

## **EFL Teacher Professional Development Needs: Voices from the Periphery**

### **Necesidades de Desarrollo Profesional de Docentes de Inglés: Voces desde la Periferia**

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#### **Abstract**

EFL teachers' professional development in Colombia has been characterized by top-down policies that neglect the regions in terms of contextualized professional development programs and resources. This article is an effort to make EFL teachers' needs in the Eastern region of Antioquia, Colombia, visible for academic institutions and local authorities to propose coherent professional development programs. This report is based on a section of the findings of a larger study called "Diagnosis of

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the needs about plurilingualism in the regions of Antioquia”. Findings show that EFL teachers in the Eastern region claim for ongoing and contextualized professional development programs, differentiated for primary and secondary-school teachers, and focused on instructional material design and adaptation according to the resources available in the local communities. Conclusions from this study outline implications for educational institutions to support teachers in pursuing their professional development within their contexts, methodological limitations for researchers, and possibilities for further research for stakeholders in the territory.

*Keywords:* Antioquia, EFL in Colombia, EFL teachers, material design, professional development, rurality, territory

## Resumen

El desarrollo profesional de los docentes de inglés en Colombia se ha caracterizado por políticas centralizadas que hacen a las regiones invisibles. Este artículo es un esfuerzo para hacer visible las necesidades de desarrollo profesional de los docentes de inglés del oriente antioqueño colombiano ante las autoridades locales para proponer programas contextualizados. Este reporte hace parte de una sección de los resultados obtenidos en el macroproyecto titulado “Diagnóstico de las necesidades de plurilingüismo en las regiones de Antioquia”. Los resultados de esta investigación cualitativa muestran que los docentes de inglés en la región reclaman programas de desarrollo profesional continuos y contextualizados; diferenciados para docentes de primaria y secundaria; y enfocados en el diseño y adaptación de materiales de acuerdo con los recursos disponibles en las comunidades locales. Las conclusiones de este estudio enuncian implicaciones para las instituciones educativas para apoyar a los docentes en la búsqueda del desarrollo profesional en sus contextos, limitaciones metodológicas para los investigadores y posibilidades para investigaciones futuras para los diferentes actores del territorio.

*Palabras clave:* desarrollo profesional de profesores, diseño de materiales, necesidades de los profesores de inglés, profesores de inglés, región oriente de Antioquia.

## Introduction

Currently, learning English as an additional language has become an asset for the citizens of our globalized world. To promote the widespread use of English, several language policies have been implemented in Colombia to improve students’ competencies in this language. However, actions to impact the field of Professional Development (PD hereafter) of teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL teacher hereafter) have not been implemented at the same rate as language policies. That is why making visible the PD needs of educators from territories outside the main cities becomes both an echo of historical inequalities and a call for actions that connect with the local contexts.

Language policies in Colombia have mainly focused on EFL. For instance, the Ministry of National Education has launched laws, policies, and programs such as *Ley General de Educación 115* (1994); *Líneas curriculares para las lenguas extranjeras* (1999); *Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras (Inglés)* (2006); *Ley de Bilingüismo* (2013); *Programa para el*

*Fortalecimiento de Lenguas Extranjeras (PFDCLE) 2010-2014; Programa Nacional de Inglés (PNI) 2015-2025; Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje: Inglés (2016); Esquema Curricular Sugerido Grados 6° A 11° English for Diversity and Equity (2016); and Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo (PNB) 2004-2019.* In the last document, Colombia is viewed as a “plurilingual and multicultural country that recognizes its native and creole languages, while opening the doors to the construction of a global citizenship through foreign languages” (p. 5). Although local languages and foreign languages are acknowledged, the vast body of language policies envisions bilingualism in terms of English and Spanish, disregarding the background knowledge of the communities in terms of other languages (Echeverri-Sucerquia et al., 2022).

Recognizing the diversity of languages in Colombia, particularly in the department of Antioquia, the findings presented in this article are part of a larger study called “Diagnosis of the needs of plurilingualism in the department of Antioquia” funded by CODI (Committee for the development of research, acronym for the words in Spanish). The main study addressed needs in terms of plurilingualism<sup>4</sup> in the eight regions of the department. However, the current report concentrates on the findings in the Eastern region of Antioquia, first with a general overview of the languages that coexist in the territory and, second, with a detailed description of the EFL teachers’ professional needs within the context.

The Eastern region of Antioquia is a territory located between the Magdalena and Cauca rivers where the Central Mountain Range (Cordillera Central) crosses the territory. There are twenty-three municipalities in the region with vast rural areas where most people live. However, urban areas within the municipalities near Medellín city (capital city of Antioquia) are currently spreading at a fast rate. According to the “*Plan de Desarrollo de Antioquia 2020-2023*”, the Eastern region of Antioquia has a great diversity of climates and a richness in natural biodiversity. Furthermore, this is an agricultural territory that has a great hydro, biotic, and landscape wealth (p.81).

In the same vein, the Eastern region plays a determining role in the development of the department and the country. This territory has 3.1% of all exporting companies in Colombia and hosts the second most important airport of the country with growing dynamics in cargo transportation, since a large part of the production of flowers and other products from the region leaves the country through this airport (*Cámara de Comercio Oriente Antioqueño [CCOA]*, n.d.).

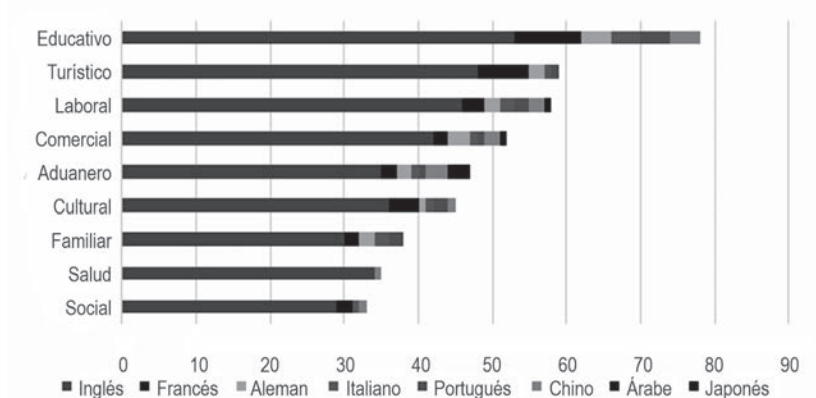
In terms of plurilingualism in this region, we, researchers, observe that the predominant foreign language in the context is English, followed by French and Portuguese. As for the

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<sup>4</sup> *Plurilingüismo es entendido como “la presencia simultánea de dos o más lenguas en la competencia comunicativa de un individuo y a la interrelación que se establece entre ellas”* (<https://cvc.cervantes.es/>).

For this article plurilingualism is understood as the simultaneous presence of two or more languages in the communicative competence of an individual and the interrelation among them (own translation).

sectors in which English is most used, the educational, tourist, labor, and commercial sectors are at the top of the list. French is present in the Eastern region in the educational and tourism sectors, since universities and language institutions offer courses of French to the community. In the following figure, we present a summary of the foreign languages used in the Eastern region according to the sectors.



**Figure 1.** Sectors where the use of foreign languages predominates. East (N=56)

Accordingly, throughout this report, we want to provide evidence of the close relationship between English, as the predominant foreign language in the region, and the needs that language teachers have voiced. To accomplish this purpose, this report relies on the concepts of professional development (PD), English foreign language (EFL) teachers PD, EFL teachers PD in Colombia and their needs in the regions from a sociocultural and critical perspective.

## Professional Development (PD)

According to Diaz-Maggioli (2003), PD is an ongoing process of reflection, change, and growth which results are driven from becoming a community of practice, sustained in time, and focused on co-responsibility towards teachers' professional practices. The PD field offers a myriad of models for teachers to identify with; these models go from workshops and one-time events to long-term learning processes, which foster major changes in pedagogical practices (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003; Freeman, 1989; Johnson, 2009). Likewise, we, researchers of this project, agree that the PD field has been called to follow the process that teachers undergo in their daily practices and to listen carefully to what they express as needs in their local contexts.

## ***EFL Teachers Professional Development***

Historically, PD for language teachers has evolved from being a training process to a more situated and dialogic process. Training programs have originated from experts who think, design, and deliver standardized documents and strategies to regulate pedagogical practices. In other words, EFL teachers training programs have offered step by step instructions that teachers should follow like a recipe to obtain the desired results that these training programs promise (Cardenas et al., 2010). Even though teachers' reality of having an overwhelming workload and extra time, they must devote to lesson planning, grading, and administrative work (Novozhenina & López Pinzón, 2018). The perspective about teacher training has reduced their role as technicians whose job is to implement the prescriptive procedures into the classroom (González-Moncada et al., 2002). One of the core characteristics of grounded PD programs is to be an open and long-lasting process since it is the teacher who decides when the PD program ends. The main objective of such programs is to look for pedagogical options to transform and build knowledge around praxis to adapt instructional actions to students' needs (Cárdenas et al., 2010; González-Moncada, 2007). Accordingly, in Yurtseven and Altun's (2016) study about teacher learning in a PD program, teachers "said that they found the opportunity to be actively involved in the learning process as well as learning from their colleagues" (p. 450). This is why PD of EFL teachers in this research is understood as a process where teachers' voices are valued, heard, and recognized as the path to act upon.

In the same vein, PD programs become well-informed strategies that set long term goals and seek to support teachers in understanding reality, self-discovering, and proposing changes in their pedagogical practices. In this way, grounded PD programs are flexible and individualized according to the teachers' context, needs, and concerns (James, 2001, as cited in Cárdenas et al., 2010). As a result, these programs meet the teachers' "desire of control over the learning experience that will primarily result in more learning" (Kahl Jr & Venette, 2010; Knowles et al., 2014, as cited in Almuhammadi, 2017, p.119), and ownership of the PD process. Therefore, we, authors of this article, based our research on the concept of PD as a flexible and dialogical process to build knowledge around teachers' realities and their agency to transform pedagogical practices.

## **96 *EFL Teachers PD in Colombia***

In Colombia, several scholars and universities have made important efforts to provide teachers with grounded PD programs. One of these efforts resulted in the "COFE project" (Colombian Framework for English) in 1991, which was conceived as an ongoing process to address several dimensions of teacher education having reflection as the basis to build professional knowledge and growth within a context. (Rubiano et al., 2000). Nonetheless, many options teachers have to pursue PD are limited to conferences, publishing companies'

events, and postgraduate studies (González-Moncada, 2021). In a study about PD needs of EFL teachers in Colombia, González-Moncada (2003) asserts that “English teachers claimed the urgency to propose PD programs that responded to the particularities of their settings and included their voices in the design” (as cited in González-Moncada, 2021, p. 141). By the same token, PD needs to embrace the principle of “Particularity”, as in Kumaravadivelu’s (1994) post method pedagogy, so both PD instructors and teachers themselves can become “sensitive to the particular conditions of the sociocultural milieu in which the teaching and learning take place” (González-Moncada & Quinchía-Ortíz, 2003, pp. 91-92). Following the previous characteristics of grounded PD programs, research projects that unveil EFL teachers’ needs in terms of situated PD like this one become a source of information to propose thoughtful PD programs to impact the communities.

### ***EFL Teachers PD Needs in Colombia***

Literature found about local EFL teachers’ needs in terms of PD to accomplish national language policies claims that teachers embrace multidimensional needs regarding their roles as worker, instructor, and learner (González-Moncada et al., 2002). For this study, EFL teachers’ needs as instructors and learners are key to envisioning a more complete picture of the multiple aspects that should be considered in situated PD programs. González-Moncada et al. (2002) affirm that PD programs should provide teachers with opportunities to access, create, and adapt different teaching aids that resonate with their contexts and allow cross curricular integration. In like manner, EFL teachers seek to update their teaching techniques and foreign language proficiency to better impact their school communities.

As a complement to the language teachers’ needs previously described, there is an underlying need for spaces where teachers can learn by “sharing his/her knowledge and experience with peer teachers who have undergone the same” (González-Moncada & Quinchía-Ortíz, 2003, p. 92). Thus, teachers become active agents responsible for both the individual learning and the progress of the PD learning community in which they participate.

Under the same perspective, Bautista Macia and González (2019) add certain characteristics that are connected to the needs of EFL teachers expressed especially in rural contexts and within the environment of the peace agreement framework. The peace agreement signed in 2016 supported the end of a half century of armed conflict in Colombia. This end of the conflict means to stop the suffering of people in Colombia and the beginning of a new chapter for the diverse communities along all the territories in the country (*Poder Legislativo, Colombia: Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera*. Junio de 2016, 26 Junio 2016). These characteristics are:

- The emphasis in the context.
- The active involvement of the community in the educational process.

- The use of differentiated approaches.
- The access to information and communication technologies.
- The implementation of flexible models that can adapt to the needs of the different communities.
- The availability of qualified teachers to develop the PD programs and make them a long-term process.

These characteristics are echoed in this study, since there is a long journey starting when the peace agreement was signed to the current times when efforts are being made to fully implement it.

In addition, to the needs found in literature, this study tries to explore what language teachers and stakeholders located in the periphery of Antioquia, it means located in municipalities of the Eastern Region of Antioquia (some municipalities are for the most part rural territories), voice as PD needs in their contexts and how these requirements echo the literature and summon new issue to consider when proposing situated PD strategies.

## Methodology

This research project relied on a qualitative exploratory research design to collect and analyze data during the years 2020 and 2021. The circumstances that resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic influenced the research process, especially in the number of participants from the educational, governmental, and cultural sectors and the way to approach participants through computer-based tools.

The data came from four sources of information: document analysis, an electronic survey, interviews, and focus groups with the aim of collecting different perspectives about the plurilingualism needs of the municipalities that belong to the east region. This information was analyzed and coded with the support of NVivo software to find recurrences and connections among the data.

We, researchers of this project, based the document analysis on the review and codification of the development plans of twenty-two municipalities in the region from two periods of time: 2016 - 2019 and 2020 - 2023. In these documents, we studied the indicators and programs proposed by local administrators related to language education.

Regarding the survey, there were 48 responses to the electronic survey from which thirteen people belonged to the governmental sector, secretaries of education, university principals, and public institutions directors: thirty-five to the educational sector, teachers, school coordinators and principals from the region. The responses came from fourteen different municipalities, being Rionegro the municipality from where we received most of

the data. The electronic survey had close and open-ended questions concerning information about the contexts where languages were used and explanation in terms of local needs regarding language education.

We carried out three focus groups with actors from the Eastern region. Five people participated in the educational sector focus group, all of them schoolteachers. In contrast, in the governmental sector focus group there was one participant, a director from a government education institution. The director of the East campus of Universidad de Antioquia participated in a focus group that included the directors from all campuses of the Universidad de Antioquia.

Finally, we conducted two individual interviews with a representative from SENA, the Colombian National Training Service, a public institution for citizens to develop skills and competencies for the job market, and a representative of a company from the airport sector in the region, which is one of the most important sectors in the Eastern region. These participants were selected to cover other visions of the territory that had not been covered in the focus groups. Since the focus groups and the interviews were carried out virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were not asked to sign a consent form. Instead, at the beginning of interviews and meetings, the consent form was read, and it was explicitly specified that if participants remained connected, we could assume that they agreed to be part of the research. Additionally, anonymity was carefully guaranteed and only initials from names and last names were used to reference quotes from interviews and focal groups.

## Findings

Outcomes from this research deal with different issues; however, in this article, we report one of the more salient categories that relates to English language education, specifically the needs in terms of English teachers' professional development.

### *Ongoing PD for Language Teachers within their Contexts*

One of the most relevant needs expressed through data was the demand for contextualized PD strategies for EFL teachers. These programs should embrace the characteristics of the municipalities and detach from Rionegro city, which is the main urban municipality from the East region. Rionegro is located an hour away from Medellín and has historically been the primary host and receptor of PD events and resources for the East region of Antioquia. This request is evident in the quote below from a teacher who affirms that his municipality, Abejorral, receives almost zero resources for PD programs since this place is far from Antioquia's capital city Medellín and from Rionegro the central city in the



East region. Consequently, this teacher considers that his own PD and improvement of both teaching and language skills do not advance.

*...Yo trabajo en un pueblo que siempre está alejado de Abejorral, Abejorral está alejado de Medellín. Entonces allá no llega a prácticamente nada. Entonces uno también se va quedando, se va quedando y se le van olvidando las cosas y se va volviendo casi que una cosa monótona y estar en un salón todo, todo el tiempo, uno casi que se vuelve repetitivo con el trabajo que hace. (L. J, Grupo Focal Sector Educativo Subregión Oriente, 10 de noviembre de 2020)*

[I work in Abejorral town that is quite far away from Medellín (and from Rionegro). Then, almost no resources get to my town. Consequently, you as a teacher stop your professional development, you start forgetting things and begin working with routines in the classroom all the time, and you become repetitive with the work you are doing]. (L. J. Focal Group Educative Sector Easter Region, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

In like fashion, another participant from the focal group states that the PD strategies offered to EFL teachers in the region lack continuity and follow up of the diverse processes that can be originated at the heart of the school communities in the different municipalities. Consequently, teachers might lose motivation to start changing their pedagogical practices. This idea is illustrated in the following extract.

*Bueno, eh. La compañera... lo acaba de decir con las capacitaciones, pero libre de eso, de las capacitaciones, es como hacerle un seguimiento y que esa capacitación no sea una capacitación que hoy sí, mañana no porque infortunadamente eso es lo que ha ocurrido. Sé que este es un departamento bastante, bastante ejecutor cuando se propone hacer algo y cuando de verdad uno inicia ciertas capacitaciones, uno inicia muy entusiasmado y llega un punto dado en que esa capacitación inició un mes por ocho días y no se vuelve a ver. (L. M, Grupo Focal Sector Educativo Subregión Oriente, 10 de noviembre de 2020)*

[Well, eh. My colleague... just said so regarding workshops, but apart from that, the workshops are like to have a follow up in place; the workshop should not become an activity of one day only, since unfortunately, that is what has happened. I know this is a department that accomplishes objectives with high execution rates when they propose to do something. When I participate in certain workshops or PD strategies, I begin the process really motivated but we get to a point in which that workshop lasts for eight days, and it doesn't occur again]. (L. M. Focal Group Educative Sector Easter Region, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

As can be seen, EFL educators in the region require ongoing PD programs based on the needs and realities of the local context. PD programs as the ones described above put the needs of local teachers in the territories at the core of the strategies and turn the whole process of improving professional practices into a coherent endeavor.

### **PD Programs for Secondary Language Teachers to Update Disciplinary Knowledge and for Primary Teachers to Learn the Foreign Language**

One of the main objectives of the PD programs for the region should be fostering learning and improvement of teachers' disciplinary knowledge regarding the foreign language

and the pedagogical practices in the field. As for secondary teachers, they claim that they need PD programs to update their English knowledge and skills. This requirement is explicit in the following quote from an actor of the educational sector.

*Dentro del mismo profesorado existen debilidades, si se puede llamar así que, que por el tiempo, por el recorrido, por la inactividad se van quedando muy atrás, es decir, se sabe que eso funciona con el desarrollo de habilidades. Generalmente en la habilidad del habla. Es algo que se va perdiendo si no se mantiene uno en constante intercambio... (J. R, Grupo Focal Sector Educativo Subregión Oriente, 10 de noviembre de 2020)*

[Inside the foreign language teachers' community there are weaknesses, since teachers start lagging in the language skills due to inactivity in the use of the foreign language, especially in the speaking skills. Teachers' performance in these skills starts getting behind if teachers are not in constant relation using the language]. (J. R. Focal Group Educative Sector Easter Region, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Regarding the teachers at the primary and preschool levels in rural and urban contexts in the region, they require ongoing education in the foreign language since many of them did not study an undergraduate program on foreign language teaching and learning but they are responsible for the English instruction at their institutions. This situation is illustrated in the following extract from a participant of the educational sector in the region.

*Porque a veces los profesores rurales dan a veces primero, segundo, tercero o cuarto quinto, o sea, dan a toda la primaria y ellos al dar todas las materias porque ellos dan matemáticas, inglés, español, sociales, ellos dan todas las materias. Entonces, yo siento que ellos a veces no tienen buena capacitación o conocimiento para dar un buen inglés, o sea, para manejar un buen idioma. (P. C, Grupo Focal Sector Gubernamental Subregión Oriente, 4 de noviembre de 2020)*

[Teachers in rural contexts sometimes cover grades from first, second, third, fourth, and even fifth grade. I mean, they teach in all grades from primary; they often teach all the subjects, Math, English, Spanish, Social Studies, etc. So, I feel teachers sometimes don't have the skills and knowledge to teach English, I mean, they are not skillful in the language] (P. C. Focal Group Governmental Sector Easter Region, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

In the same vein, EFL teachers of the region recognize the direct impact that learning and updating their knowledge and skills in the foreign language have in their pedagogical practices inside the classroom. The following excerpt from a teacher illustrates this issue and makes a conclusive call to propose thoughtful strategies that can impact the learning experiences that EFL teachers offer in their institution.

*Entonces la importancia de las capacitaciones radica en eso, en que al uno actualizarse, al uno ir avanzando y aprendiendo cosas nuevas, eso mismo lleva al salón y eso mismo hace que el proceso de enseñanza también mejore. Y ojalá se pudiera dar en algún momento ese tipo de trabajo, porque la verdad el compañero lo decía ahora, hace muchos años, no se brinda ningún tipo de formación para nosotros. Y yo si realmente considero que uno se va quedando estancado y se va quedando siempre en lo mismo, eso es una forma de oxigenar y de que nosotros también*

*cambiamos y empecemos a trabajar de otra manera. (L. J, Grupo Focal Sector Educativo Subregión Oriente, 10 de noviembre de 2020)*

[So, the relevance of PD programs is there, when you update your knowledge, you advance and learn new things; then, you take your learning into the classroom, so the learning experiences inside the classroom improve, too. I would like those kinds of programs to take place any time soon because, as one workmate said, we haven't been offered PD events for a long time. I do consider that you as a teacher start lagging and get stocked in the same routines. PD programs are an alternative to refresh teacher's knowledge, so we teachers can change and start teaching in different ways] (L. J. Focal Group Educative Sector Easter Region, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

In sum, we, researchers, can state that EFL teachers are aware of the limitations they face to access PD programs when they work in the municipalities of the East region of Antioquia. Likewise, they are knowledgeable about both the needs they have as EFL professionals who work in-context as well as about the impact of improving their pedagogical practices and language base knowledge in their students' learning processes.

### ***Ongoing and Contextualized PD Regarding Material Design***

EFL teachers and agents from the educational sector assert that material design should be a cornerstone of the PD programs that are offered for the region. This emphasis on instructional material design should follow three characteristics: adapted to prepare students for national standardized tests (ICFES, acronym that stands in Spanish for *Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación*), sensitive to rural schools' contexts and familiar with different paths to adapt and create situated materials. Additionally, EFL teachers manifest their willingness for learning to adapt and appropriate resources for their classes.

Regarding the process to adapt and create materials related to national standardized tests, data show that there is a need to support teachers in building resources for students to practice and improve language skills and knowledge about the tests in primary and secondary levels. As it was previously mentioned, the fact that teachers who teach English in primary, and sometimes in secondary levels, did not study an undergraduate program in foreign language teaching and learning, poses some trouble to accomplish the objectives of the subject and achieve satisfactory results when students take standardized tests. The following quote exemplifies this issue.

*... Entonces también el uso de materiales, de mirar qué tipo materiales manejan ustedes, cómo podríamos llevar este tipo de material de la escuela de idiomas a las aulas de clase de nosotros, cómo poder ayudar a otros profes que no tienen tanto conocimiento porque no sé si pasa en los demás municipios, pero en ... sí pasa, que el que da inglés es el profe normal y él no sabe, entonces él se siente encartado con un área que no maneja y que los tiene que enfrentar a unas pruebas ICFES, que es igual para todo el mundo, a unos exámenes que son estándar para todos y que no saben llegarle pues a esos muchachos. (L. J, Grupo Focal Sector Educativo Subregión Oriente, 10 de noviembre de 2020)*

[So, the use of materials, looking at the kind of materials that people use (at the university), I wonder how teachers from public schools in municipalities can take those resources that teachers use at the school of languages (at the university) to our classrooms, how other teachers who are not prepare to teach English but deliver such lessons, and often feel frustrated and stressed with the subject and the pressure to prepare students to face standardized tests can received support from different stakeholders]. (L. J. Focal Group Educative Sector Easter Region, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

In a similar manner, PD programs should fundamentally offer different alternatives about resources and materials that teachers can access, adapt, create, and implement in the diverse rural contexts such as “*escuela nueva*” where they work. This request is supported with this extract, “*Porque a veces los profesores rurales dan a veces primero, segundo, tercero o cuarto quinto, o sea, dan a toda la primaria... Entonces me encantaría unas guías para los docentes, talleres también para ellos?*”. (P. C, Grupo Focal Sector Gubernamental Subregión Oriente, 4 de noviembre de 2020) [since, teachers in rural areas sometimes teach first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grade, I mean, they teach the whole primary... So, I would love some guides for the teachers, workshops, and activities for them too] (P. C. Focal Group Governmental Sector Easter Region, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

Lastly, teachers should be provided with a myriad of possibilities and opportunities for adapting and creating situated materials, since factors such as the profound shortcut of resources and budget of public schools deeply influence the foreign language learning process inside institutions. As a result, teachers are constantly making their best efforts to get materials and use them according to the knowledge they have, usually doubting the choices they are making. This is why, it is imperative to support teachers in following a well-structured adaptation and appropriation process of the resources they have available in their contexts. Thus, teachers can both build knowledge about the alternatives to create their own contextualized materials and propose innovative instructional materials and pedagogical strategies that match their particularities. One of the participants from the educational sector referred to this issue as follows.

*Los colegios no tienen los mayores recursos para trabajar, es lo que uno medianamente pueda ir consiguiendo en el camino. Los colegios ya ofrecen muy pocas, pues recursos y materiales y que libros y que guías y que audio, no lo que uno pueda conseguir, porque los colegios ya no proporcionan ningún tipo de material...Nosotros trabajamos con lo que tengamos y hacemos el mejor esfuerzo para que esos muchachos logren cualquier cosita.* (L. J, Grupo Focal Sector Educativo Subregión Oriente, 10 de noviembre de 2020)

[Schools don't have resources to work; resources are limited to what we can get on the way. Schools currently offer few resources, materials, books, guides, recordings, etc, so materials are restricted to what we can get; schools no longer provide resources... We work with what we have, and we do our best effort so students can learn something]. (L. J. Focal Group Educative Sector Easter Region, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Likewise, teachers explicitly express their willingness to adapt and find appropriate resources to impact diverse contexts at the heart of the municipalities of the region. However, teachers themselves acknowledge they lack information regarding these aspects as it is stated in this extract “...uno también no sabe si ese material se puede adaptar a otros, a otras escuelas, a otras formas o cómo poderles llegar también ayudar a esas escuelas donde no llega nada. En determinado momento, con el diseño de ese material” (L. J. Grupo Focal Sector Educativo Subregión Oriente, 10 de noviembre de 2020). [We don’t really know whether those materials can be adapted to other contexts, schools, ways, and how we can get to impact those schools that have nothing. In a certain way, material design can help] (L. J. Focal Group Educative Sector Easter Region, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

To conclude, we, researchers, can clearly perceive the need that EFL teachers must access PD programs focused on material and instructional design in the region. Teachers urge for such programs since the lack of resources, materials, and knowledge about these topics is undeniable. EFL teachers also face numerous questions about how to face their realities with the shortcomings they experience and the doubts they have about the path to create contextualized materials to transform their English classes in their territories.

## Discussion

EFL teachers in the East region of Antioquia are making visible their needs regarding PD programs, which should address three fundamental characteristics: being sustainable and situated, differentiating between the needs of primary and high school teachers, and emphasizing on teaching material creation and adaptation.

The first characteristic entails to propose sustainable PD programs in the region that continue functioning despite changes in local administrations. In this way, PD programmers will understand, read, and reflect local realities of the east region of Antioquia. This claim is an echo of what Cárdenas et al. (2010) argued about the expectations of EFL teachers about their PD, since teachers prioritize programs that involve educators and their cultural and social realities. Consequently, PD programs should dialogue with the diverse contexts teachers live and be aligned with their needs and expectations. In similar fashion, certain authors have asserted that when PD programs are based on teachers’ needs, skills, and experiences there is a high possibility to have a positive impact in the professional life of educators, their pedagogical practices, and their students (Giraldo, 2014; González-Moncada, 2006). In this sense, we, researchers, can conclude that contextualized and sustainable PD programs for EFL teachers can result in improving the foreign language teaching and learning process in local schools in the region.

The second foundational characteristic of these PD programs is to provide opportunities for primary teachers to improve the language skills and pedagogical strategies to face the English class and for secondary teachers to update their language instructional practices. This finding is updating the claim that Cadavid-Múnera et al. (2009) made one decade ago. The authors reviewed several studies that highlighted the need to have skillful teachers both in the foreign language and in the use of strategies to face the English teaching and learning process at the primary level. This situation is markedly different from the secondary school context, where teachers who major in English teaching are officially enrolled. Accordingly, some scholars have found that teachers who are skillful in the foreign language or major in a language program are significantly few in primary contexts. Unfortunately, this situation does not tend to change due to the lack of clear national policies regarding EFL teaching at primary level and the absence of strategies implemented in these contexts to promote permanent change (González-Moncada et al., 2001; Cárdenas, 2010; Cadavid-Múnera et al., 2004; Quinchía & Cadavid, 2007). Consequently, there is a need to promote national language policies that work towards the EFL proficiency levels, the pedagogical knowledge required to work with primary level population and the contextualized PD programs to impact the primary teachers' community. Similarly, PD programs to tackle the need to update language and pedagogical knowledge from secondary school teachers should be on the radar.

The third characteristic that PD programs should include is the use, adaptation, and creation of instructional materials as a fundamental aspect to empower teachers in their territories. González-Moncada (2006), in her study about language teacher education in Colombia, the formation offered to language teachers about the use of materials, concluded that teachers perceived materials as a key component in an effective teaching process. Likewise, teachers in the Eastern region of Antioquia recognize that the instruction about material use, creation, and adaptation should be explicit from the undergraduate programs, complemented by visiting the vast variety of school realities that coexist in Colombia, such as: public schools, private schools, rural schools "*escuela nueva*", etc. As a result, we, researchers, can assert that both the teachers in González-Moncada's (2006) study and teachers in the Eastern region of Antioquia foresee the fundamental role that contextualized materials, their local uses, adaptations, and possibilities play in the PD programs to have a more profound and steady impact in the region.

To conclude, it is claimed that PD programs for the Eastern region of Antioquia should have three main cornerstones: a) sustainability and contextualization, b) differentiation according to the characteristics of teachers, and c) deep knowledge about material design and adaptation of resources according to the specific needs of the diverse municipalities. These characteristics reflect the voices from educative and governmental actors from the region who know the territory and live the difficulties of unstable PD programs for EFL teachers in the communities.

## Conclusions

Throughout this study, we, researchers, realized about the latent requirements EFL teachers have in the Eastern region of Antioquia and the urgent need they have to address their PD in an ongoing and contextualized way. Firstly, teachers argue that the diverse contexts they live should be at the core of PD programs as opposed to the central views that PD programs have displayed during the last decades in the region. Secondly, EFL teachers assure that their PD should be addressed differently according to the school level where they work, their language skills, and the resources they have available at their local communities.

Regarding the limitations in this study, we experience methodological constrains due to the Covid 19 pandemic. We could not visit the territories as it was originally planned but conducted all the data collection instruments in an online fashion. A similar challenge posed the fact that researchers were in different municipalities and did not meet face to face during the research process; that situation was particularly challenging for the data analysis process and writing of the discussion of the findings. Additionally, it was expected more participation from actors from the different sectors, but we understood that people from the Easter region of Antioquia have other concerns as priorities during that crucial time of humanity.

Findings from this research should be considered by stakeholders in different spheres of the educational process. For instance, universities are called to create partnerships with local authorities and community organizations to design and offer situated PD programs for EFL teachers and accompany the PD strategies that are already in place to strengthen the impact in the territories. As for researchers, this study visualizes routes to propose follow-up actions such as systematizing the experiences of different PD programs implemented and the actions that teachers take in their pedagogical practices that might be reflected on students' achievements. Finally, language teachers along the Easter region of Antioquia are encouraged to pursuit their PD and actively participate in the strategies proposed to voice their realities and be agents to transform their contexts.

Undoubtedly, the conclusion of this study is an energetic call to persist and cultivate an ongoing presence of diverse PD projects that can be situated and sensitive to the needs of local communities to observe significant changes in the EFL teaching and learning process in the territories. As a result, what the Easter Region of Antioquia has to say about English in their communities can be echoed and visualized in the main cities and considered in the government agenda.

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