

**WHO AM I AS AN ENGLISH TEACHER?  
NON- NATIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS' IDENTITIES IN QUIBDÓ- CHOCÓ:  
CASE STUDIES.**

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CASE STUDY**

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## **Dedication**

To my beloved children Maria Isabella and Nicolas David who are my strength to move forward and improve myself. To my mother Maria, who is always supporting me in every stage of my life; and my grandmother Danae, who is my role model. I Love You so much!

**Karol Andrea Arias Lloreda**

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify teachers' perspectives on their identities as non-native English teachers in Chocó. This qualitative research carried out a theme analysis of the data gathered in semi-structured interviews with four (*n* 4) nonnative English teachers in Chocó. It was explored teachers' academic background and teaching experiences to identify the aspects that have influenced the construction of their self-image as professionals in the field and their perceptions of their careers taking into account the context of Chocó. The findings in this study show that their perceptions about their roles and self-images as English teachers are not affected by the fact they are nonnative speakers (*Nativespeakerism* factor). On the contrary, they acknowledge their advantages and achievements as bilingual speakers. Having a great or little knowledge in English as a subject matter does not represent an obstacle for them performing in the classroom; however, social and cultural aspects do influence the way they prepare and teach their lessons; for these reasons, the context in which they perform play an important role in the construction of their professional identities formation and perception of the self. On the other hand, it can be stated that the confidence gained as nonnative English teachers in Quibdó is product of their teaching experiences and knowledge of the socio-cultural context where they perform, in which their work goes beyond the classroom activities and shorten social differences between learners in the same class.

**Key words:** Non-native English teachers' identities, self- perception, and professional identities, self-image, perspectives.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to identify English teachers' perception on their professional identities and the given value of their professions in their workplace and their Afro-Colombian community in Chocó.

Defining non-native English teachers' identity in Afrocolombian contexts will help to understand teachers' perceptions of their professional identity and beliefs about their profession. This information can be taken into consideration by policy-makers in charge of educational policies in Colombia to have a greater perspective of the meaning of being a non-native English teacher in this kind of contexts. Similar research projects done in different places of the world about this topic like one made in Iran by Abbas Zare-ee\* & Ghasedi (2014) found that the construction of teachers' professional identity (TPI) begins with the definition of their professional roles and how they integrate that in the process of becoming teachers. Their findings suggest that teachers' beliefs impact directly on their construction and perception about their profession; for instance in the guidance they give to their English learners; which could influence positive or negatively in the context where they perform.

This research project is valuable for the Colombian educational context to have a better understanding of non-native English teachers' professional construction of their identities, how they perceive their profession, and the given value to the English language itself. It is the first time this type of research is done within this context, and it will allow opening a bibliography bank on the identity of NNET in Afro-descendant communities in Colombia for further research or findings in the field.

## **CHAPTER 2: Research Question, General and Specific Objectives**

Main research question: What are the teachers' perspectives on their professional identities as Non-Native English Teachers in Chocó?

### **General and Specific objectives**

#### **General:**

- ✓ To identify teachers' beliefs and opinions about their profession as English teachers in Chocó.

#### **Specific:**

- ✓ To describe teachers' perspective on the roles adopted in their profession as English teachers in Chocó.
- ✓ To identify teachers' self-image as English teachers in Chocó.
- ✓ To identify the socio-cultural aspects affecting their professional identity in their Afro Colombian community in Chocó.



### **CHAPTER 3: Background about Chocó**

The department of Chocó is located by the Pacific coast of Colombia; it is made up of 30 municipalities. By 2005, Chocó had a little more than 480,820 inhabitants (Government Statistics Department, DANE. 2005). This region is well-known nationally for its natural, cultural, and excellent geographical location. However, the socio-economic and educational reality of this region is not similar to other regions in Colombia. Poverty, lack of jobs and prestigious educational centers for the community impede this region to achieve the desired improvements proposed by the government in terms of education; especially what concerns to the teaching-learning of English as a foreign language in the country.

#### **Academic achievements**

Students' governmental test results (Saber 11) yields very low results, placing the department in the last national place rank. Students occupy the last place in terms of academic quality as well. For the specific area of English, the result of the exam is characterized for being the lowest in the country. According to the statistics published by The Ministry of National Education (MEN) in 2015, Chocó has 99% of its students in A- and A1 respectively, while the rest of the country has 85% of its students in A- and A1; this means that students from Chocó high Schools are 14 percentile points under the rest of students in Colombia. These tests results reflect students' performance in English, and leave English teachers in a bad position in relation with teachers from other cities of the country.

The MEN (2015) carried out different systematic studies and determined the need to improve the educational system for Colombian students to learn English as a second language, and strengthen English teachers' competences. For this purpose, it was implemented the national program of bilingualism in 2004- 2019, *proyecto de fortalecimiento de desarrollo de competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras 2010-2014*, *Colombia very well 2015-2025* and *Colombia bilingüe 2014-2018*.

Sánchez (2012) carried out a study called “Bilingüismo en Colombia” and found that only 25% of English teachers in Colombia has the level expected in academic tests; and concluded stating that “teachers have a direct impact on the academic performance of students...[and] the government policies should focus mainly on teachers ” (page 31). Reviewing Sanchez’ analysis, students’ poor performance is linked to English teachers’ low levels in the language.

There are no studies in Chocó yet that indicate English teachers’ level of proficiency, nor the process by which these teachers have learned English; and the reasons why they have chosen to become English teachers; which will give affluent information to define the value they give to their profession and how policies influence the construction of their professional identity in a community with the lowest educational results in the country, trying to adapt the self - and the professional to the changing government policies, a place with the perception that English is an unimportant subject matter with no benefits.

### **Bilingualism in Colombia**

It is well known the importance the English language has acquired during the last decades around the world. Colombia since 1994 through the “Ley 115 General de Educación” and with the national program of bilingualism (NPB) of 2004 has implemented the learning of English as a foreign language as a mandatory subject in all schools and high schools in the country. Through the Ministry of Education (MEN) the Colombian government planned different strategies for teachers and students to reach competitiveness in English and become bilingual by 2019. Some strategies were: inclusion and enforcement of new technologies applied to education (NTAE); the hiring of 1400 certified B2 nonnative English teachers performing in high schools, and 1400 natives teaching in 9, 10 and 11<sup>o</sup> (Colombia aprende, 2014); the implementation of the teaching of English from preschool to all the educational stages, including afro communities; the use of English Language Teaching materials (ELTM) published by Colombian and international experts ( /

*speak*); and a national English curricula guideline. Unfortunately, some of the strategies mentioned above have not given the expected results so far; on the contrary, have raised an environment of unconformity on the majority of English teachers. Valencia (2006), Wiches (2009) and others have mentioned that many teachers felt that the new policies were affecting them, because now they have more working hours, numerous groups of students per class, and additional hours trying to help themselves learning how to follow new guidelines to reach the government goals. They also emphasize the fact that many local authorities reject to adopt the guidelines because of the lack of incentives, resources, and well-prepared English teachers. These arguments suggest that new policies and English projects do not have a positive image among teachers, perhaps have not been successful because teachers from other contexts rather than the main cities were not taken into account to participate in the constructions of the guidelines, nor the psychosocial context or the physical one; reasons why, they might not feel represented nor benefited in their educational contexts.

Oswald & Perold (2015) tracked an English teacher identity in Africa and found that adapting the curriculum, the new notion of an English teacher, and the description of their duty led teachers “to feel confused, frustrated, her expectations on education changed, she become less effective and eroded a state of failure (page 7). The above, suggests that teachers’ professional identities are deeply touched by changes that commit their work, role in the classroom, and self-esteem. As can be seen, information relating to teachers’ construction of their identity in different context suggests that some external and internal factors such as policies and self-perception toward the career have influenced in the way they perceive their role as English teachers.

## English Teachers in Chocó

As regards to English teachers, the new policies changed the teaching profile and its obligations. One of the requirements of this educational national policy demands that English schools and high schools' teachers in Colombia should evidence a B2 proficiency level according to the Common European framework Reference for languages (CEFR). To reach this ambitious goal, since 2004 the government carried out teaching training in the four skills, immersion programs and the implementation of study materials for several departments in Colombia; Chocó was not included as can be corroborated in *Programa de Bilingüismo 2014-2019*. It was not until 2006 that a year program was run to prepare English teachers in Chocó (*Chocó Bilingüe 2006-2007*).

The secretary of education from Chocó made an educational characterization process in 2010, named *Política pública de formación de docentes y directivos docentes de la secretaría de educación Chocó 2010-2014* [Public policy of training teachers and directors of the secretary of education Chocó 2010-2014]. It was determined that there was a high percentage of teachers who were not performing in their training profile, including teaching English (p.13); and that English teachers lacked proficiency in the area and in their mother tongue. In fact, plenty research done in Colombia concerning the level of English teachers in Colombia show disappointing results. For example, Howlett (2014) in his paper *Colombia's Problem with English* quotes that, "75 percent of English teachers cannot speak the language to the European B2, or Upper Intermediate; 14 percent struggle to pass the A1, or Beginner level" (page 1). Which indicates that English teachers proficiency is a national issue and the national bilingualism program faces this great obstacle.

## Chapter 4. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

### Nonnative English teachers

Since the heyday of learning English as a foreign or second language around the world, there has been a preference on native speakers over non-native speakers to teach the language based on the concept of ideal accent or “native-like” (Liu, 1999); although the number of nonnative English teachers is greater and there is more availability in nonnative English countries. A NNET is a person who does not speak English as their mother tongue; they belong to what Kachru (1985) called the outer and expanded circle.

For decades, many researchers have tried to determine if the fact of being non-native speakers of a language affects the perception and the self-confidence NNET have towards their profession. Findings vary depending on the context; for example, Reves and Medgyes (1994) research with teachers from ten countries found that teachers accepted that they had difficulties with the linguistics aspects, but it did not influence in their teaching practices. Tajeddin and Aylar (2016) found that NNET recognized their strengths and abilities to perform in their contexts. However, they lacked of self-confidence and awareness of their role when comparing themselves to native teachers.

Likewise, Viafara (2016) investigated Colombians English teachers' self-image as nonnative speakers. He could establish that the way teachers perceived their profession influenced over their views as future teachers and felt concerned about the fact of being “too Spanish-like” (page 481). Nevertheless, the authors mentioned above and many others insist in the advantages NNET have due to their own foreign language learning experiences, socio-cultural awareness, sensitiveness to their students learning problems, and familiarity to the socio-cultural environment where they perform; which enhance their role not only as educators but also as language learners models.

Cook (2007) called NNET as advantageous for being multilingual, and Alptekin (2002) includes the international culture mixed to a variety of accents. It can be stated that almost all of these studies suggest that it is more relevant to be an English teacher with strategies and techniques to reach positive learning environments and knowledge progress over the fact of being native speaker with “proper accent”; and give great importance to the fact of being socio- cultural aware of the place in which English teachers perform.

### **Teachers’ identities**

One’s identity can be defined as the individuals’ sense of who you are in relation to the particular social context or community of practice in which you participate. From this perspective, identity is a constant negotiation between the self and the role the person plays in a social environment (Ball & Godson, 1972). On the other hand, the term *professional identity* it is defined by Ibarra (1999), Schein (1978) and others, as “the self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences (Ibarra, page 764). Thus, teachers’ teaching methods and attitudes have personal marks of distinctiveness; they are directly linked to their identity as teachers, self-perception towards their profession, the language they teach, and the context where they perform. Zare-ee & Ghasedi’s (2014) paper about professional identities construction as an English teacher carried out in Iran found that, the construction of teachers’ professional identity (TPI) in that country begins with the definition of their professional roles and how they integrate that in the process of becoming teachers and their values. Their findings suggest that English teachers’ identity construction in their work place is connected to their personal lives. Likewise, in the guidance they give to their English learners following the role they are required to follow.

## **Teachers' self-image**

It is the individual psychological concept a person has about himself/herself, which in its' affective dimension includes the feelings of self-worth for different contexts as individuals and as part of a community (Pajares & Schunk, 2005, p. 105). Bandura (1997), Harter (1999) and other researchers, agree that identifying a degree of domain specificity, cognitive and evaluative self-belief, and self-efficacy awareness when performing a specific task contributes to a high-order self-concept and self-esteem. For the specific case of English teachers, it can be stated that teachers' self-image refers to their sense of competence as English teachers and the role they play in society at different stages: language knowledge and performance, teaching, formation, interaction, and experiences. Maslow (1943) states that it is important that teachers have a sense of confidence, achievements and uniqueness in order to increase their self-image and impact positively in the context where they perform. The above means that having a high self-image balance a good sense of personal/professional limitations due to the self-awareness of abilities and disadvantages, and improve easily their teaching dynamics; which helps to avoid frustration and negative feelings about themselves and the context where they work.

## **Perceptions**

It is the interpretation given to their professional role in society and its effectiveness in social interactions (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Byram, (2008) stated, "Those who teach second and foreign languages have to think about how the language is offering a new perspective, a challenge to the primary language of identity, and a different vision of the culture(s) in which they live and have hitherto taken for granted" (Page, 83). Language teachers' perceptions are constructed taking into account the way they interpret their professional role seen from the inner perspective (Self-image), and the outer perspective (what others think about their role). The above is externalized in the classroom, in the academic community,

and in society; having implications in the learning experiences and the motivation students will receive to challenge themselves to learn a foreign language. When referring to teachers' perception it is also important to include the social recognition of their labor, students' academic achievements, and prejudices or stereotypes linked to the profession as NNET; such as lack of language and cultural competence or speak like native-like (Polio & Wilson, 1998). Recognizing the advantages as multilingual (Cook, 2007), and the variety of accents to enrich the learning experience (Alptekin, 2002) enhances the perception NNET might have independently of the context where they perform.



## **CHAPTER 4: Methodology**

### **Type of study**

The qualitative approach seemed pertinent for the study since the purpose was to inquire teachers' opinions and personal experiences. A thematic analysis (Flick, 2014:420-436) was carried out in order identify of the study aims to find some patterns in participants' opinions and beliefs about their profession in order to identify some factors affecting their perspectives on their roles as nonnative English teachers.

### **Participants**

The participant pool for this project consisted of four non-native English educators working in Quibdó- Chocó with ages ranged from 26 and 33 years old, with at least three years of experience as English teachers. Volunteers from different working places were invited to participate taking into account their situational contexts, and work environment as the common characteristics to describe the findings for the purpose of this project. This was a convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, since the teachers who volunteer were teachers from institutions that were more available for the researcher in the context. These were the only teachers who responded or were available for the research of a list of fifteen teachers invited.

### Teachers' characterization

Teacher	Genre	Age	Academic Preparation	Years of experience	English level certificate	International experience
<b>Teacher A</b>	Female	26	Graduated as English and French teacher at Universidad Tecnológica del Chocó in 2016	3	No	Yes
<b>Teacher B</b>	Female	28	Graduated as English and French teacher at Universidad Tecnológica del Chocó in 2013.	6	No	No
<b>Teacher C</b>	Male	33	Graduated as English and French teacher at Universidad Tecnológica del Chocó in 2010. Participated in one-day immersion in the bilingualism program run in Quibdó.	7	B2 – BPN test (5 years ago)	Yes
<b>Teacher D</b>	Male	31	Graduated as English and French teacher at Universidad Tecnológica del Chocó in 2015 Currently studying a Master in	3	TOEFL IPT (does not remember the score)	No

			Education at the same University.			
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**Instruments**

This research was flexible and implemented open-ended, non- numerical interviews as an interpretative tool to collect information focusing on individuals’ opinions, experiences, feelings, and views. According to Callejo (2002), this type of interviews is informal and requires the interviewed to trust in the interviewer in terms of “confession and recognition of a norm that it is accepted in the practice” (page 409).

**Personal unstructured interviews:**

Unstructured interviews did not follow a rigid format or one style of questions. However, for the well-being of the research a list of predetermined questions was developed to guide the conversation in terms of the project and to keep a friendly flow conversation with the teachers. Through individual meetings with each one of the four teachers, qualitative data was collected and analyzed to show answers to the questions proposed in this research project.

**Procedure**

The project was conducted through individual interviews; each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for the analysis process. In addition, they were conducted in Spanish to avoid misinterpretation or misunderstanding; and carefully translated into English to ensure the accuracy of the translation. The researcher identified four main categories to conduct the theme analysis: academic background and formation characteristics, working contexts and experiences, perception of their teaching role, and attitudes towards their position as non-native English teachers. Alvarez-Gayou (2003) defines categories as “conceptual units of analysis to classify, analyze or understand significant elements of reality through groupings of conceptualizations” (page 188). The information collected was

analyzed in order to describe in detail the findings concerning the research problem.

## **CHAPTER 5: Research Findings and Analysis**

As mentioned previously, four non-native English teachers working in Quibdó were invited to participate in individual interviews that prior consent and confidentiality agreement were audio-recorded, transcribed to English and analyzed through a categorization process based on the nature of the research. Four main categories were defined to conduct the analysis: academic background and formation characteristics, working contexts and experiences, perception of their teaching role, and attitudes towards their position as non-native English teachers.

- **Background and Formation Characteristics**

The pool participants are native from Chocó, they grew up in family groups with many needs, they studied school and high school in public centers well known in the city as disadvantaged academic places for their poor results and the socio-economic strata of the student community; which is not far from the reality that Chocoanos' society experiences in general. The four participants graduated at the *Universidad Tecnológica del Chocó* as English and French teachers in different years, for that reason they studied through different Pensum programs, and their perception towards their academic background varies.

They acknowledge the impact of the University in the process of becoming teachers, stated that they never had native English teachers, their professors were also native from Chocó graduated from the same University. Also, two of the teachers interviewed complained of the lack of methodological and language training in depth; and the little time, opportunities, and resources to

improve their language skills at the University. By that time, their perception of teaching English in Quibdó schools was based on their experiences during the teaching practices that take place two semesters before graduation as professionals and memories as high school students “*learning the verb to be and basic vocabulary every year*” (Teacher B).

Becoming an Expert as English teachers was not their biggest goal at the beginning. It was more about a social competence, a personal goal of becoming professionals, and improve their families' quality of life. According to their comments, their academic backgrounds were guided by others NNET who taught their lesson in Spanish, used traditional teaching techniques like photocopies, translations, book dialogs, and no technology. They perceived their professors as good teaching their subject matters; but they did not focus in rising students' four skills; which resulted in the perception that becoming an English teacher was having a University degree, and some vocabulary and grammar knowledge to perform in the classroom.

Therefore, when they began to work, even though they were teaching in Spanish discovered they lack of confidence to control the classroom, and they needed more teaching techniques to reach their students attention beyond the language capabilities per se.

“To gain confidence as an English teacher at the beginning was complicated because the pedagogical and didactic training at the University by the time I graduated was not good” Teacher C

“When I began at the University the pensum was designed to teach, not to develop our four skills as teachers; specially the communicative one which was limited to around 5 hours of English per week, and through the semesters they were reduced” Teacher D

These teachers graduated between 2010 and 2015, expressed their unconformity with their academic process in becoming English teachers, considering lack of training as their biggest issue in teaching regardless of the English level. On the other hand, although, they belong to different teaching promotions the lack of fluency and deep development of the four skills in English is a common point among them. However, the above was not an obstacle for them to find a job in Quibdó because they began to work as teachers in schools before obtaining their graduation certificate. The requirements for the position did not include English level certificates or experience; being in the process of becoming English teachers at the University was enough to apply.

Throughout their first steps in teaching, they understood that being a NNET was more than accumulating grades, giving homework or controlling class behaviors, they felt the importance of being good with the four skills in order to give their students more tools to succeed academically. According to the teachers, Quibdó is a place where students dislike English; find it an uninteresting topic beside other circumstances like working with vulnerable social groups, poor infrastructure, and lack of resources and training by the government. For those reasons, they decided to find ways to improve themselves in the four skills and teaching techniques; as a result, they gained the self-confidence needed to teach English in Quibdó changing the traditional grammar classes.

“To improve, I had to commit myself, to borrow materials and apply teaching models that are not common in Chocó, you know, blended learning, teaching using games, not the traditional teaching I learned” Teacher D

Other interesting findings during the interviews were the reasons that took these teachers to study this career; that is to say their motivation, defined by Schiefele (1978), as an intrinsic personal set of goals or achievements that guides people's decisions. Teachers A and B stated that they wanted to learn English since high school because they felt connection with the way people communicated in English:

sounds, articulation and pronunciation were interesting. Also because of TV shows, clothing styles, and music by that time was new, amusing and interesting to them. They wanted to be immerse in the English culture, and felt motivated for how “cool” English sounded and the admiration for people who were able to speak it. Teacher A biggest motivation was her opportunity to travel to study a semester in the United States of America; she was excited for the opportunity of travelling abroad. However, her biggest gaining was that despite the facts that surrounded her English learning process and lack of fluency in English she was able to communicate with natives in English and teach them Spanish, impacting positively in her self-perception as a NNET and envision the possibility that students from her hometown could gain similar opportunities if learned English for real. According to Falk (1978), these types of learners have an integrative motivation, because they have interest in become familiar not only with the language itself but also with everything related to it.

“I was a self-taught person. When I was in 7 grade an English teacher of mine made me like it because of her teaching strategy through songs, I found it interesting to listen a different language. I always got good grades in the English and that lead me to make the decision about my profession”

Teacher B

On the contrary, teachers C and D referred to two factors that affected their decision of becoming English teachers: the lack of economical capacity and opportunities to study something different. They wanted to be recognized as professionals and to be providers for their families; since this career was one of the cheapest ones, they decided to study English and French at the University in Quibdó. Therefore, their motivation at the beginning was instrumental, because they wanted to reach concrete goals (Hudson, 2000).

“ I wanted to study Electronic Engineering, but I could not due to lack of opportunities and financial aid. Now, I am an English teacher and I began to like it during the process, and all I care now is to strengthen and improve my skills as a teacher” Teacher C

Despite the situations mentioned above, these teachers displayed positive attitude towards the career and that facilitated the process changing their motivation from instrumental to integrative while working as English teachers in Quibdó. For example, teacher C found out that he had great abilities to improve easily his communicative skills. He participated in conversation clubs and he was capable to interact in English with other NNETs. Besides, he worked in a private school in Medellin for one year and he felt his job was appreciated; he also participated in an international interchange to the United States of America in 2017, thanks to an educational program in which he won the opportunity to experience the culture and the educational environment.

On the other hand, teacher D had his first experience teaching English at a University to some indigenous students who *“had even issues to communicate in Spanish because their native language was different”* and stated that what impacted him was the fact that *“I had to do research to create ideas to teach them English and Spanish while being accepted socially by them. That, I think is the biggest challenge I have faced in my career so far”*. He understood that being an English teacher lead him to be a socio-cultural mediator, to guide his students to interact successfully with other people beyond their community boundaries. Now days, he has interest beyond the professional field and stated to self –study to improve his language skills to communicate with native and others non- native speakers. He also had taken courses to improve his teaching because he wants to motivate his students to learn English to interact with others.



So far, these teachers' interventions have permitted to identify their inner motivation, working experiences and positive outcomes as the key set of factors that have influenced positively in the construction of their professional identities as English teachers.

“I constantly challenge myself to learn and apply new ways of teaching that is my biggest motivation to start studying at a Master level” Teacher D

With regard to BPN requirement of a B2 proficiency level according to the Common European framework Reference for languages (CEFR) for high schools English teachers in Colombia, only teacher C acknowledge his English level (B2) after taking a test with the BPN five years ago. The other three participants are unaware of their level, because of the high costs of the international tests and limitations to take them in the region. They work in public institutions; however, they commented that they have not yet participated in any of the BPN programs, have not received materials nor taken English level examinations. Nevertheless, bilingual institutions, Universities nor the places where they have worked so far have requested the certificate in order to teach English in Quibdó.

The academic community in Quibdó does not emphasize on the English level certificate. Thus, the PBN requirements have not impede these English teachers to participate openly in their working places. Having international certificates do not represent an obstacle for these teachers to teach English in this context, to feel empowered of their roles, or to be less respected in the institutions where they labor.

- **Working contexts and experiences**

The participants' pool work in Quibdó- Chocó as English teachers in different high schools in the urban area, three out of four schools are in charge of the municipality. As mentioned before, their students come from different social strata and many of them come from slums with social and family issues, the school's infrastructure is inadequate, English teachers lack of materials, lack of resources, and almost forty students attend per class. Consequently, teachers face obstacles almost daily. According to them, their students are usually in a bad mood when they first arrive to class for different reasons. Teacher C mentioned that when it rains too hard the sewage system overflows in his school or when it is too hot students cannot concentrate and complain about it because they do not have fans in the classroom. These external factors slow down the English teaching process and influences the negative view students have of the education per se.

They also mention that the policy the BPN implemented in which English should be taught since school by primary school teachers who have little or no knowledge about the subject matter, influences the way students perceive English as an unimportant subject matter in the future, and predispose them mentally from learning a foreign language. Teachers C and D disagree with the ideal of becoming bilingual in this sense, and mentioned two situations: some primary school teachers in Quibdó avoid teaching English and use those hours for other subject matters, other primary teachers waist a lot of time teaching only *"the colors and numbers grading with the same topics for 5 years"* (teacher C). Therefore, when students begin high school English lessons they are misinformed, they are under the expected level, and have negative attitude toward English.

"When the government changes that policy and hires English teacher for schools as well, maybe we can believe in the possibility of a bilingual education in Colombia. They should take as an example private education system for teaching English" Teacher C

“I have to invest a lot of time teaching the concepts that according to the BPN they should have learnt in school, I’m always behind my goals because I have to start over again” Teacher D

The interviewed teachers think that the aspects mentioned above are negative seeds sown through their students’ experience in the primary. According to them, primary teachers’ lack of expertise affects their English teachers’ results in high school. In Colombia, primary school teachers are not English teachers, and many lack of competences in this foreign language (Cárdenas & Chaves, 2013). Through the bilingualism program, the government has implemented different programs to improve these teachers’ competences, yet they have not reach the expected level and there are primary teachers who refuse to teach the language because they find it irrelevant (Cuesta, 2018). There is no evidence that primary teachers from Chocó have participated in any of these programs; however, the atmosphere of inconformity among High school English teachers can be evidenced.

“Primary school teachers know about everything and about nothing, Colombian policies difficult our labor as English teachers” Teacher C

These factors have influenced the construction of their perception as high school English teachers because they have to start by enhancing students’ motivation, and teaching them what they should have learnt since school. At the beginning of the academic year, they always focus more on motivation content and getting to know their students; and adapt the guidelines and the teaching practices to the sociocultural elements involved in the classroom. They have learnt to work in the context and they consider themselves as social models that can influence through the subject matter with their students’ academic feelings.

Socio-culturally speaking, the community does not perceive English as important for their life styles and interests, the majority of the people prefer to enroll

in medicine, law school or economy programs. High schools' board give less teaching hours to English teachers, and final grades are computed with Spanish and critical thinking. Under these circumstances, English teachers have fewer chances than other teachers to reach the academic goals with their students in the expected time, and recognize that grades are not a threat for those students who do not work during the school year. They accept their reality and complain with the government because they compete with the rest of the country results without having the same conditions. This has had influenced in the way the have to prepare their classes, the academic results in English every year, and the development of the BPN bilingual speaking community in Quibdó.

“The local government is not interested in the education; if you go and check the infrastructure you will feel sorrow for us, the sewage system overflows when it rains. There is no investment; we are working there with the bare essentials” Teacher C

"The physical structure of the school is not good, and the other English teachers are over forty years old, we do not have Internet, we do not have an English Laboratory” Teacher D

Thus, socio-cultural and infrastructural issues have an impact on their teaching practice. They are recursively affected and struggle to reach the standards proposed by the MEN during the periods demanded by the curriculum. The national results each year publish poor results in English for the region; however, it does not affect their perception towards their profession because they acknowledge that many of the factors affecting the process are external. In fact, the context has contributed to their determination to commit personally to face those challenges in order to make of their subject matter a better image among their students, and to participate actively beyond the English classroom. For instance, teacher C is part of the disciplinary, cultural and science committee, and

invites teachers from other subjects to do cross-curricula projects to enhance students' motivation in English.

The participants are also constantly giving speeches to their students about the importance of going beyond grades and learn for real, referring to scholarships, and telling about other Chocoanos' experiences who have gained academic opportunities to achieve their dreams by learning English. They spend much time preparing hand-made materials when needed, to apply lessons designed taking into account the reality in Quibdó to contextualize their students, and make them participate more through familiar topics. From their work experiences' perspectives, these teachers have managed to use those factors that affect them as tools to become creative, be part of the school community beyond the English teacher tittle, and enhance their teaching strategies.

There is also the aspect of the type of students English teachers work with. There is a large number of students who are inattentive or careless. They express openly that English is not an important subject; they do not like English due to prior experiences, and/or have inner issues that affect their integration and participation in class. Two teachers expressed their frustration at the beginning of their professional career because they did not know how to manage those situations. They had to commit personally and work harder to motivate their students; which reinforce teachers' positive perception of their duties as social models.

“The majority of my students do not like English for bad experiences in school, remember that primary teachers are not English teachers; they fulfill the government requirements, and unfortunately they do not do much to teach it properly” Teacher C

“I felt frustrated when students were negative; once a student told me he liked me as a person but hated English” Teacher B

“Every new group of students I have dislike English, they do not think English is important, there is no inner motivation, and the other English teacher in this high school is very old and does not effort to make things differently, I do everything on my own” Teacher B

Teacher A context is different, she works in a private high school. She has her own English classroom, Internet, materials, and resources (books and digital platform). However, she also has around forty students per class, her students are from middle-low strata, and have specific periods to reach the academic goals as well.

“There are many students who struggle when learning English, pronunciation and writing are the biggest challenges, it takes more time, even after the school year is over I have to prepare lessons to level these students for the next year knowing that they did not improve much, and that next year it will be the same again” Teacher A

As seen so far, English teachers in Quibdó face multiple realities at their working places: structural, and resources to labor properly; but the one interfering the most is the social aspect. Low motivation, negative attitude towards English, low-acceptance by the majority of the academic population, and poor results at the end of the academic year influences the dynamics to teach English and the roles NNETs’ play in this context. On the contrary, it had influence to have a strong perception of their profession as social mediators and active academic members of the community.

- **Nonnative English teachers perception of their teaching role**

Teachers consider that their role is to transform students’ opinions about English and shorten the cultural barriers, instead of just teaching English. The participants mentioned in the interviews that the majority of their students expressed their dislike towards the language because in the primary they used to

have boring and repetitive English lessons. Therefore, these four English teachers have implemented different strategies to motivate their students and change their attitude towards this subject matter; for instance, teacher B likes to make real connection with her students, being sincere and displaying her real personality. Clarck and Trafford (1995) found that having a good bilateral relationship between students and teachers could change their attitude towards the language and motivate students. This implies that students are more willing to participate and display positive attitude when they develop a caring relationship with their teachers; aspect that goes beyond teaching a lesson, it is more about the human being.

“I know they have issues, but if they trust me they will feel comfortable in my classes as well, we both work better in that way”. Teacher B

“I began using lullabies and traditional songs from the region, it was fun, and they loved it! I also prepare different games; I try to take them out of the classroom, to do things different” Teacher A

Teachers consider that their main role during the school year is not only teaching English, but also creating a positive environment raising their students' desire for learning English and to get involved with cultural and pedagogical activities related to English. They admitted not to strictly follow what the government requires in terms of knowledge in English because they find it “useless for the context”. Instead, they plan their classes according to their students' needs and pace, carrying a careful process to control students' behavior, discipline, and reaching a balance point among what they have is mandatory and what they need to know in English. These English teachers consider themselves as people who transform and contribute from their teaching labor to the development of the education in the department.

“I like to motivate them talking about the world, about successful people from our region, I want them to look beyond a grade” Teacher A

“I am a versatile person, my attitude helps me to get closer to my students, that is why I always have a big smile for them no matter what” Teacher B

“I do not follow the government guidelines and requirements, to me that is like going to a supermarket: you would like to take something you need. However, this is not the case, the government says: “No, you must take this” Teacher D

On the other hand, experience in teaching English in Quibdó and a spontaneous personality are important elements to overcome the majority of the obstacles as English teachers in Quibdó. As mentioned before, in a single classroom, teachers have around forty students, they belong to different social strata, some of them belong to wealthy families, others are very poor, and some live in slums. For that reason, the four participants agreed that experience in teaching is more relevant than experience in teaching the subject itself because through classroom activities they eliminate those socio-economic boundaries that make them different. In addition, through the experience they became capable to identify strategies, techniques and activities that could help them to improve their teaching process and reach empathy and positive attitude in their classes.

“I am an English teacher; I am a mediator between those who have everything and those who have nothing” Teacher C

“ With the experience I have gained so far, I understood that teaching English in Quibdó is not about a text book; it is more about the reality and what they should know in a foreign language” Teacher B



- **Attitudes towards their position as non-native English teachers**

The participants were interviewed to know their perspectives as non-native English teacher in Quibdó. The four of them expressed to feel advantageous in terms of teaching abilities specially “*transforming and contextualizing English teaching materials*” (Teacher D), because the materials they usually find to support their classes are monolingual and it could be difficult for their students due their low English level. They mentioned that sharing the mother tongue and belonging to the same socio-cultural reality of their students have been a benefit that allows them to have an excellent relationship with their students.

They also believe that being non-native has not impeded them to work in the field, they have learned English and recognize how much effort and determination does it requires, and they have partial mastery in English to teach the language as a native English speaker. Teacher C expressed that he always teaches his students how to talk about themselves, their families, their context “*survival English*”. On the other hand, they admit that they are disadvantaged if compared to a native English teacher in pronunciation or having a fluid conversation due their poor training and lack of opportunities to interact in English with others. Their self-confidence prevails optimist and keep positive attitude towards their position as NNETs’.

“A native does not represent a better learning, it is about knowledge in the language and strategies to share that knowledge” Teacher D

“I feel disadvantaged in the communicative part or perfectly listening what is said to me; but a native teacher is not always aware or understands what it is to be bilingual, we do” Teacher D

As NNETs’, they recognized that they do double effort to improve their language skills, and they study continuously on their own to strength their intrinsic

motivation. The context does not help them enough because being good in the subject matter is not a requirement; improving speaking is more a personal goal.

“I do not want to be a traditional teacher in Quibdó that is why I am constantly pushing myself to improve myself as an English teacher” Teacher C

The interviews suggest that they feel advantageous in comparison to native speakers in many aspects. They are native from the region, are familiar with the culture, the local usage of the mother tongue and because the national tests do not evaluate the oral competences; which would be the only fact in which native teachers could be more accurate. The lack of mastery in oral communication has never impeded them to achieve the expected academic goals with their students; and for that reason, their self- image in the professions is not affected. They believe that comparisons should not be focus on the *native fact*; but more in the methodological-didactic ways of teaching in which knowing about English is as important as understanding the context where the teaching takes place.

“It is not about reaching a native speaker accent to teach, but having a good domain of the different competences in the language and teach them properly” Teacher A

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

Teachers' responses enriched the purpose of this research, important information about the aspects that interact with them professionally to help them to construct their identity were found. First, English teachers from Quibdó work under poor conditions: Infrastructure in terrible conditions, and lack of resources and materials. However, it does not have an impact on the perceptions they have about their profession or their teaching duties. They have learnt to minimize the negative factors that affect the educational process in their classrooms by focusing more in constantly improving themselves as English teachers in order to use and adapt the available resources. In addition, throughout the experience in the region, they have acquired the ability to adapt the self and the socio-cultural aspects to advance academically.

Second, the social-cultural environment in which they work affects their teaching role, and has influence in the way they interact with students, prepare the materials, and perform as teachers. Each classroom has around forty students, teenagers with plenty economical and personal difficulties, and a mixture of social strata. These four English teachers have decided to keep a positive attitude to the adversities of this context, to be leaders, social mediators and lives inspirational, reasons why they do not focus in teaching English only, but also in creating a positive environment in the classroom where students feel comfortable even if they are uninterested in learning; by using cross-curricula projects that connects the English with other subject matters or the regional traditional knowledge.

Third, these teachers do not strictly follow Ministry of Education requirements' for English as a foreign language. When students begin sixth grade in Quibdó, their English level is very low which does not allow teachers to follow the guidelines. They have to spend time to fulfill basic English prior to what have to teach. On the other hand, these teachers find relevant to teach the contents taking into account the context, they perceive pedagogy as one of their strengths and because of that

they have the ability in teaching English through topics that are familiar to the students, because their biggest goal is teaching their students to talk about what they know, feel and live in the foreign language. They are not restricting the teaching to the government requirements, which agrees with Valencia (2006) and Wiches (2009) findings about teachers' unconformity to adopt the guidelines because they go against the learning reality of their context.

Forth, the positive attitude towards their role in the classroom and the self-confidence in their potential and preparation to lead English learning processes in the context, have influenced their self-awareness of their advantages as NNEs'. To see themselves as positive influencers who are contributing from the self and their actions to the development of important changes in Chocó, in which learning a foreign language will give them more academic, economic, and work opportunities. Thus, it can be stated that becoming a confident English teacher is a mixture of linguistic, pragmatic, morphologic, and semantic aspects that go along with the socio-cultural aspects that accompany the human being regardless of their native or nonnative speakers' characteristics.

To conclude, the findings of this study point that to be an English teacher in Quibdó requires to accept the differences, to be disciplined enough to continue improving by their own, to adapt their academic desires to the socio-economical reality, to be creative to adapt English materials they find to the context, to have a flexible-teaching personality to be comprehensive with their learners, to understand the socio-cultural dynamics represented in the classroom, and to constantly find ways to enhance their students' motivation. Additionally, to be an English teacher in Quibdó means to provide opportunities for the students to benefit from the class beyond the language learning experience considering that learning English is not important in the context and does not bring any benefit for the community in an immediate future.

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