has created an inequality in evaluation given that proficiency tests are based on the CEFR. It is difficult to obtain the desired results in an environment that lacks exposure to the target language, among other issues like lack of resources and preparedness mentioned in the previous category.

Participant G considered that the SEC and its use of standardized tests have inconsistencies because:

when it comes to being evaluated by the standardized tests, it only evaluates two skills; reading and grammar. (NI)

Based on this perception, we can infer that the SEC does not consider the particular context and the complexities of target language exposure in the learning process. In this sense, it would be difficult to meet the standards set by the SEC in isolated rural areas. In addition, Participant C affirmed that:

SEC expectations are too high to be accomplished. (NI)

Macías (2013) stated that “Colombian society has had high expectations of foreign language teachers in connection to their students' competence and

performance in the target language” (pp. 100-101). Poor test results show that English language teaching in the country is not yielding the expected outcomes. Thus, basing student results on government tests can be a risk for rural institutions since they may divert their concern towards the teachers’ process and ignore the shortcomings of the exam. In accordance, Hattie (2012) mentioned that “high, challenging, and appropriate expectations are among the most powerful influences in enhancing student achievement” (p. 4). Subsequently, it would be proper not to avoid but to reestablish the expectations.

In regard to the frequency and amount of classes, the educational process can be effective if it is constant. Scott (2003) recommended more than two classes per week. In this study, the general perception that pre-service teachers have is the lack of time hinders the learning process. The MEN (2016) recommends 200 hours to reach level A2 in seventh and eighth grade. Level B1 requires 375 hours of class time for ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades (p. 32). However, Participant F, Participant G, and Participant H emphasized that the school only provided one to three hours of English class per week, which they believed limited the possibility of reaching the proposed learning objective.

According to the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education (ICFES due to its acronym in Spanish), rural students average at an A1 to A2 (beginner) level on standardized proficiency tests. Clemencia (as cited in Cárdenas, 2006) argued that “Voices from academic communities have expressed that because of contextual reasons, the Common European Framework (CEF) does ‘not suit the Colombian reality’” (para. 9). Once again, the problem of evaluating with the Common European Framework becomes evident since it requires a certain number of hours that cannot be reached in these rural schools. Likewise, Martinez (2019) indicated that the rural context is marginalized because the MEN developed the SEC to be implemented in urban schools. Based on this, it is clear that the characteristics of rural areas are not being considered by the SEC. According to the previous stance, it is possible to affirm that the SEC presents obstacles regarding decontextualization, the distance between English and the rural area, the high expectations, the time factor, and the marginality of the context.

## How SEC Implementation Affects the Pre-service teachers' Performance

The perception that participants have about their performance when applying the curriculum can guide us in identifying the present issues that determine the effectiveness of the SEC in rural areas. According to Sherer (as cited in Sulaiman, 2015), within the educational setting, teachers are responsible not only for transmitting knowledge but also playing an important role in treating their students equally despite their differences.

The pre-service teachers mentioned appreciations for their performance, which is worth analyzing as it provides a broader view of possible deficiencies in applying the SEC in rural areas. The SEC is meant to be adaptable given the necessities of the context. This adaptation depends on teachers and could be positively or negatively affected by them. For example, Participant B mentioned that:

the training and perspective of each teacher can greatly influence the adaptation of the SEC. (NI)

However, some of the pre-service teachers expressed that even if they did their best to follow the SEC, it was impossible to

maintain linearity in terms of the curriculum. As an example, Participant B manifested that:

*El SEC tiene algunos desfases, hay contenidos que se repiten y aunque ayuda a reforzar, no está previsto como una linealidad.*

[The SEC has some gaps. There are contents that are repeated and although that helps strengthen them, it is not intended to be linear.] (NI)

Given that the curriculum and SEC seem disconnected, the pre-service teachers used teaching strategies to help students reach significant goals. Long, Ming, and Chen (2013) stated that if teachers are not aware of students learning motivation, then it will be very difficult for them to complete teaching tasks that will help students reach their potential. Along the same lines, Participant A affirmed the following:

*me gustaba implementar, innovar y crear material para que los niños se sintieran motivados con las clases, y lograr un buen ambiente y un buen proceso de aprendizaje para ello.*

[I liked to innovate and create material to motivate the students, as well as achieve an adequate environment and a good learning process for them.] (NI)



Based on the excerpt above, we can interpret that Participant A is using autonomous strategies to achieve objectives through innovative and motivational exercises. Although teachers are not achieving the goals required by the MEN, their innovation, adaptation to the environment, and the implementation of realistic objectives are motivating contributions for the learning process.

In addition, most participants chose to apply contents to fill previous gaps and reinforce skills. Participant B stated:

From my autonomy, I tried to fill gaps from elementary level focusing a lot on reinforcing grammar. (NI)

Likewise, Participant E and Participant F mentioned that innovative material and technological resources can allow students to learn dynamically. According to these perceptions, it is necessary to identify the resources that enhance students' motivation. Sulaiman (2015) said that "when learners feel that their instructor is profoundly putting resources into their prosperity, they normally react with more inspiration to learn" (p. 112). For instance, Participant D proposed carrying out educational activities such as English Day or utilizing film making, where students could

explore the importance of learning a foreign language. Participant D is not only proposing a strategy but also raising awareness of the students' lack of motivation to learn a foreign language. In the same way, Participant C expressed that:

*la experiencia de ir y poder darles una nueva visión de lo que era el idioma al inglés, que lo pudieran amar un poquito más, y que se pudieran interesar, ya era muy gratificante.*

[It was a very rewarding experience to go and be able to give students a new vision of what the English language is and make them love it a little more and make them feel more interested.] (NI)

These perceptions indicate that there was a great effort made by the pre-service teachers to give meaning to the target language by contextualizing it. Thus, positive teachers' perceptions promote better mutual understanding and help increase the opportunities of genuine teacher-student interaction (Xu, 2013). In the same way, teachers may get a rewarding feeling when students accomplish the expected goals. Based on the pre-service teachers' perceptions, it was possible to deduce that, even though their performance was appropriate, it could have been negatively

influenced by other factors rather than their teaching skills.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, this case study allowed us to understand the connection between the role of being a pre-service teacher, working in rural areas, and the implementation and scope of the proposed objectives in the SEC. First, we found that the pre-service teachers perceive that the lack of resources and teacher training for multigrade classes are not appropriate to accomplish the significant language goals suggested by the SEC in rural areas. Second, the curriculum ignored the real environment where it was implemented, which can reduce the effectiveness of standardized tests and overall teacher performance. Third, pre-service teacher performance may be affected by the high expectations of the SEC in rural areas. Hence, all of the pre-service teachers ultimately coincided upon the fact that the SEC is not evaluating what it requires. These results might contribute to the educational field by identifying the deficiencies that pre-service teachers experience during the application of the Suggested English Curriculum in rural schools. Based on the findings, teachers and the educational institutions might promote

and provide strategies bearing in mind the rural conditions for the teaching and learning English process.

### **Pedagogical Implications and Further Research**

The results of this study displayed different dimensions that may be negatively impacting the Colombian education system. As reported by the MEN, the national bilingual program aims to achieve citizens' capability to communicate in English in such a way that they can contribute to the global economy and the culture of the country. All the findings display the huge gap between the MEN's elevated expectations, the SEC design, and the reality of the rural context. Thus, the following questions are proposed for further research:

- What would be the most appropriate educational model for rural schools in Colombia?
- To what extent is inclusion favorable in traditional schools?

Zigmond (2003) stated that teachers cannot focus extensively on each student if different educational activities are

implemented for different students at the same time. In addition, if the government provides updated technological materials, it is important to consider teacher preparation when including them in the classroom. In this sense, it would be worth asking if it is a risk to leave teachers the responsibility to adjust a curriculum that is not realistic and to what extent are teachers in Colombia prepared to adapt these guidelines regardless of the context. Setting high expectations for the ICFES tests, as well as the development and implementation of SEC, should be analyzed in order to propose reformulation. Finally, issues such as isolation, lack of resources, and low foreign language learning motivation should be taken into account in order to promote strategies that encourage interest, learning, and language awareness.

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