

Colombia's nationwide EFL policy and the construction of equity in policy documents

Daniel Correa Villegas, University of Nottingham

The Colombia Bilingüe (Colombia Bilingual)¹ program was introduced by the Ministry of Education (MEN) in 2004 with aims of increasing the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at primary, secondary and tertiary education level. However, this program has failed to reach its set language goals and has come under strong criticism. Scholars suggest that Colombia Bilingual has not only been unsuccessful in improving English skills but has resulted in unequal practices by favoring language instrumentation, marketization of language services and stratification of people. This paper offers a Critical Discourse Analysis of seven policy papers set forward by the government that have introduced and given continuation to this program. I will argue that the construction of equity in Colombia's EFL policy is framed within a limited interpretation that has mainly given priority to improving Colombia's international competitiveness while overlooking other important elements of equity such as autonomy, identity, and equality. I will conclude that the presence of social efficiency messages in the policy documents substantiates previous studies' criticism and highlights the importance of policy documents towards reaching more equitable language learning practices.

Keywords: EFL policy, equity, Colombia Bilingual, policy papers

1 English language learning in Colombia

In Colombia, learning a foreign language is established as a general duty in the General Education Law (115 of 1994, 2013); students from primary and secondary schools must develop the skills to speak, read and write in at least one foreign language. Moreover, in Colombia, the government must set the technical curricular and pedagogical norms for preschool, elementary and high school education (Article 5 of Law 715, 2001). Under this context, the government has been central in the development and introduction of language education in the country.

Without exception, the most studied foreign language in Colombia is English. Its study began as early as the 1940s when the Colombo-American and Colombian-British centers were created through the cooperation with American and British governments. Nonetheless, Colombia's English level remains low in comparison to the world and other neighboring countries. English First's (2017) English Proficiency Index (EPI), which is widely publicated, places Colombia

Corresponding author's email: dcorreavi@gmail.com

ISSN: 1457-9863

Publisher: Centre for Applied Language Studies

University of Jyväskylä

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<http://apples.jyu.fi>

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17011/apples/urn.201708083437>

under the “Very Low Proficiency” level. According to this measurement, Colombia ranks tenth lowest amongst fourteen Latin-American countries. More noticeably, the country has dropped eight places in its world ranking since 2011 when the Index was published for the first time. According to English First, the low results are explained by the time allocated to English, and the amount of available resources; on average, Colombians receive a total of 7.35 years of English instruction during their formal education, two years less than Latin America’s top performer (Argentina). Moreover, unequal distributions of resources, allows private school students to outperform those in public institutions (OECD, 2015). The low rankings and inequity urged the Colombian government to set forward the first nationwide English Program: Colombia Bilingual (CB) that aimed at raising the time and resources allocated to English studies across both private and public institutions.

2 Colombia Bilingual Program

In 2005, the Ministry of Education (MEN) announced the CB program in the “Colombia Bilingual 2004–2019” policy paper (Mineducacion, 2016f). In this document, the MEN announced the program’s general guidelines and set official nationwide English acquisition goals:

- High school graduates would reach intermediate level (B1)² by 2019
- English teachers would hold at least a high intermediate level (B2) by 2019
- Bachelor degree graduates in English would reach a high intermediate level (B2 + C1) by 2019 (ibid, p.7).

During the following years, the MEN’s strategy consisted mainly in the creation of national standards, the introduction of new English language assessments, and a series of teacher development programs.

In terms of standardization, the “Basic Standards of Foreign Language Skills: English” was salient (Mineducacion, 2016e). This document developed in conjunction with the British Council in 2006, established international guidelines in terms of content and skills attainment. Most importantly, the booklet introduced the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) described as a fundamental tool to compare students’ level of English, domestically and internationally.

In terms of assessment, the MEN worked closely with the British Council to align the ICFES (high school graduate) and ECAES (bachelor degree graduates) assessment with the CEFR standards. Likewise, the Cambridge’s Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) and First Cambridge Exam (FCE) were rolled out to gauge English teachers’ language skills and teaching capabilities.

Additionally, the MEN negotiated teacher immersion programs abroad with various institutions (mainly in The United States). Similarly, native English teachers from The United States were hired for one-year periods to teach alongside local teachers. Lastly, semi-sponsored language courses that allow teachers to enroll in English courses at a discount were made available.

Despite the efforts, by 2013 only 2% of high school graduates and 35% of teachers had accomplished a B1 level (Correa, 2015). Under these circumstances, the MEN had to postpone the 2019 language acquisition goals to 2025. In addition, the MEN focused its strategy on teacher development; suggesting that teachers’

poor language level was the main reason for students' continuous low performance (Mineducación 2016d). Therefore, the MEN in collaboration with the British Council initiated a Teacher development program called "Waterfall scheme". This program aimed at taking 3000 English teachers of a total of 15000, from A2 level to B1 level.

In parallel, the MEN developed an English curriculum for school levels 6-11, introduced additional English language assessments at levels 5 (primary school leavers) and 9 (middle school leavers), and raised the standards for accreditation of language institutions.

3 Criticism

Despite the impetus that the CB program has brought to EFL in Colombia, the original English language attainment levels originally set by the MEN in 2005 are far from being reached. Moreover, researchers and practitioners have progressively voiced numerous difficulties with the program. One of the main contributors to the field, Usma (2009) first argues that the program's failure is mainly due to its reliance on external processes and standards. For example, local EFL professionals such as Cardenas (2006), argue that the country is not ready to introduce CEFR standards because they do not adapt to Colombian students who have not had the same exposure to the target language as European students (for whom the standards were originally created). Similarly, González Moncada (2009) mentions that the process of standards selection was done quite deliberately, without explicit documentation proving why this model was superior for Colombian context over other available local (for example: COFE) and external standards (for example: Canadian Language Benchmarks, the ESL standards for PRE -K-12 students).

Similarly, the presence of the British Council in Colombia and its strong partnership with the MEN has been questioned. The implementation of pre-established pedagogical models for teacher training such as the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), and First Cambridge English (FCE) have been strongly contended; local scholars argue that the poor test results from teachers and students, precisely have to do with the fact that the materials are standardized foreign documents that don't adapt to local circumstances. Therefore, the production of local tests and pedagogical materials has been proposed as a means to improve testing strategies and distribute the economic benefits of EFL services amongst a larger local population (Usma, 2009).

Others argue that the articulation of CB program as a strategy to join the "knowledge economy" has resulted in a situation where indigenous languages (spoken by approximately 10% of the population) have been undervalued and deemed to disappear, as they do not have a significant economic value (de Mejía, 2006; González Moncada, 2009; Jackson, 1995;). Moreover, the policy seems to support patterns of stratification among Spanish speakers; students of the private sector have wider access to English through truly bilingual schools:

A typical Colombian citizen may say that English instruction in government schools is quite poor, and that learning of the language takes place in private schools, language centers (González Moncada, 2010, p. 7).

Finally, CB program has been criticized from economic perspectives. Sánchez and Obando (2008) suggest that the MEN has overemphasized the importance of the teachers' English levels and pedagogical skills while failing to improve other more basic necessities such as infrastructure and materials. Many teachers agree that the average time allotted to English in the public school system is not enough to meet the desired skill levels within the set timeframes.

The practical shortages and criticism of the CB program highlight possible equitable deficiencies. It seems that the Colombian government has resolved to further English education with limited notice for matters of language autonomy of minority populations, equal distribution of resources for learners, and a preference of the external over local identities. Another salient characteristic is apparent centralized decision-making; in Colombia, the CB program has been introduced with a series of policy documents which have had the function of theoretically and legally setting the practical goals and strategies of the program. However, to what extent the local EFL community (teachers, scholars, and students) have been involved in their negotiation and creation is not clear. It seems as though they have functioned primarily as a medium to inform policy decisions rather than collaboratively reach policy design. Historically, policy documents have been a very powerful tool as they can serve to inform and influence populations (Young & Quinn, 2002). Examining the documents and determining the Colombian government's interpretation of equity will help to understand if some of the practical deficiencies of Colombia's EFL program are also present at semiotic level. Drawing connections between the practical outcomes of a policy and the initial documents could highlight the importance of the policy formation process itself.

This study will examine policy documents in an attempt to answer the following question:

1. What is the interpretation of equity within the Colombia Bilingual policy documents that have introduced and given continuation to the program?
2. Are there similarities between the interpretation of equity in the policy documents and the CB program?

4 The construction of educational equity in EFL Policies

This section will describe the meaning of equity in language education policy from a theoretical and historical point of view. Doing so will allow us to reach an informed understanding of Colombia's own interpretation of equity within its CB policy documents.

A general definition of equity is "justice according to natural law or right; specifically: freedom from bias or favoritism" (Merriam-Webster n.d). In educational policy, equity has been interpreted as issues of distribution of material and human resources; who gets what, when and how. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) suggest that equity can be viewed in a weak sense, as simply implying formal access to provisions, while stronger notions of equity do not just consider problems of access but also analyze outcomes by looking deeper into the social and economic conditions that allow people's capacity to benefit from state provisions. In Language policy, strong views of equity are those that consider autonomy in terms of language choice, matters of identity such as

character and personality, and the avoidance of economic inequality based on such choices (ibid 2010; Ricento 2000).

However, Stone (2001, as cited in Rizvi and Lingard, 2010) warns that equity is a term that is continuously being redefined and verbalized by governments and policymakers. Similarly, Singer (2002) suggests that under the context of a globalized world, the understanding of ethical values as a whole are being refined and negotiated globally. As a result, policymakers have to ensemble a range of values that adapt both to international and local imperatives. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) explain this process through the concept of Value Trade-Off (VTO). VTO suggests that equity along with other values such as liberty, security, efficiency, and community, are constantly being assembled, organized and articulated in education policy. Policymakers have to prioritize and re-articulate some values in order to reach their goals.

4.1 Post colonialism

The Value Trade-Off can be illustrated during the 1960s when first world countries were attempting to modernize post-colonial countries. During this time, language policy was viewed purely as a tool to broader economic purposes in ex-colonial countries:

If citizens could speak the same modernized language...both unity and economic development, keyed to western technology, financing, and expertise, were more likely (Fishman, 1968, as cited in Ricento, 2010, p.12).

Many language policy researchers at that time (Rubin, 1971; Jernudd & Das Gupta, 1971; Kloss 1968; Fishman, 1968, in Ricento 2000) argued that language was ideologically neutral. In other words, language policy did not interfere with matters of equity. However, the focus was on the development of language models that aggressively attempted to have non-native populations acquire the target "higher" language. During this period, EFL professionals developed corpora and designed language implementation models that sought to expand the use of target language and culture. Some critics maintained that English teaching and curricula served primarily as unfair conducts to transfers specific cultural norms and values through classroom practices:

Institutions provided procedures through which human conduct is patterned, compelled to go, in grooves deemed desirable by society. And this trick is performed by making these grooves appear to the individuals as the only possible ones (Berger, 1963, as cited in Vaidehi, 1965, p. 25).

Scholars today agree that postcolonial EFL policy period was a time when the broader yet essential, issues of equity such as language choice, identity, and structures of inequality, were blurred by a focus on state-building (Ricento, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This period is described as a moment when interventionist actions of foreign powers to modernize ex-colonial countries set language policy that was ahistorical (disconnected from the surrounding socioeconomic realities). The purpose of education was to transfer knowledge to students in order to adjust them to desirable states of mind (Freire, 1968).

4.2 *Social efficiency*

More recently, economic growth has evolved from state-building to developing the citizen's repertoire of knowledge. Nowadays, education is not viewed as a purpose in itself but rather working in favor of a country's economy. Human capital is the source of economically valuable innovations. The amount and quality of research and publishing in academic journals are common measures of potentially valuable ideas (Sokolov, 2016). David Labaree (2003, as cited in Rizvi and Lingard, 2010) describes this system as social efficiency, a model that seeks to educate individuals in a cost-effective manner to further economic goals.

In this context, English has been regarded as the key that unlocks the doors to the world's academic wealth (Kuzhabekova, 2016). Organizations such as the OECD, have strongly endorsed these views and suggest that learning English can lead to greater economic opportunities and higher standards of living. English is almost regarded as a "meta value" to which other social objectives are incorporated.

Consequently, governments from around the world pressured to increase their societies knowledge of English have secured assistance from expert private service providers. The privatization of English has not only been favored by the urgency to learn it but also by a categorical change in societies' value system. By giving priority to the liberty of choice free, market economies have been set up around the world and translated educational policies into service provision. Equity is now largely influenced by the forces of the market where the idea of contesting choice over greater equality are not entertained. The below statement communicated by the British Council (BC) over 60 years ago exemplifies the initial prominence given to privatization and marketization of language teaching around the world:

A new career service is needed, to lay the foundations of a world-language and culture based on our own ... an army of linguistic missionaries ... a central office in London, from which teachers radiate all over the world (Routh, 1941, as cited in Ricento, 2000, p. 91).

Since the 1980s, policy researchers started to problematize the status quo. Cobarrubias (1983, as cited in Ricento, 2000) was one of the first to suggest that language policy was intrusive to people's identity. More recently, scholars such as Pennycook (1994) and Phillipson (2009) have raised the importance of building on linguistic diversity and granting linguistic human rights by focusing their studies on the relationships between language policies and the detrimental effects on local languages, culture, and economy. Many scholars have also advised that English is being used to legitimate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources between groups defined on the basis of language (see e.g. Giroux 1988; Ricento 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas 2016). Similarly, others contend that in the attempt to keep up with the global economy, many countries have adopted EFL policies that have resulted in the stratification of language learners that disfavor low-income populations and indigenous groups (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Overall, the examined historical theory has highlighted connections between economic pursuits and the formulation of EFL policies around the world at different periods. Formerly, during the postcolonial period, the teaching of

English as a foreign language was influenced by state-building pursuits, while more recently social efficiency models have been dominant. More importantly, both periods have favored market forces and interpreted equity through a weak lens concerned with formal access provision of English. Consequently, it has favored the dispersion of English in an economical manner by allowing its instrumentation and marketization, all while largely downplaying other elements of equity.

Drawing on the previous theoretical framework and the CB program's historical background it seems that at on a practical level the Colombian government has endorsed a weaker perspective of equity. The characteristic problematics of social efficiency models such as the instrumentation and marketization of English are the same issues highlighted by critics to explain the program's limited success. In the following sections, it will be determined whether the CB policy documents endorse stronger or weaker interpretations of equity.

5 Methodology

The analysis of policy documents is important, as they are the interim stage in which ideas that influence more practical instances of EFL (such as curriculum and classroom practices) are initially documented (Mahboob & Tilakaratna, 2012). Tollefson (1991), states that language policies are political documents that could serve the interests of dominant groups in maintaining their power and prestige. In the case of English, which has been acclaimed as global lingua franca, it is increasingly important to identify and acknowledge the power imbalances that emerge as English is given a privileged position.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements or moments. This entails that CDA does not analyze discourse on its own but is rather transdisciplinary by allowing relating discourses between disciplines, theories, and frameworks (Fairclough 2013). It is critical as it attempts to solve a social wrong by analyzing its sources, causes, and resistances. CDA focuses on shifts in the structuring of language style that can constitute as textual evidence of a social change.

Fairclough (2013) explains CDA through a four-step process:

1. Focus on a social problem.
2. Construct objects of research by judging which research questions can deepen the understanding of the issue.
3. Select and analyze the texts linguistically and interdiscursively. Linguistic analysis tries to define how vocabulary and grammar create meaning. Some questions that the researchers may ask themselves are: What experiential, relational or expressive value do words have? What type of verb tenses are used? Are sentences positive or negative? Are nominalizations of verbs used? Is there a declarative or imperative mode in the grammar structure? The interdiscursive analysis attempts to determine how two or more texts operate as a genre. What is the relationship between texts? To what extent are they similar or different? Do the texts enable the maintenance of a particular discourse? This stage connects the formal

features of text with the analyst's own beliefs, assumptions and experiences to unveil meaning.

4. Identify possible ways past the obstacles by transitioning from negative critique to possible suggestions that may alleviate the issue.

Based on Fairclough's four step process, this paper will consider seven CB policy documents authored by the Colombian government as objects of research. The selection of documents was led by the definition of what constitutes as a policy document; a policy document should describe a state problem and recommend a particular course of action (Global Public Policy Institute, n.d). In this way, the seven policy papers were selected by giving priority to those documents that through their discourse enacted a plan of action to tackle the state problem: Colombia's low English proficiency level. Moreover, policy documents from different time periods were selected in an effort to establish interdiscursive analysis between documents. The seven policy papers included in this study are from three governmental sources (see Appendix 1 for list of policy documents and available links to full documents).

5.1 *The Ministry of Education*

This study will analyze five documents published by the MEN:

- *National Bilingual Project 2004–2019*: This is the initial document that was published by the MEN and introduced the CB program process and goals.
- *The Pedagogical Principles and Guidelines Suggested English Curriculum: 6th to 11th grades 2006*: This is one of the main working documents for the CB policy. It has functioned as a guide for local education authorities and schools.
- The National Education Plans (EP) for two presidential periods: *Education Plan 2010–2014: Education is quality* and the *Education Plan 2014–2018: Colombia, the most educated in 2025*. EPs are published each presidential period and include the general education plans for the country. More recently, they have included a chapter dedicated exclusively to the Colombia Bilingual Program.
- *Special alliance of cooperation #127 of 2012 signed between the Ministry of Education and The British Council – The British Council and the business foundation for education (ExE)*: This document constitutes an important alliance signed between the MEN and The British Council. It establishes the nature of the agreement, the goals, and responsibilities of each entity.

5.2 *The Government*

This study will analyze two documents published by the government:

- *National Development Plan 2010–2014: Prosperity for all*, this document contains the economic and educational goals and strategy set out by the government led by Alvaro Uribe.
- *National Development Plan 2014–2018: All for a new country*, this document contains the current economic and educational goals and strategy, planned by the leading government of Juan Manuel Santos.

For the purpose of this study, the analysis will be focused exclusively on the sections of the above documents that are related to the CB program. On occasions, other sections may be referenced in hopes of giving a broader and more rational interpretation of discourses.

5.3 Colombia's Legal Framework

Furthermore, given the contextual relativity of equity, it is necessary to also consider contextual values that could help negotiate the meaning of educational equity locally. In this way, Colombia's Legal framework is used as a reference point throughout the analysis. Special attention is given to Articles 1 and 67 on equity and education of the 1991 National Constitution, and the 1994 General Education Law 115.

The papers are analyzed linguistically, and interdiscursively. Connections are made between documents, the theoretical EFL policy framework, and Colombia's own EFL history. Each of the below sections will attend specific problematics. The conclusion section will complete the CDA by offering a wider interpretation of the challenges and suggest possible alternatives to overcome such obstacles.

6 Discussion

This section explores the existence of social efficiency discourses in the policy papers. Each subchapter will ask specific questions to determine the presence of a problematic such as English instrumentation or marketization. The questions are:

1. Are foreign languages pursued for humanistic, cognitive, cultural or instrumental reasons?
2. Do the policy papers interpret bilingualism as being able to communicate in English?
3. How do international organizations influence Colombia's EFL policy?
4. Does the alliance with the BC endorse messages of marketization?

Moreover, the analysis of the documents resulted in further inquiries as documents were reread and interdiscursively compared.

6.1 English – A requirement for global competence

The first question examined in this study seeks to understand the purpose of learning English: are foreign languages pursued for humanistic, cognitive, cultural or instrumental reasons? After a careful examination of the policy papers, considerable messages supporting instrumental views of the English language were identified. Below are several extracts published by the MEN between 2004 and 2014 that support this perspective:

- a) "English as a Foreign Language: a strategy for competitiveness" (Mineducacion, 2016f, p.2)
- b) "Being bilingual is essential in the globalized world" (Mineducacion, 2016e, p.5)
- c) "The country has led efforts to transform education so as to produce answers ... of a globalized society. To this end ... the government launched the program of bilingualism" (Mineducacion, 2016d, p.82)

- d) “The English curriculum suggested is a clear commitment that seeks to create educational equality ... that allows them to communicate and promote their human and professional capacities” (Mineducacion, 2016a, p.7)

Extract a), which appears as a subheading of the CB initial introduction document, is a standalone statement that sets a tone of instrumentation as it suggests that English is a means to competitiveness. Likewise, on page four, English is ascribed as the answer to competitiveness along with the use of Information Technologies and workplace skills. English is mentioned again on page six as a comparative advantage that must be accomplished by all.

Extracts b) and c) build a dominant construal of globalization as categorically true. This is a typical construction of current democratic economies to place globalization as a catalyzer to describe persuasive solutions (Fairclough, 2013). The words “essential” and “answers” mean that “Bilingualism” leads to results. In the second extract “Being bilingual” is placed as a state (verb nominalization), while in the third extract “bilingualism” is the response to the unquestionable globalized world. The contextualization of education within globalization and its necessary transformation in the third sentence belong to the dominant social belief that educational systems must align its contents to the requirements of the global economy.

Extract d) encapsulates the interpretation of equity as a question of access. It presents the Curriculum as an instrument that will guarantee access to English, while automatically stating that the user will, therefore, be able to communicate successfully. The shortsightedness of this statement resonates with Rizvi and Lingards’ (2010) critique, where a restricted interpretation of equity posits excessive emphasis on the matter of *access* while undermining other important matters such as where and when the learner will engage in learning.

6.2 *Ethnic languages are not in the bilingual equation*

The next question was whether the policy papers interpreted bilingualism as being able to communicate in English. The relationships between English and bilingualism was first analyzed in the 2014–2018 EP “Colombia the most educated in 2025”. In this document, English is initially described as one of the basic competencies sought to be developed in school education (Mineducacion, 2016c). Next, English appears repetitively under the CB policy section. Below are the first two extracts that mention English:

- e) “Colombia ... to respond to the demand for these sectors [tourism, the supply of goods and services] faces an undeniable reality: the vast majority of Colombians cannot communicate in English”. (Mineducacion, 2016c, p.65)
- f) “The ‘Bilingual Colombia 2014–2018’ program has been structured with the purpose of strengthening learning English in primary and secondary education.” (Mineducacion, 2016c, p.66)

The above extracts illustrate that the general linguistic goal of the MEN is to expand the knowledge of English language. Similar deductions were held by Sánchez and Obando (2008) whose critical discourse analysis of the “2006 Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages: English” suggested that English encapsulates the ideal foreign language and is therefore equated with

Bilingualism. The analysis of other documents such as the MENs 'Pedagogical Principals and Guidelines Suggested for English Curriculum', furthered the link between bilingualism and English:

- g) "English is the foreign language to which the national government has committed in order to have a bilingual country that is competitive at an international level" (Mineducacion, 2016a, p. 15).
- h) "The English teaching process must be complemented through the comparison with Spanish, such that students can understand how both languages work" (Mineducacion, 2016a, p. 28).

In the above extracts, English is mentioned as the target language and Spanish is presumably viewed as the learners' mother tongue. However, where does this leave indigenous languages? When exploring the reference to indigenous languages in MEN's documents their absence became clear. Only when widening the scope, references to indigenous' linguistics rights were found; the government's 2010–2014 NDP states:

- i) "Ethnic groups must have their own cultural life, using their own language that is crucial for the understanding of their culture and develop personality" (National Department for Planning, 2011, p.473)

Despite the acknowledgment of indigenous linguistic rights, further references to English and indigenous languages seems to set English under a more positivistic discourse that describes it as a pertinent, highly valued and sought skill, while minority languages are described in a language that focuses on conservation rather than growth:

- j) "The Ministry of Culture will tend for the defense, protection, and strengthening of the native mother tongue...considering their immense cultural and spiritual value that this tongue represents to these communities" (National Department for Planning, 2011, p. 475)
- k) "The country has led efforts to transform education so that responses to the increasing occurrence and speed demands of a globalized society. With this in mind, the government is set to implement a bilingualism program." (National Department for Planning, 2011, p. 82)
- l) "Human capital formation supported by the relevance...enables the population to be more competent and competitive... in this way the country seeks to strengthen...bilingualism." (National Department for Planning, 2011, p. 108)

The messages also assemble levels of priority and distinction between people. In the extract j), the premise of defending and strengthening the indigenous communities is set as a future goal (verb: will), while in extract k) the use of "has led" signals a distinction between what is important in the past, now and possibly in the future. Secondly, the use of the pronoun "these" in the j) are specific to indigenous communities and described as valuable to the specific communities, while in l) English is described as important to the "population"= Colombians. The choice of identity categories is problematic as it attributes a false distinction between people.

Moreover, the prevalence of English as a foreign language under the CB policy placed ethnic groups in a position of disadvantage. The following extracts exemplify conflicting views of how language education should be managed:

- m) “Trilingualism will also be strengthened...to promote in the education system the teaching of the three languages (Creole, English, and Spanish)” (National Department for Planning, 2011, p. 475).
- n) “Teaching of ethnic groups with linguistic tradition will be bilingual” (Article 57 in General Education Law 115 of 1994).

The mixed discourses between local law and the pursued linguistic policy evidence a problematic between global and local requirements that have put ethnic minorities at a disadvantage. According to the government, indigenous people should learn Spanish as a second language and English as a foreign language (de Mejía, 2006). The prospect of developing a trilingual indigenous community in the poorest regions of the country seems ahistorical, a key characteristic of social efficiency policies.

6.3 The OECD’s influence on Colombia’s local policy

The next question concerned the influence of international organizations on Colombia’s EFL policy. A characteristic of social efficiency is the emphasis of global requirements to legitimize local policies. In the CB policy paper’s, indications of transnational organizations influencing local policies mainly concerned the OECD. For instance, in 2011 the National Department of Planning made the following announcement:

- o) “We have begun the process to join the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); something unthinkable just a few years ago.” (National Department of Planning, 2011, p.21)

A grammatical analysis of the above excerpt suggests that the idea of establishing cooperation agreements with the OECD is a submissive relationship. The statement encapsulates two objects: We (the Colombian government) and the OECD. The word “we” functions as a subject that exercises the action of joining the other. While the OECD functions as the direct object of the sentence. This distinction is important as it illustrates the implicit meaning of establishing an agreement. The Colombian government must trigger a set of actions required by the more prestigious international organization in order to join it. The prestigious nature of the OECD is shown by the use of the word “unthinkable”. This word assumes that being subscribed to the OECD carries an honorable meaning and unprecedented achievement. Fairclough (2013) defines assumptions as for how particulars are presented as unquestionable universals.

The influence of the OECD becomes more obvious in the 2014-2018 NDP policy documents where it is stated that treaties with the OECD would require deep educational changes:

- p) “The income OECD countries require profound cultural transformations. This implies great challenges for the educational system ...where skills are transferred...” (National Department for Planning, 2016, p.72)

The citation of the OECD as a cornerstone driving educational reforms signals a common phenomenon in global educational policy where international institutions “steer at a distance”. Baird et al. (2011) explain that international organizations such as de OECD have expanded the practice of policy by numbers, by which countries’ are rated based on statistical data. Moreover, governments constantly use these numbers to justify political courses (Cardenas, 2006). Without exception, the use of OECD statistical data was identified throughout various policy papers. The following citation captures the influence of the PISA results on Colombia’s language educational policy:

- q) “Though the PISA 2009 indicate a slight improvement in language skills, these results are far from the results obtained by the members of the OECD” (Mineducacion, 2016d, p. 26)

Through the above discourse analysis, I have attempted to make connections among various policy documents that suggest the government’s acknowledgment of the OECD’s authority. More importantly, the discourses seem to prioritize international statistical data to guide local language policy.

6.4 *The British Council: A hegemonic expert, facilitator, and investor*

Given the latent criticism towards the British Council (BC) participation in the CB program, this section studies whether the policy documents have endorsed messages of marketization through the alliance with the BC. Given the economic nature of marketization, it would have been ideal to analyze the allocation of budget resources between local and foreign EFL providers and thus discern financially unequal distribution of benefits. However, given the limited CDA focus of this study, semiotic elements that pointed to discriminating relations of power were studied in “*the alliance agreement number 127 signed by the MEN and BC*” in 2012. This document initially introduces BC as an expert in the EFL services with the technical knowledge needed to develop the English communicative competencies in students and teachers:

- r) “Considering the 75-year experience in the teaching of English as a Foreign language the Ministry of Education decided to subscribe alliances with this entity [British Council] since 2004” (Mineducacion, 2012, p. 13)

Though the BC’s lengthy experience with English education is difficult to contest, the historical reference to BC’s involvement in Colombia is interesting. Singer (2002) suggests that historical perspectives are set by governments to determine what is fair or equitable. By highlighting the 75-year presence of BC in the country, one may argue the MEN is justifying its continuous involvement in EFL programs as the historical connection entitles them.

Moreover, the MEN reinforces the message by elaborating totalitarian language and referring to assumptions once again:

- s) “This Allianz intends to facilitate the goal that wouldn’t have been viable independently” (Mineducacion, 2012, p. 16).

The above extract not only signals an uneven relationship but also addresses it as an unchangeable reality. Another interesting component is the financial details included in the document that detailed the MEN's and BC's monetary contributions to the programs; it is easily discernable that BC's investment is considerably higher than the Colombian government's (approximately 71% of investment was contributed by BC). Overall, the document seems to reinforce the message that Colombia is financially dependent on foreign institutions without whom educational developments would be unfeasible. Likewise, it strengthens the argument that equity is submitted to higher powers; through centered produced methods, materials, and testing, the hegemony of well-established organizations, such as BC, are maintained (Kumaravadivelu, 2014). The previous illustration of BC's involvement in Colombia highlights a current social belief that has reset the models of work organization. By deregulating the market and allowing international agents to reform systems of education and training, governments strive to increase people's knowledge efficiently (Ricento, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

7 Conclusions

The CDA set out in this study has allowed me to conclude that the CB policy papers encapsulate the meaning of equity within the narrow tenets of social efficiency. This discourse genre is embedded in the articulation of general educational policy and specifically visible in the Colombia Bilingual EFL policy sections. Discourse relationships were discerned between the NDPs and the MEN's papers, both sources carrying messages of social efficiency as conceptualized by Rizvi and Lingard (2010) and Ricento (2000). The instrumentation of English was made apparent with the narrow and dominant discourse that the Colombian government has pedaled its learning. English is defined as the only linguistic solution to gain economic success and social cohesion. While learners do have legal autonomy to select the foreign language of study, the CB policy has led its discourse by presumably assuming that bilingualism means a person that can speak Spanish and English. A reconceptualization of the term bilingual in the policy documents or a broader view of language learning beyond English would be conducive to stronger conceptions of equity.

Moreover, linguistic analysis of the policy documents suggests that the Colombian government has pushed English learning by asserting itself as a weaker power pressured to meet the standards of international organizations such as the OECD. As a result, the Colombian government has interpreted the privatization of EFL services as the most feasible and historically reasonable option for the country. The instrumentation and marketization of EFL policy have resulted in a weak formulation of equity that has left questions of identity widely unanswered. The most obvious example presents itself in the conflicting discourses between Colombia's legal framework and CB policy documents in terms of how language education should be managed with indigenous people. The acknowledgment of other minority languages in the CB policy documents needs to be explored more extensively to determine whether indigenous people's linguistic rights are being violated.

This paper also highlighted possible connections between discursive genres in policy documents and actual EFL practices. The inequalities that CB has faced at a practical level are aligned to the discourses or inequality identified as a semiotic level in the policy documents. This situation calls attention to the crucial role of policy formation. It alerts the importance of establishing effective mechanisms that are able to negotiate global English requirements with the local community in a fair way.

Further research should focus on EFL policy in Colombia as a process to understand the mechanisms, conditions, and participants that surround policy formation at semiotic level. For example, language learners, minority ethnic groups, EFL teachers, and researchers could all be valuable sources of pedagogical and linguistic knowledge. Are they being actively included as policymakers? Exploring EFL policymaking process and its admittance to matters of transparency, collaboration, relevance, and empowerment could lead to more equitable language learning discourses and practices in Colombia.

Endnotes

¹ All translations are my own and are reproduced without any further alterations from original source.

² According to the Common European Framework of Reference for English acquisition as a Foreign Language.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Colombia Bilingual's published policy papers

| Ministry of Education | |
|---|---|
| Paper | Link to document online |
| <i>National Bilingual Project 2004 -2019</i> | http://www.mineduacion.gov.co/1621/articles-132560_recurso_pdf_programa_nacional_bilinguismo.pdf |
| <i>The Pedagogical Principles and Guidelines Suggested English Curriculum: 6th to 11th grades 2006</i> | http://aprende.colombiaaprende.edu.co/sites/default/files/naspublic/Anejo%2014%20Orientaciones%20y%20principios%20Pedagogicos.pdf |
| Education Plan 2010-2014: <i>Education is quality</i> | http://www.mineduacion.gov.co/1759/w3-article-293647.html |
| Education Plan 2014-2018: <i>Colombia, the most educated in 2025</i> | http://www.mineduacion.gov.co/1759/articles-356137_foto_portada.pdf |
| <i>Special alliance of cooperation #127 of 2012 signed between the Ministry of Education and The British Council – The British Council and the business foundation for education (ExE):</i> | http://www.mineduacion.gov.co/1759/w3-article-318224.html |
| The Government | |
| <i>National Development Plan 2010-2014: Prosperity for all</i> | https://www.dnp.gov.co/Plan-Nacional-de-Desarrollo/PND-2010-2014/Paginas/Plan-Nacional-De-2010-2014.aspx |
| <i>National Development Plan 2014-2018: All for a new country</i> | https://colaboracion.dnp.gov.co/cdt/prensa/bases%20plan%20nacional%20de%20desarrollo%202014-2018.pdf |

Received November 6, 2016
Revision received April 17, 2017
Accepted July 4, 2017