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CHALLENGES WHEN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN A COLOMBIAN POST-CONFLICT RURAL AREA TO FOSTER QUALITY EDUCATION WHILE REDUCING INEQUALITIES AT SCHOOL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English as a foreign language in post-conflict rural areas in Colombia presents unique challenges due to the historical context of armed conflict and its impact on education. This research project aims to explore the difficulties faced when teaching English as a foreign language in a rural area from the Department of Córdoba, Colombia, which has been deeply affected by violence and displacement. The study investigates factors influencing language-learning outcomes, such as limited exposure to English, lack of resources, and the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies. Concerning the methodology section, its nature is qualitative, framed within the Participatory Action Research (PAR) Jacobs, (2016). In regard to the thematic analysis is used to analyze in-depth the data and identify common themes, patterns, and relationships (Xu & Storr, 2012). By addressing these challenges, some of the most outstanding results were the contribution to effective English as foreign language programs in post-conflict rural areas, supporting education and empowering these communities, teaching them to value their culture and idiosyncrasies highly, and enable them to identify their greatest barriers to seek for effective and efficient solutions for their community; contributing in the same way, to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, (ONU, 2015).

KEYWORDS: TEFL, Colombian in-post-conflict rural areas, Sustainable Development Goals.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign language in a post-conflict rural area in Colombia presents a distinctive set of challenges. Colombia has experienced over 50 years of armed conflict, which has had a devastating impact on the country's education system; Many schools have been destroyed or damaged, and teachers have been killed or displaced. As a result, access to quality education is limited, especially in rural areas. In addition to a significant political and social unrest, resulting in displacement, violence, and limited access to education in many areas. For children growing up in these contexts, learning English as a foreign language can be especially difficult due to limited exposure to the language, low motivation, a lack of resources and infrastructure, cultural differences, and geographic isolation (USFCA, 2023). Furthermore, teaching English as a foreign language requires specialized knowledge, skills, and strategies that are tailored to their cognitive, social, and emotional development (UNESCO, 2020). Teachers must be able to create engaging and interactive learning experiences that promote language acquisition while also responding to the unique needs and challenges of their students, even though it is important to highlight that there are no English teachers in elementary grades in Colombia.

In this context, this research aims to explore the challenges of teaching English as a foreign language in a post-conflict rural area in Colombia. Specifically, it examines the factors that influence language learning outcomes in this context, such as limited exposure to English, lack of resources, and the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies (USFCA, 2023). Additionally, the research explores effective teaching strategies and resources that can help overcome these challenges and support in developing strong English language skills. By addressing these challenges, this research aims to contribute to the development of effective and sustainable English language programs in post-conflict rural areas in Colombia, supporting the education and empowerment in these communities.

Tierralta is a municipality located in the department of Córdoba, Colombia. It is located in the southern part of the department, in the subregion of Urabá. The municipality is situated in a mountainous region, with the highest peak being Mount Paramillo. The municipality is also home to several rivers, including the Sinú River and the Urabá River. The climate in Tierralta is tropical, with average temperatures ranging from 25 to 30 degrees Celsius. The wet season runs from May to November, and the

dry season, from December to April. The vegetation in Tierralta is diverse, including rainforest, savanna, and cloud forest. The municipality is home to a variety of wildlife, including jaguars, ocelots, and monkeys.

Tierralta is a strategic location due to its proximity to the Gulf of Urabá. This has made it a target for armed groups, including the FARC, the ELN, and the AUC. The armed conflict in Tierralta has caused widespread displacement, violence, and human rights abuses. This is a town where the armed conflict has left a deep scar. Many people have been killed, and many more have been displaced or traumatized. But the people of Tierralta are resilient. They are determined to rebuild their lives and create a better future for their children (CNMH, 2019).

Teaching English in rural areas can be challenging and rewarding. Public services have been stunted by war and neoliberal ideologies are the stabilizing factor in the post-conflict. Therefore, education needs to be a central focus of the Colombian government in order to guarantee the longevity of peace (Cabrera, 2018). As an English teacher, you could introduce a new language to students who may have had limited exposure to it before. However, teaching in a rural area may require additional preparation and creativity to engage students who may not have access to the same resources as their urban counterparts (Sierra Gutierrez & Sánchez Gutiérrez, 2022). In this context, it is important to establish a solid foundation for learning, which includes creating a welcoming classroom environment and building relationships with your students. It can be done by incorporating fun and interactive activities that not only engage your students but also help them develop their language skills.

Additionally, it is essential to understand the cultural environment in which you are teaching. Rural areas constantly have their own unique traditions and values, and incorporating these into your lessons can help students feel more connected to their learning experience. Furthermore, teaching English in a rural area requires creativity, flexibility, and a willingness to adapt to the unique needs of your students (Education Northwest, 2016). With these skills, you can create an engaging and effective learning environment that fosters a love of language and a desire to learn.

In fact, teaching and learning English in rural schools can present a variety of challenges for both teachers and students. Some of the common problems include:

- Limited access to resources: Rural schools may have limited access to resources such as

textbooks, technology, and educational materials (Ramos H. & Aguirre M., 2016). This can make it difficult for teachers to create engaging and effective lesson plans, and limit students' exposure to the language.

- **Lack of exposure to English:** Students in rural areas may have limited exposure to English outside of the classroom. (Ramos H. & Aguirre M., 2016) As a result it can make it challenging for them to practice and develop their language skills, especially if there are few opportunities to use English in their daily lives making it boring to learn English.

- **Violent context:** A violent context can have a devastating impact on education. It can lead to the destruction of schools and other educational infrastructure, the displacement of teachers and students, and the disruption of learning. (UNESCO, 2020) The effects of armed conflict on education can be far-reaching. Children who are unable to attend school are more likely to be illiterate and unemployed, and they are also more likely to be involved in violence. (Villar-Márquez, 2010) Armed conflict can also lead to a loss of cultural heritage and knowledge, as schools are often repositories of these things.

- **Cultural differences:** Rural areas often have their own unique traditions, post-conflict area, native language, Indigenous culture, and values, which can impact how students learn and engage with English. (Ramos H. & Aguirre M., 2016) Teachers need to be aware of these cultural differences and incorporate them into their lessons to ensure that students feel connected to their learning experience.

- **Limited motivation:** Students in rural areas may not see the practical value of learning English, especially if they do not plan to leave their community. (Orozco Parra, 2020) This can make it challenging for teachers to motivate students and create a desire to learn.

Overall, teaching and learning English in rural schools requires a creative and adaptive approach to overcome these challenges and ensure that students can develop their language skills effectively.

1.1. Justification

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in a post-conflict rural area is a challenging task due to several factors. The research results reveal that most English teachers in Colombia are reluctant to work in rural schools due to cultural isolation and multi-level classes. These challenges are exacerbated in post-conflict rural areas, where social, economic, and political instability can make it difficult to attract and

retain qualified teachers. Additionally, rural schools often lack appropriate instructional materials, such as textbooks and technology, which can make it difficult to teach EFL effectively. The absence of a sociolinguistic environment in which English is meaningful can also make it challenging for students to learn and use the language. Moreover, socio-cultural factors such as self-esteem, socio-cultural level, and geography location can affect students' English language learning in a post-conflict rural area. To justify the challenges of teaching EFL in post-conflict rural areas, several studies have been conducted. For instance, (Cabrera, 2018) highlights the challenges of teaching EFL in rural areas, including cultural isolation, multi-level classes, and lack of instructional materials. Similarly, a study by (Şahin, 2021) found that rural teachers often got demotivated by the limited conditions of their environment identified with technological deficiencies, defects in school buildings, inadequate resources, and lack of opportunities for professional development. To address these challenges, several strategies have been proposed. For example, providing training and support for teachers, developing appropriate instructional materials, and creating a sociolinguistic environment that promotes English language learning have been suggested (Cabrera, 2018). Additionally, peacebuilding and social justice have been suggested as a framework for teaching EFL in post-conflict rural areas, emphasizing the importance of creating a safe and inclusive learning environment that promotes social justice and equality. All in all, teaching EFL in post-conflict rural areas is a challenging task that requires significant investment and resources. The challenges of teaching EFL in rural areas have been identified in several studies, including cultural isolation, multi-level classes, lack of instructional materials, and socio-cultural factors. To address these challenges, several strategies have been proposed, including providing training and support for teachers, developing appropriate instructional materials, and creating a sociolinguistic environment that promotes English language learning. Achieving SDG 10 is crucial for reducing inequalities and promoting quality education in post-conflict rural areas, but it requires transformative change, including eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, investing more in health, education, social protection, and decent jobs, empowering, and promoting inclusive social and economic growth, and eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices.

1.2. General objective

To reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of the public policy in regard to English instructions in post-conflict rural area

Specific objectives

- To identify the cultural barriers that teacher in post-conflict rural areas face when teaching English,
- To acknowledge the strategies that TEFL use to address these barriers in order to promote equity in English language learning.
- To categorize the contextualized challenges that teachers face in this conflict rural area when teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) while reducing inequalities.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Ministry of Education in Colombia (MEN, 2021) aims to have citizens with high English communicative proficiency based on international standards through different bilingualism policies included in the educational system. (Roldan & Pelaez, 2017) cite the Ministry of Education's goal in their research paper. The policies aim to promote bilingual proficiency and increase the competitiveness of Colombian citizens so that they can participate in international dynamics by speaking English. However, the policies have faced challenges, such as a shortage of appropriate instructional materials and the absence of a sociolinguistic environment in which English is meaningful, particularly in rural areas.

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in post-conflict rural areas presents several challenges that need to be addressed to foster quality education and reduce inequalities. The lack of facilities and amenities, negative attitudes towards learning English, and parents' lack of awareness about the importance of learning are some of the challenges faced in teaching English among EFL students in rural settings (Shan & Abdul Aziz, 2022).

In addition, the shortage of English language teachers in rural schools is a significant problem in many countries, resulting in poor academic performance among rural students. To address these challenges, several remedies can be implemented, such as providing training and support for teachers, developing appropriate instructional materials, and creating a sociolinguistic environment that promotes English language learning (Shan & Abdul Aziz, 2022).

In the same way teaching EFL in a post-conflict rural area can be challenging and pleasing. As a teacher, you may have the opportunity to introduce

a new language to students who may have had limited exposure to it before. Some studies have been carried out to performance English skills in rural areas all over the world. The article of research by David H. Monk titled "Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Teachers in Rural Areas" examines the challenges of hiring and retaining highly trained teachers in rural schools tend to have a below-average share of highly trained teachers, and teacher turnover can be high. (Monk, 2007)

Besides, compensation in rural schools is often low, which can make it difficult to attract and retain teachers, especially when combined with several student characteristics. However, Monk suggests focusing on hard-to-staff rural schools rather than developing a blanket set of policies for all rural schools. (Monk, 2007) Several strategies have been proposed to recruit and retain highly effective teachers in rural schools, including providing incentives such as loan forgiveness, offering professional development opportunities, and creating partnerships between schools and universities.

Moreover, rural EFL teachers face challenges in developing their professional identities, identifying their needs, and adapting to teaching contexts. The impact of teaching contexts on the practices of rural teachers and the training needs of rural EFL teachers have been identified as areas of concern. To overcome these challenges, preparation courses for pre-service EFL teachers and professional development activities for rural EFL teachers can be designed. Additionally, teachers must create a safe and inclusive learning environment that promotes social justice and equality to overcome the challenges of teaching EFL in post-conflict rural areas (Şahin, 2021).

Education has a critical role in building social cohesion, inclusion, and resilience, and it is essential to ensure that education interventions do not have negative effects. By promoting bilingual proficiency and creating a safe and inclusive learning environment (WorldBank, 2023), teachers can provide high-quality instruction and engage their students effectively, increasing competitiveness in international dynamics.

Besides, it is important to develop culturally based materials that are relevant and meaningful to rural learners, in order to describe the characteristics that EFL material for rural fifth learners from Loricá, Córdoba should adopt, (Soto Falón, 2023) considering the pupils' cultural background where that EFL material should be graded to the students language level, include a culturally well-known

vocabulary with enough audiovisual support to enhance receptive skills, and allow learners to create their own material for classes.

On the other hand, realities, and remedies of teaching EFL in rural schools can include a shortage of appropriate instructional materials and the absence of a sociolinguistic environment in which English is meaningful. To address these challenges, the study suggests several remedies, such as providing training and support for teachers, developing appropriate instructional materials, and creating a sociolinguistic environment that promotes English language learning. (Tayade, 2012)

Moreover, understand the background and context of the conflict, as well as the interaction between education and the conflict, in order to identify ways in which education can mitigate the impact of conflict, in order to provide effective strategies for supporting education in post-conflict situations (Smith, 2009) In the same way as teachers EFL in Colombian high schools, is important that teachers can create a safe and inclusive learning environment that promotes social justice and equality. (Ortega, 2019) Thus, recognizing the diversity on school communities and respecting the rights of others and existing

In fact, Teaching EFL in a way that promotes social justice and peacebuilding involves creating a safe and inclusive learning environment, as a result teachers this strategies can empower their students to grow and thrive as confident individuals not just as students during their time in educational systems, but in life beyond school as citizens in their communities and in the world.

It is fundamentally essential for students to learn English from a youthful age in this rapidly globalizing world, providing learners with future opportunities and career prospects (Orozco Parra, 2020) Even though it is a post-conflict area, Tierralta is a town with wonderful places to visit, waterfalls, mountains, and nature which makes this place attractive to tourists, scientists, or researchers, Although Tierralta is a town of victims; at least one in three inhabitants of this Cordoba town is included in the Single Registry of Victims (RUV). Which is not a secret for anyone.

However, among its inhabitants, there is a perceived desire and need to guarantee that acts of violence are not repeated. (CNMH, 2019) and people who could use English in a way to communicate with foreign people who wants to visit around, in fact, people look for guides to show most of the places and this could be a way to work in the future. (Holguín, 2016) However, teaching in a rural area may require

additional preparation and creativity to engage students who may not have access to the same resources as their urban counterparts.

On the other hand, Colombia has a strong tradition of private education, as a result, middle and upper-middle families generally decide to enroll their children in private schools, which are often classed as bilingual. (de Mejía A.-M. , 2009) In fact, Colombia has implemented an actual policy for teaching English, the National Bilingual Program (NBP) which was implemented since 2004 by the National Education Ministry with the purpose of focusing efforts on three lines of work:

- 1) Ethno-education, to provide education bilingual in indigenous communities, where the mother tongue is aboriginal and second language is Spanish;

- 2) Flexible models of education, in order to regulate the teaching of foreign languages in official schools for work and human development

- 3) English taught in bilingual schools and colleges and monolingual to improve current levels of Communicative competence (MEN, 2021) The PNB main goal is "Have capable citizens to communicate in English, so that they can inserting the country in communication processes universal, in the global economy and in openness cultural, with internationally comparable standards"

Nevertheless, due to geographical location, and social, political, cultural, or economic differences in educational access, some populations are less fortunate because they have access to the most basic education since they stand in the way of access to variables that support effective education, especially teachers with a low level of English skills in TEFL, parental involvement and the lack of educational resources.

Consequently, rural schools may have an English Curriculum based on the Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages and class planners but most of the teachers are not qualified to teach EFL because they are primary school teachers trained in different areas of knowledge, without a textbook to follow, without resources as audiovisual, flashcards, games, among others

2.1. Conceptual framework

2.1.1. Challenges Teaching EFL

According to (Ramos H. & Aguirre M., 2016), Teaching EFL in rural areas of Colombia is a challenging task for teachers due to several challenges that they may encounter, such as cultural isolation and multi-level classes. Several strategies are suggested to overcome these issues, including

providing training and support for teachers, developing appropriate instructional materials, and creating a sociolinguistic environment that promotes English language learning. Additionally, teachers should be encouraged to work in rural areas by providing incentives such as housing, transportation, and professional development opportunities. The article highlights the importance of addressing the challenges of teaching EFL in rural areas to foster quality education and reduce inequalities.

2.1.2. Post-Conflict Rural Area

Post-conflict rural areas are regions that have been affected by armed conflict and violence, resulting in social, economic, and political instability. The challenges faced by English language teachers in rural areas of Colombia include lack of qualified teachers, lack of appropriate instructional materials, absence of a sociolinguistic environment, and socio-cultural factors. In San Clemente Educational Institution at Tierralta, Córdoba, the challenges of teaching EFL are exacerbated by the post-conflict situation, which has resulted in social, economic, and political instability. The Development Plans with a Territorial Focus (PDET) is a national participatory strategy that aims to promote socio-economic development in the 170 municipalities most affected by armed conflict in Colombia. (Ley 893, 2017)

This process enables social conflicts that were previously resolved through the use of weapons and violence to be dealt with through democratic discussion and respect for difference. Moreover, the PDET is implemented through action plans created at village, municipal, and subregional level, and they are structured around the social organization of rural property and land use, economic renewal, and agricultural, environmental, and forestry production, among other areas. Besides is a key component of the peace process in Colombia, and it is expected to contribute to the transformation of the countryside, the creation of conditions of well-being for the rural population, and the construction of a stable and lasting peace. (Ley 893, 2017)

2.1.3. Quality Education

The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Quality education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development, and it provides children with basic cognitive and language skills while fostering emotional development. However, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was already off-

track to achieve its education targets, and projections showed that more than 200 million children would be out of school. (ONU, 2020)

To achieve SDG 4, education systems must be re-arranged, and education budget must be increased. Include ensuring that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes, providing equal access to affordable vocational training, and eliminating gender and wealth disparities with the aim of achieving universal access to a quality higher education. (ONU, 2020)

Therefore, The PDET is a key component of the peace process in Colombia, and it is expected to contribute to the transformation of the countryside, the creation of conditions of well-being for the rural population, and the construction of a stable and lasting peace. Although progress has been made in increasing access to education, more efforts are needed to achieve universal education goals, achieving inclusive and quality education for all reaffirms the belief that education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development.

2.1.4. Reducing Inequalities

Sustainable Development Goal 10 (ONU, 2020) aims to reduce inequality within and among countries. The goal has ten targets, including promoting universal social, economic, and political inclusion, ensuring equal opportunities, and adopting policies that promote equality. Achieving SDG 10 requires transformative change, including eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, investing more in health, education, social protection, and decent jobs, empowering and promoting inclusive social and economic growth, and eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices. This approach emphasizes the importance of creating a safe and inclusive learning environment that promotes social justice and equality. Achieving SDG 10 is crucial for reducing inequalities and promoting quality education in post-conflict rural areas.

2.2. Legal Framework

2.2.1. General Law of Education

In 1994 was established in Colombia "The General Law of Education", which provides general rules for organizing the General Educational System in Colombia and recognizes the right to access education for all Colombians (Ley 115, 1994). It emphasizes the importance of providing equal access to education for all students, regardless of their

background or location. The law also recognizes the importance of developing social and emotional skills in children to foster critical thinking and personal development. The law has been instrumental in expanding access to education in Colombia, particularly in rural areas, but there have been challenges in implementing the law. Ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that the law is effectively implemented and that all students have access to the resources and support they need to succeed in the classroom.

2.2.2. Development Programs with a Territorial Approach (PDET)

Decree 893 of 2017 is a Colombian government decree that aims to improve the well-being and quality of life of the population in rural areas, including children and women, by making their political and economic rights effective. The decree creates the Programs of Development with Territorial Focus (PDET) within the framework of the Peace Agreement between FARC and the national government. (Ley 893, 2017) The PDET is a series of plans developed in consultation with local leaders to address long-neglected governance and development priorities in rural areas. The decree outlines the roles and responsibilities of different government entities, educational institutions, and teachers in implementing the National Bilingualism Plan, which aims to improve English language proficiency among Colombians and promote bilingualism in the country. (Ley 893, 2017) The decree establishes standards for English language proficiency and provides guidelines for teacher training and evaluation. The PDET is a crucial tool for fulfilling the peace accords' promise of breaking Colombia's cycles of violence and addressing the government's long absence from mostly rural territories where millions of people live amid weak rule of law, illicit economies, and armed groups.

2.2.3. National Bilingualism Plan

The National Bilingualism Plan is a Colombian government initiative that aims to improve English language proficiency and promote bilingualism in the country. The plan has established standards for English language proficiency and provides guidelines for teacher training and evaluation. It recognizes the importance of bilingual education and provides guidelines for implementing bilingual programs in schools. (Law 1651, 2013) The plan emphasizes the importance of cultural exchange and provides opportunities for Colombians to study abroad and for foreign teachers to work in Colombia.

The Colombian government has launched several national bilingualism plans, with the most recent being the National Plan of English: Colombia Very Well! 2015-2025. The plan aims to increase the competitiveness of Colombian citizens by promoting English language proficiency. The National Bilingualism Plan is part of a broader effort to improve education in Colombia and reduce inequalities between urban and rural areas (MinEducación, 2015). Despite criticisms from the academic community, the Colombian government is committed to creating the conditions for Colombians to develop communicative competencies in English.

2.2.4. Basic Standards for Foreign Language Skills of Colombia

The Basic Standards for Foreign Language Skills in Colombia, specifically for English, have been established to improve the quality of foreign language education in the country. The Colombian government has implemented policies to foster English as a Foreign Language in Colombia to improve the quality of life, offer equal learning and working opportunities, and achieve high levels of education. The Basic Standards of Competences in Foreign Languages: English booklet was distributed to educational institutions across the nation to guide the development of foreign language skills. The booklet provides guidelines for implementing bilingual programs in schools and emphasizes the importance of cultural Exchange. The Basic Standards for Foreign Language Skills of Colombia is part of a broader effort to improve education in Colombia and reduce inequalities between urban and rural areas.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research project reflects on the advantages and disadvantages of public policy regarding English instruction as a foreign language in Colombian public schools of post-conflict rural areas. The chosen methodology is especially suitable for this analysis because it enables an in-depth investigation of the experiences, perspectives, and perceptions of interested parties related to or damaged by these policies (Rahman, 2016). The collected information is valuable and needs to be interpreted and coded in a valid way (Hernández S., Fernández C., & Baptista L., 2016). Thematic analysis is used to analyze the data and identify common themes, patterns, and relationships (Xu & Storr, 2012) In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers in post-conflict rural areas to collect primary data. (Knott, E., Rao, A. H., Summers, K., & Teeger, C., 2022) .

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a qualitative research methodology that involves researchers and participants collaborating to understand social issues and take actions to bring about social change (Jacobs, 2016). For this purpose, this research is conducted under a qualitative research paradigm with PAR approach allows for a rigorous exploration of the challenges faced by teachers and successful and failed strategies in post-conflict rural areas regarding English instruction. This methodology provides a deeper understanding of the contextualized challenges faced by teachers in these areas and help identify the effectiveness of the strategies used by TEFL in addressing the identified challenges and reducing inequalities.

3.1. Type of investigation

A qualitative approach is conducted due to this is a type of research that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems (Rahman, 2016) because it has been defined as the investigation of phenomena, typically in-depth and holistic fashion, through the collection of rich narrative material using a flexible research design (Polit & Beck, 2008) The qualitative approach also follows significant research areas or themes. However, instead of clarity about research questions and hypotheses preceding data collection and analysis (Hernández S., Fernández C., & Baptista L., 2016) In this way it may possibly be understood how teachers and students have experienced TEFL comprehending advantages and disadvantages in this location.

3.2. Population

Once the unit of analysis has been defined, it is proceeded to delimit the population under study and on which the results are intended to be generalized. (Hernández S., Fernández C., & Baptista L., 2016) Thus, a population is the set of all cases that agree with a series of specifications (Selltiz, C.; Wrightsman, Stuart W. ; Lawrence, S., 1980) With this in mind the population for this qualitative research includes teachers in involved or affected by the public policy regarding English instruction in San Clemente Educational Institution, located in San Clemente Town, in the municipality of Tierralta, Córdoba, post-conflict rural areas. The research focused on the challenges faced by teachers in these areas when TEFL while reducing inequalities.

3.3. Sample

In the qualitative process, there is a group of people, events, communities, etc., about which data was collected, and without necessarily being

representative of the universe or population, that is study (Hernández S., Fernández C., & Baptista L., 2016).

The sample for this research study consists of 3 English teachers in San Clemente Educational Institution.

3.4. Context

In the Department of Córdoba is located Tierralta, a municipality situated in the southern part of the department, in the subregion of Urabá. The municipality is situated in a mountainous region, with the highest peak being Mount Paramillo. The municipality is also home to several rivers, including the Sinú River and the Urabá River (see annex N° 1). The climate in Tierralta is tropical, with average temperatures ranging from 25 to 30 degrees Celsius. The wet season in Tierralta lasts 8.2 months, from April 7 to December 14, with a greater than 42% chance of a given day being a wet day. (WeatherSpark, 2023) May and June receive the most rainfall. The vegetation in Tierralta is diverse, including rainforest, savanna, and cloud forest. The municipality is home to a variety of wildlife, including jaguars, ocelots, and monkeys.

On the other hand, San Clemente Educational Institution is an Official Campus located in San Clemente Town one hundred meters from the road that leads to the Urra S.A. hydroelectric plant, at a distance of 14 km. From the urban area Tierralta. The educational model of the school is Constructivism where the teachers work with small groups, collaborative and interactive activities, and open dialogues about what students need in order to find success. Offering a quality educational service is the mission of the school in accordance with social and environmental needs, through the constructivist model focused on the training of leaders capable of performing in the agribusiness field, through the practice of good human relations that in turn allows them to interact efficiently in their social environment. (INESAC, 2023)

3.5. Data Collection Instruemnts and Techniques

In these techniques, first-hand data is gathered through the observation of events, behaviors, interactions, processes, etc. directly to obtain an understanding of the concepts. (Taherdoost, 2021) involves delving deeply into social situations and maintaining an active role, as well as permanent reflection. Be attentive to details, occurrences, events, and interactions (Hernández S., Fernández C., & Baptista L., 2016). Which encompasses directly

observing and recording significant events related to the phenomenon under study, and it can be used in combination with specific structured and organized instruments for data collection. This method includes an engagement with the setting, a clear expression of the events, technical improvisations, high attention, and good recording. (Taherdoost, 2021) All in all these factors into account, Direct Observation would be used to gain a better understanding of the problem situation and make more informed decisions based on reliable data.

A field diary is a written record of observations, thoughts, and experiences made by a researcher during the course of a study (Caro, 2022) In the context of teaching EFL in rural areas, field diaries allow researchers to record information and systematize it starting from the observation and interpretation of facts or events. (Martínez, 2007) Additionally, is a complete instrument that includes not only the literal description of the observation but also a small reflection, observations, and annexes that support the veracity of the description, such as photographs, audios, or videos. In the context of EFL teaching in rural areas, field diaries can be used to document the challenges faced by teachers and the strategies they use to overcome them, because it provides a complete record of the observation.

Interviews were a fundamental way of social interaction that researchers used to collect data by asking questions and receiving answers from participants (Taherdoost, 2021) Unlike questionnaires, interviews allow for direct collection of data, which can increase the chance of obtaining

confidential information from interviewees. However, conducting interviews requires special skills that are not necessary for questionnaires (Taherdoost, 2021). Open interviews are a qualitative research method that involves a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the participant, with the intention of gathering in-depth information about the participant's experiences, perspectives, and opinions.

Focus groups are a research tool that can be used in various stages of instrument development. They are related to group interviews and allow researchers to capture deeper information more effectively than is possible with individual interviews (Barowski & Grimsley, 2021) In a research project, focus groups can be used to gather deeper information from participants and generate rich contextual information about their worldview and corresponding terminology, moreover, focus groups are a qualitative research method that involves a small group of participants engaging.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following section presents the research findings and provides commentaries on them. It was conducted using a qualitative approach and it is divided into two parts based on the research aims. The first part discusses the difficulties faced by TEFL in rural areas, particularly in post-conflict rural areas. The second part discusses the factors that influence the issues that teachers confront.

Table 1. Findings of first question.

Question	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
How do EFL teachers in post-conflict rural area face challenges to foster a quality education in school contexts?	Public education policy	Teachers' perceptions or reflection when TEFL in a post conflict rural area	Cultural barriers

After analyzing the data, three categories emerged. The first category is related to public education policy which indicates the disparity between the education policy and the implementation in context. The second category is teachers' perceptions or reflections when TEFL in a post conflict rural area, where it underscored these perceptions about the role of public school in rural communities and the factors related to the success of

the educational program The third category is cultural barriers which highlights the importance of understanding the cultural aspects when learning a language.

These categories are related to the challenges faced by teachers in a post-conflict rural area when fostering quality education. It outlines the specific challenges within each category, including the impact of quality policies, teachers' perceptions and

cultural barriers. This categorization helped to identify and understand the multifaceted nature of the obstacles encountered by teachers in post-conflict rural areas, shedding light on the complexities of fostering quality education in such contexts.

4.1. Public Education Policy

The analysis revealed that the school is applying the *Estándares Básicos de Competencia de Lengua Extranjera: Ingles*, to the different levels of basic education in Colombia. However, interviews with teachers indicated that students still exhibit low proficiency levels in English. This discrepancy between policy and practice highlights a significant challenge in the education system. Additionally, the impact of public policies, such as the PNB, on addressing these proficiency issues needs to be further explored to bridge the gap between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities (Pineda & Meier, 2020) making emphasis in the difference between the intended impact of policies, and the actual proficiency levels observed among students. It underscores that the policies are formulated without considering the actual conditions in classrooms leading to the design of initiatives that don't meet students needs; this lack of awareness of the context results in policies that are not adaptable to the specific requirements of the educational environment.

4.2. EFL Teachers perceptions and reflection in a post conflict rural area

After analyzing the data collected, it was evident that teachers' perceptions and reflections on TEFL in post-conflict rural areas play a crucial role in understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with foreign language teaching in these settings. The interviews shed light on the importance of teachers' awareness and capabilities to employ local resources, as well as their professional concern for fundamental issues in rural education. Moreover, the interviews revealed the followings challenges faced by teachers:

Resource Limitations: a significant issue with the lack of resources available for teaching English in rural schools. Teachers at these schools often face challenges due to the absence of English labs, specialized platforms, and technology rooms, which negatively impacts their ability to provide comprehensive English language instruction (Montoya G. & Valencia C., 2014) This limitation highlights the need for improvement in these areas.

According to Montoya and Valencia's research conducted in Colombia, there are prevailing

weaknesses, in the context of English teaching and learning, such as the lack of resources, low English proficiency, and inadequate training (Montoya & Valencia, 2014). To better understand how English is being taught and learned in these areas, it is crucial to consider the perspectives of teachers and education stakeholders. This understanding is essential for creating initiatives that can enhance the teaching of English in the context.

In light of the above it is relevant to highlight prevailing weaknesses such as the lack of resources, low English proficiency, and inadequate training. It is now crucial to acknowledge the perspectives of teachers and education stakeholders in this context to gain insight into how English is being taught and learned in these areas. (Montoya G. & Valencia C., 2014) This understanding is essential for creating initiatives that can enhance the teaching of English in this context, provided that necessary infrastructure and resources to support effective language education in these areas are available.

Importance of English Education: Teachers expressed that in a post-conflict rural area, they face a significant issue when TEFL due to the disparity in social, economic, political, cultural and linguistic conditions for language learning (Cruz-Arcila, 2013) these conditions can contribute to a general perception of English as less important in rural areas. Furthermore, issues such as demotivated students, and parents' skeptical mindsets have been identified as challenges in TEFL in rural schools (Ramos-Holgín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016) (Cruz-Arcila, 2013) as educators, overcoming these barriers it is possible to improve the value and relevance of English education in rural areas, ensuring that students have access to quality education and can actively engage in the globalized world.

Adaptation and Improvement: The teachers' willingness to adapt their teaching methods and seek improvement is evident in their proactive attitude towards enhancing the quality of English education in post-conflict rural areas. They expressed a desire to incorporate new approaches, such as gamification and cooperative work, to make English learning more engaging and effective for students. This proactive reflects their commitment to overcoming the challenges faced in rural language education. As highlighted in the literature, issues such as demotivated students and parents' skeptical mindsets have been identified as challenges in teaching English in rural schools (Ramos-Holgín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016) (Cruz-Arcila, 2013) These challenges underscore the necessity for innovative and engaging teaching methods and reflect teachers'

dedication to providing quality English education in rural areas.

Challenges Faced by Teachers: The teachers express the difficulties they encounter in finding appropriate teaching techniques and strategies, as well as the lack of training and resources to effectively teach English in these settings. They emphasize the need for continuous professional development and training to adapt to the unique demands of teaching in rural areas. As highlighted in the literature, English language educators face an unpredictable environment, where job security has declined in recent years, and where class sizes and the scarcity of school infrastructure in rural areas can hinder the successful teaching of English (Cruz-Arcila, 2013) in light of the foregoing the commitment of teachers to overcome these difficulties and provide quality English education in rural areas is essential for the advancement of language education

EFL teachers' perceptions and reflections play a crucial role in understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with education in post-conflict rural areas. The interviews shed light on the importance of teachers' awareness and capabilities to employ local resources, as well as their professional concern for fundamental issues in rural education. Besides, they recognize the importance of English education for students in rural areas and demonstrate a willingness to adapt their teaching methods and seek improvement. However, the interviews also revealed the challenges faced by teachers, including inadequate resources available for TEFL in rural schools, difficulties in finding appropriate teaching techniques and strategies, and the lack of training and resources to effectively teach English in these settings. Therefore, there is a need for improved infrastructure and resources to support effective language education in post-conflict rural areas, as well as continuous professional development and training to adapt.

All in all, the exploration of EFL teachers' perceptions and reflections in post-conflict rural areas underscores the pivotal role that teacher awareness plays in addressing the complex landscape of education in such environments. Moreover, a continuous commitment to professional development and training is imperative to empower teachers to navigate and effectively meet the unique demands of English language education in post-conflict rural areas. Ultimately, by fostering teacher awareness and providing the necessary support, we can find the way for a more impactful and transformative educational experience for students in these challenging settings.

4.3. Cultural Barriers

This category was analyzed under the specific objective of identifying the cultural barriers that teachers in post-conflict rural areas face when teaching English. According to the interviews conducted, cultural barriers present significant challenges for TEFL in post-conflict rural areas which may underscore the complexities of teaching and the need of implementing strategies to address linguistic and communication challenges in this context (Cruz-Arcila, 2013) in the same way issues such as language barriers by rural dialects (Ramos-Holgín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016) have been identified as challenges in teaching English in rural schools. In view of the above, teachers have to adapt their teaching methods and seek improvement to ensure the effective teaching process of English in rural areas..

Addressing language dialects is a crucial aspect of overcoming cultural barriers in TEFL in post-conflict rural areas. It is essential to delve into the specific challenges posed by language dialects, which introduce a layer of complexity to the teaching process, requiring teachers to navigate linguistic variations that can impact comprehension and communication. One prominent issue is code switching, where individuals alternate between different languages or dialects within a single conversation. This phenomenon poses a challenge in the development of English language proficiency and effective communication (Cruz-Arcila, 2013).

Additionally, the incorporation of borrowings from local dialects further complicates the linguistic landscape. The use of terms and expressions from regional languages may introduce unfamiliar elements into the English learning environment, demanding teachers to clarify and bridge linguistic gaps for optimal understanding. Moreover, interference, a linguistic phenomenon where features of one language affect the acquisition of another, is particularly relevant in TEFL in rural areas. Teachers must be attuned to these interferences and employ strategies to mitigate their impact on language learning (Ramos-Holgín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016) In the face of these challenges, teachers in post-conflict rural areas are compelled to adapt their teaching methods and continuously seek improvement to ensure the effectiveness of English language instruction. By addressing the intricate interplay of language dialects, code switching, borrowings, and interference, educators can develop focused strategies that enhance linguistic inclusivity and facilitate a more successful English language learning experience for students in these challenging settings.

Communication Challenges: Teachers face communication challenges in rural areas, where the use of English is limited. They express the struggle of using English as the primary language of instruction due to the need for translation and the students' limited exposure to the language (Ramos-Holgín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016) moreover, teachers have reported using various strategies to address communication challenges, such as shifting the communicative load to the student, using Spanish-speaking peers in the classroom to interpret when a student encounters difficulty, and using culturally sensitive materials in the classroom.

To face these communication challenges, educators in rural areas have implemented various strategies. One common approach involves shifting the communicative load to the students themselves, encouraging them to actively participate in the learning process and take on a more proactive role in overcoming language barriers. Additionally, teachers have reported leveraging the assistance of Spanish-speaking peers within the classroom, enabling interpretation when students encounter difficulties in understanding English instructions.

Furthermore, the use of culturally sensitive materials has emerged as a valuable strategy (Local Literature and Stories, Cultural Artifacts and Objects, Local Proverbs and Idioms, Customized Teaching Materials, Multilingual Resources, Cultural Celebrations and Festivals) (Ramos-Holgín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016) By incorporating materials that resonate with the local culture and context, teachers create a more inclusive and relatable learning environment. This approach not only aids in overcoming language barriers but also fosters a sense of cultural relevance, enhancing the overall effectiveness of English language instruction in rural settings.

Economic Pressures: Economic pressures on students, particularly the necessity for some to work, constitute a significant challenge for educators in rural areas, affecting students' attendance and engagement in school. Teachers have expressed valid concerns about the impact of economic factors on students' ability to fully participate in English language learning (Ramos-Holgín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016). The need for students to contribute to their family income often leads to absenteeism as they miss school days to fulfill work responsibilities. This creates a scenario where students face difficulties in maintaining regular attendance and consistent engagement in the English language learning process. (Ramos-Holgín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016) As a result, the educational experience for these

students is hindered, as they grapple with balancing economic necessities and academic pursuits.

In the context of English language instruction, this is a multifaceted challenge. Students who are absent or disengaged due to economic pressures may miss crucial language lessons and opportunities for language practice, hindering their overall language development. (Ramos-Holgín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016) Additionally, the varying attendance patterns can disrupt the continuity of instruction, making it challenging for teachers to implement effective and consistent language teaching strategies. This economic pressure on students' education in rural areas requires a comprehensive approach that considers not only language instruction but also the broader socio-economic context. Collaborative efforts involving educators, local communities, and policymakers are crucial to developing strategies that support students in balancing their economic responsibilities with their educational pursuits, thereby fostering a more conducive environment for English language learning.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This research took a qualitative exploration in addressing the general aim of reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of public policy of English instruction in post-conflict rural areas. Through an analysis of the data, three distinct categories emerged public education policy, teachers' perceptions or reflections, and cultural barriers. These categories shed light on the multifaceted nature of obstacles encountered by teachers in fostering quality education in challenging contexts.

For this purpose, the examination of public education policy revealed a significant disparity between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities. Despite the implementation of standards, students still exhibited low proficiency levels in English. This calls for a closer examination of the impact of policies, such as the PNB, to bridge the gap between intended outcomes and observed proficiency levels (Pineda & Meier, 2020). Teachers' perceptions and reflections played a crucial role in understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with English language teaching in post-conflict rural areas. Resource limitations, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate training were identified as significant challenges. The commitment of teachers to adapt and improve their teaching methods demonstrated a proactive approach to overcoming these obstacles.

In addition to what has been said before, teachers' perceptions and reflections brought to light

challenges such as the low importance of English education in post-conflict rural area was recognized, but issues like demotivated students and skeptical mindsets needed to be addressed. The commitment of teachers to adapt and improve their teaching methods showcased a proactive approach to overcoming challenges.

In the same way, cultural barriers were explored, emphasizing the intricate interplay of language dialects, code switching, borrowings, and interference, which were recognized as substantial challenges in the teaching of English. TEFL in post-conflict rural areas adapted their teaching methods to navigate these complexities, emphasizing the importance of linguistic inclusivity.

In addition to the challenges faced by teachers in post-conflict rural areas when TEFL, communication challenges were identified, with teachers struggling to use English as the primary language of instruction due to limited exposure and the need for translation. Strategies such as shifting the communicative load to students, employing Spanish-speaking peers, and utilizing culturally sensitive materials were employed to address these challenges.

On the other hand, economic pressures emerged as a significant concern, affecting students' attendance and engagement in English language learning. The need for students to work to contribute to their family income led to absenteeism, posing a challenge to consistent language development.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX A



School Coordinates: 8.05556409542678, -76.12648010392265

Source: Image 2023, Google date of map 2023, Location of San Clemente Educational Institution, by google