

**The Student's Socio-Cultural Environment: A Determining Factor in Didactics for  
Learning a Foreign Language in Basic Education in Colombia**

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by

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### **Dedication**

To my family, that throughout my life has supported and motivated me to continue pursuing my dreams and putting my talents into practice, to my students who awaken in me every day the desire to be a better professional, to my colleagues from whom I have learned that teaching is learning in itself, to my tutor of this monograph and teachers along my life, because thanks to them, I am on this path and mainly to God, who day after day has given me wisdom, strength, persistence and above all love for this profession since He is the best teacher.

### Specialized Analytical Summary

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| Contents    | <p style="text-align: center;">El propósito de este documento es motivar a los involucrados en el diseño y aplicación de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en Colombia a buscar vías que permitan una optimización del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras en el país, a través de la contextualización didáctica, que considere la cultura, el desarrollo personal y social de los estudiantes de primaria del país.</p> |

Entre los hallazgos de este documento se puede mencionar el impacto de la inequidad económica y los antecedentes culturales del país en la educación primaria bilingüe en Colombia que se evidencia en los últimos resultados de las evaluaciones internacionales; la organización de la educación colombiana y cómo los recursos docentes y la fuerza laboral docente inciden en el proceso de bilingüismo en el país, en comparación con los dos países mejor clasificados según los estándares del Programa Internacional de Evaluación de Alumnos. Se abordan igualmente temas como la didáctica desde lo general y lo particular, algunos aspectos del aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera y la segunda lengua en el contexto colombiano, así como la relevancia didáctica en el aprendizaje de lenguas en Colombia; y la importancia del equilibrio entre contenido, contextualización y estándares internacionales, en la aplicación didáctica para el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras en Colombia.

Las conclusiones de este documento nos invitan a adoptar una perspectiva del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera en el país que nos permita aprovechar los elementos didácticos en un punto de vista local con proyección internacional.

Finalmente, la respuesta a la pregunta de indagación propuesta busca continuar motivando a todos los involucrados en

el campo de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en Colombia a reflexionar sobre los métodos, materiales, contexto, rol del docente y preconceptos de los estudiantes para lograr una optimización del aprendizaje del inglés en los estudiantes de primaria haciéndolo significativo y ajustado a su realidad y también a estándares internacionales.

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Research Line

Pedagogy, didactics, and curriculum is a transversal research line that corresponds to the ECEDU program that seeks to make visible the autonomous learning models of pedagogy from traditional settings and with a focus on pedagogical practices in learning environments, which, due to its themes and objectives, implies work related to research processes in the academic programs of all the university's schools.

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Conclusions

Despite the multiple initiatives and proposals both at the national and local level that seek to ensure that Colombia is linked to modern society and improve its image in the face of new globalizing trends, making its students competent bilinguals, significant improvements are not observed in the results obtained by the students, which accounts for problems in the teaching-learning process of the foreign language in the country.

Basic school students in Colombia learn English based on foreign teaching models and didactical methods that omit the students' socio-cultural reality, making it difficult for students

and teachers to build meaningful knowledge.

Content without contextualization generates an imbalance in the teaching act, affecting the results of primary students in both national and international English proficiency tests.

The sociocultural reality of a country like Colombia, directly affects how students access knowledge in formal educational settings such as those that occur in basic education in the country.

A didactic reflection of foreign languages that takes into account not only the contents but also teachers and students can result in a meaningful education with higher rates of real bilingualism in Colombia as shown by some initiatives developed in the country.

The availability of resources for bilingual teaching and human talent are determining variables that continue to increase the gap between public and private education in the Colombian educational system.

## Abstract

The purpose of this document is to motivate those involved in the design and application of the teaching of foreign languages in Colombia to seek ways that allow an optimization of the teaching-learning process of foreign languages in the country, through the didactic contextualization, that considers the culture, personal and social development of primary school students in the country.

Among the findings of this document can be mentioned the impact of economic inequity and cultural background of the country on bilingual basic education in Colombia which is evident in the latest results of the international assessments. The organization of Colombian education, the teaching resources, and the teaching workforce affect the process of bilingualism in the country when compared with the two highest-ranked educated countries according to the standards of the International Program for Student Assessment. Likewise, the didactic, from the general and particular aspects of the learning of the foreign language and the second language in the Colombian context as well as the investigation of the didactic relevance in the learning of languages in Colombia, is addressed. Finally, the importance of the balance between content, contextualization, and international standards in the didactic application for learning foreign languages in Colombia is also considered.

The conclusions of this document invite us to adopt a perspective of the teaching-learning process of the foreign language in the country allowing us to take advantage of the didactic elements from a local standpoint with international projection.

Finally, this study seeks to continue motivating all those involved in the field of foreign language teaching in Colombia to reflect on the methods, materials, context, role of the teacher, and preconceptions of the students to achieve an optimization of the learning of English in the primary school students, making it meaningful and adjusted to their reality and international

standards.

**Key Words:** Didactics, Foreign Languages Education, Socio-cultural Environment, Basic Education in Colombia, Contextualized Learning.



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First, thanks to God who in His incommensurable love allowed me to discover my vocation from a very young age and to undertake this path of educating, thanks to my family for their support and faith in me, to my teachers because thanks to them I can stand on giant's shoulders and my students who are my incentive to continue improving.

## Table of Contents

|   | <b>Page</b> |
|---|-------------|
| Dedication.....   | 2           |
| Specialized Analytical Summary.....                                 | 3           |
| Abstract.....   | 7           |
| Acknowledgements.....   | 9           |
| Table of Contents.....  | 10          |
| List of Tables and Figures.....                                     | 12          |
| Introduction.....   | 13          |
| Significance of the Study.....                                      | 13          |
| Statement of the Problem.....                                       | 14          |
| Objectives.....   | 16          |
| General Objective.....  | 16          |
| Specific Objectives.....  | 16          |
| Literature Review.....  | 17          |
| Social and Economic Inequity in Colombia.....                       | 17          |
| Cultural Background of the Country.....                             | 22          |
| Performance of Colombian Students in International Assessments..... | 25          |
| Organization of the Education in Colombia.....                      | 26          |
| Teaching Resources.....   | 27          |
| About the Teaching Workforce.....                                   | 28          |
| Didactics.....  | 29          |
| Didactics: General and Particular Aspects.....                      | 29          |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Didactics of Languages .....  | 31 |
| Foreign and Second Languages.....   | 33 |
| Colombia and the Languages .....  | 34 |
| Pertinence of Didactics.....  | 40 |
| Didactic Inquiry in the Field of Foreign Languages .....                                | 43 |
| Foreign Language Didactics and its Role in Meaningful and Contextualized Learning ..... | 44 |
| Contents, Contextualization, and International Standards in Application for Learning    |    |
| Foreign Languages in Colombia .....   | 46 |
| Methodology .....   | 50 |
| Results and Discussion .....  | 53 |
| Factors Referring to the Socioeconomic Situation of the Country .....                   | 55 |
| Factors of the Bilingual Educational Model Applied in Colombia .....                    | 56 |
| Didactic Reflection for the Optimization of the T-L Process of Foreign Languages in the |    |
| Country .....   | 57 |
| Didactics .....   | 57 |
| Didactic of Foreign Languages .....   | 58 |
| Conclusions and Recommendations .....   | 60 |
| References.....   | 63 |

**List of Tables and Figures**

|  | <b>Page</b> |
|--|-------------|
| Table 1. Types of Schools according to the MEN .....                                       | 35          |
| Table 2. Specialized resources for learning English. Source: (Ramos & Cardenas, 2014) .... | 39          |
| Table 3. Human talent management.Source: Ramos & Cardenas (2014) .....                     | 39          |
| Figure1. Monograph content matrix .....  | 51          |

## **Introduction**

As a transversal science, the didactics of teaching foreign languages (DFL) are balanced and supported by the didactic triangle: teacher, student, and content (which in this case is the language that is taught and learned).

This didactic ideal requires that all the axes that compose it are in balance so that the teaching-learning process is optimal. That is why when the academic results do not reflect both government and local efforts in bilingual education projects, it is necessary to inquire about the factors that affect the academic performance of students, such is the case of Colombia, a country that despite multiple initiatives and programs, both national and local, persists in having a weak performance both in national and international tests in their command of the lingua franca most used in our globalized society, the English. That is the reason why, from an analytical point of view, in this paper, various agents that affect the learning of English by students who attend basic school in the country are explored. including how the socio-cultural reality of the learner affects their process in a significant way and why this factor cannot be omitted from the equation for didactic planning and execution.

### **Significance of the Study**

As a social process, education is constant and at the same time evolutionary; it is because of this reality that the scientific disciplines that support and guide it are perfected with the emergence of new economic, technological, political, social and cultural challenges of each era. This evolutionary phenomenon is even more evident in the field of language education since these are the mediator, builder and perpetuator of culture and knowledge. Thus, improving the didactics of languages is a necessity for the countries on the development path as is the case of Colombia.

The reader may consider that this aspect has been treated from other disciplines such as sociolinguistics which studies different social aspects that influence the use of the language, undertaking it from the perspective of the sign and the linguistic uses that contribute to social relationships, being over the years very effective in describing the determinants within society as an introspection, however, fall short when it comes to seeking teaching techniques and methods in a globalized and continuously interconnected society.

Therefore, this monograph seeks to account for the state of knowledge, as a product of documentary research, establishing an original vision regarding the importance of taking into account the socio-cultural context of the student in Colombia when designing and applying the didactics for teaching and learning a foreign language in order to plan and apply a didactic that fulfills the function of optimizing learning through the integration of culture and personal development. (Mallart, 2001)

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Ministry of National Education (MEN) of Colombia has been implementing since 2004 the national bilingualism plan (PNB) whose specific objective included, within a period of 15 years, that all students finish their secondary education with an intermediate level (B1 according to the Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Language: English). For this, the basic standards of competences in foreign languages: (English) were published and socialized. This document established, among other things, the objectives and contents for the progressive and systematic teaching of the foreign language (English) in basic and secondary education, in addition to a definition of a solid and coherent evaluation system, which establishes that from 2007, the foreign language components (English) of the teaching tests and the *Saber* exams are organized according to the standards and levels of the Common European Framework of

Reference (CEFR). Teacher training was also established with the support of native speakers of the foreign language (Fandiño Parra, Bermúdez Jiménez, & LugoVásquez, 2012).

Nevertheless, the EF Standard English Test (EF SET) in 2017 classified Colombia in 11th place among 17 countries in the region and for the second consecutive year Colombia obtained a low level in the ranking of the international consultancy Education First (EF) compared to 88 countries in a test conducted on more than 1.3 million participants (Monterrosa Blanco, 2017). This low performance could be attached to a deficiency in the didactics application because in some cases the didactics that apply to foreign language learning in educational settings in Colombia come from the countries of origin of the languages to learn and do not consider the influence that the sociocultural environment of the student plays in his/her learning processes. An example of this is the international schools that are accredited by the countries of origin of the language and operate with foreign curricula that meet their own standards which are almost indistinct from those applied to the mother tongues in their countries and whose educational materials are imported, among which are distinguished those that belong to programs like AdvancED, NEASC, IBO, IB and CIS.

In other cases, there is not a clear distinction in the application of didactics for learning a second language and the didactics of a foreign language in the country. This phenomenon is evident in the use that many Colombian educational institutions make of texts and curricula designed abroad to learn a second language.

Overall, the teaching for learning a foreign language focused on the objectives and not on the student's process, which loses significance by implicitly excluding the socio-cultural factor that is in fact the origin of the communicative need and therefore the purpose of learning a language.

Keeping in mind all of the above, this monograph raises the question what the importance of the sociocultural context of students to design and apply effective didactics in the teaching-learning process of a foreign language is.

## **Objectives**

### ***General Objective***

To argue through a documentary review the importance of the sociocultural context of education students in the design and effective implementation of didactics for learning foreign languages in Colombia.

### ***Specific Objectives***

Analyze the various factors that affect the reality of learning a foreign language in the country from various perspectives, through the objective presentation of necessary data from various bibliographic sources.

Relate the impact of the sociocultural context of the student with the teaching-learning processes of a foreign language in Colombia through the description of social phenomena exposed by documentary sources.

To explain the importance of the balance between contents, contextualization and international standards when designing and applying didactics for meaningful learning of foreign languages in Colombia through the exposition of selected documentary sources.



## **Literature Review**

The following literature review purposes to analyze previous research documents regarding the reality of learning a foreign language in the country and the various factors that affect it, from diverse perspectives, first from a global and international perspective, starting with the social and economic disparity in Colombia, the cultural background of the country and the performance of Colombian Students in international assessments.

Then, topics as the education in Colombia are analyzed considering diverse variables as the inner organization, the teaching resources and the teaching workforce followed by the didactics from general and particular aspects including the didactic of languages and the explanation of foreign and second languages.

Finally, how all the aforementioned issues converge and are approached from the local reality, analyzing first Colombia and languages, the relevance of didactics, didactic inquiry in the field of foreign language, the didactics of FL and its role in the meaningful and contextualized learning, the contents, the contextualization, and international standards in application for the learning of foreign languages in Colombia and examples of the Colombian cultural identity in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

### **Social and Economic Inequity in Colombia**

The right to education, recorded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (UDHR) and other legal instruments of international organizations, like the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), to which Colombia belongs to, establishes that this fundamental right seeks developing skills to get out of poverty, for children and adults who are socially or economically marginalized, and to fully participate in community life, thanks to a quality and sustainable education with access for all.

(UNESCO, 2019) However, the reality of education in Colombia is far from the international ideal due to the social and economic inequity prevailing in the country.

Over the years and the governs in Colombia, according to data from the Ministry of National Education (MEN), public spending has increased placing education as the sector with the largest budget compared to the total budget (Mineducación, 2020) Also, legal measures have been taken, with the aim of promoting access to education for children, girls, and adults, such as Law 1294 of 2009 that enables the scheme of schools in concession (educational services by private entities when the public offer of basic-media education is insufficient) and Decree 4807 of 2011 regulating the gratuitousness of the educational service from pre-schooling to middle education.

Programs have also been implemented to promote access to education in the territory, such as transfers conditional on the attendance and permanence of “Familias en Acción”, the access to higher education programs “Ser Pilo Paga” and “Generación E” that seek to benefit to 40,000 students during 2014-2018 and 352,000 students in 2019-2022, respectively.

However, according to data from the review of national education policies conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Ministry of National Education:

Many [Socio-Economic] obstacles limit young people's access to education, including lack of educational opportunities, poverty, pressure to start working, conflict and violence.

Generating low school attendance rates, poor transition between levels, high dropout rates and a significant number of children who do not enter the education system.

(Schleicher, 2016)

Evidence of the above is provided by different published sources like diaries and reports which emphasize that education coverage in the Colombian territory is not universal (only 72%) (Santa María, 2020), showing that greater disparity between opportunities for rural and urban students; example of this is that in 2014 almost one million school-age children and young people were outside the education system in Colombia, and from them about 70% belonged to rural areas which also lack access to basic public services, as featured by the newspaper *El Espectador* (Matijasevic, 2014) . In addition, only 37% of rural schools have drinking water service (Bonilla Hernandez, 2018).

Another aspect that should be highlighted is the population of working children, which, according to data from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) in the quarter of October to December 2019, was 22.2% of the total national population, divided between 278 thousand children between five and 17 years of age in urban areas and 308 thousand in rural areas (DANE, 2019). This without mentioning the effects of a war that has lasted more than 70 years in the country and has resulted in 4,737 minors having distanced themselves from classrooms when recruited into the ranks of groups outside the law such as the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, for its acronym in Spanish) and the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional for its acronym in Spanish). According to information from the Unit's Directorate of Registration and Information Management for Comprehensive Victim Care and Repair about 1,68 million children were victims between the ages of six and 17 as revealed by the research “War Goes to School” conducted by Juliana Castellanos in 2016 journalist and teacher of the *Politécnico Gran Colombiano*, who also realizes that the conflict that the country has experienced for so many years, has not only had repercussions on students, but also left teachers missing, displaced, threatened and even killed, as well as ruined schools because they

were used as trenches and ended up with their infrastructure damaged by bullet and explosive impacts. (Semana Magazine, 2016).

Taking into account the context of war that the country has lived for decades, the peace as an objective finds in the education the force to develop a sustainable future that “prepare all people with the necessary knowledge, skills and values that will allow them to live with dignity, build their own lives and contribute to the societies in which they live” (UNESCO, 2019).

Regarding sustainability, studies of the United Nations Education Organization Science and Culture (UNESCO) explains that: Sustainability education seeks to provide students with the three knowledges (know how to think, know how to be and know how to do) by the competences model with the skills approach, to help people understand what is going on, to feel part of the society in which they live and to know how they can participate in development processes, which content aims to achieve social justice for current and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity by functioning as a fundamental element of the right to a decent life and individual development, and as a determining factor for poverty reduction and inequalities (UNESCO, 2019).

In this regard, Colombia has implemented public policies as stated in the National Development Plan 2014-2018 in which the Sustainable Development Goals set out by the UN and UNESCO became part of the purposes to achieve at the national level. With regard to education, it implements pedagogical strategies such as The School Environmental Projects (PRAE) included in the Institutional Educational Project (PEI) that as environmental management tools seek training from a conception of sustainable development, with space-temporary references and on the basis of respect for diversity and autonomy and contemplating

economic, social, cultural, political, ethical and aesthetic aspects for sustainable management. (MinEduación, 2005).

Relevance, integrality, and equity in education are concepts raised by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are decisive in judging the quality of education in a country. These are closely linked to achieving the educational goals set by international societies and entities, as evidenced in the key aspects- test results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018, which focused on evaluating reading, mathematics, and sciences, which with regard to equity demonstrated that: in Colombia students with socioeconomic advantage surpassed disadvantaged students in reading with 86 points; regarding performance in mathematics and science, the socioeconomic condition was a factor that applied 13% of the variation in performance in mathematics as and 12% of the variation in performance in science between one group and another. These variations are accompanied by reports from school officials highlighting:

\*The ability to provide education is diminished by lack of staff, in the case of favored institutions it is 18% while in the least favored is 34%.

\*Only 62% of educators in less-favored schools are fully certified, compared to 78% of educators in favored schools.

It is evidenced that the academic performance gap related to the socioeconomic status of students and schools in Colombia is still wide (OECD, 2018).

Regarding the socio-economic reality of the countries, it could be concluded that "Education in Colombia is an aggravating factor in social [and economic] inequities despite extensive coverage, [since, it does not] ensure social mobility and the full exercise of political and social rights for all citizens (Herrera, y otros, 2016).

## **Cultural Background of the Country**

According to the anthropologist Ramón D. Rivas: The development of people and their standard of living, it is directly linked with the conditions in which the individual develops, therefore, the cultural factor is immersed in the behavioral, social and economic development of people. (Rivas, 2015) all factors that affect their learning and acquisition of knowledge, reason why the cultural back ground of Colombia will be explored in order to relate the impact of the sociocultural context of the student of basic education in Colombia with the teaching-learning processes.

Colombia's cultural background can be traced to the first inhabitants of the territory: the Chibchas, the Caribes and the Arawaks, indigenous tribes with a rich culture and a great degree of intellectual development. Example of this are the Chibchas who had an advanced knowledge in mathematics, (used a calendar that allowed them to manage agriculture and celebrate religious holidays) and used hieroglyphic writing. The Caribes who were an essentially warrior and merchant tribe, and the Arwaks whose architecture surpassed that of previous cultures (Röthlisberger, Röthlisberge. 1963).

In the XVI century when the Spanish people colonized the Colombian territory, found the diversity of languages, customs, religions, and geographical position as a weak point to take advantage of, therefore the natives were helpless to face the Spanish invaders, who came to impose their own culture, which was also product of a mixture of different people that pass through the Peninsula over the centuries (Iberians, Celts, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks and Muslims) (Otero Carvajal & Bahamonde Magro, 2004). With the European invaders came along the slaves (Toward the end of the XVI Century) with the purpose to expand the indigenous workforce, these slaves were also from different geographic regions (Guinea coast, Cameroon

and Somalia, Republic of Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Togo and Nigeria.) and therefore had their own culture as well as language thus contributing to the cultural miscegenation that the Colombian society is product of (Lizcano, 2005).

Furthermore, if we talk about society, it is also necessary to talk about culture, and this can be defined as “the assimilation, use, revision, questioning and modification of inheritance” (Guédez, 1987) by the individuals, which converges and becomes interdependent and Inter influential as a social result, with education; Since the latter is a process of cognitive development, the result of the collaborative and transformative process of the individual with its context. (Castorina & Dubrovsky, 2004).

In this regard, developmental psychologist and theorist Lev Vygotsky quoted by Tudge and Winterhoff states that: "Individual development cannot be understood without reference to the social environment in which the [individual] is included (Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993). Furthermore, Salas quoting Vygotsky sustains that since the self-formation of the individual is given thanks to social interactions with significant people through whom he accesses culture, develops superior mental functions and acquires symbolic knowledge such as traditions, customs and language, among others which allow to continue the cultural legacy of a society (Salas, 2001).

This cultural legacy accounts not only of the state of society's current expressions such as art, intellect, and education, but also of its history. Such is the case of Colombia whose mestiza culture is the result of the interaction of various peoples (in its beginnings: indigenous, Spanish, and African and later and communities originated in external migrations, as well as external social processes such as globalization) and the evolution of their interactions throughout different eras, resulting in a great cultural diversity.

This cultural diversity is recognized and protected by the 1991 Political Constitution of Colombia and is committed as a state to foster access to the culture of all Colombians on equal opportunities, through permanent education and scientific, technical, artistic, and professional teaching at all stages of the process of creating national identity (Article 70 Political Constitution of Colombia). Furthermore, UNESCO stresses that culture is at the heart of contemporary debates on identity, social cohesion and the development of an economy founded on knowledge (La Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura, 2001).

Regarding the impact of cultural identity on social equity, the Nobel Economics Laureate Amartya Sen and the philosopher John Rawls, in the article *on the subject equality of what*, agreed that “Culture” contributes in a double way to poverty reduction. Inequality of opportunity in access to education and culture is the most contributing factor in maintaining extreme poverty (Sen, 1979). About this, UNESCO mentions, referring to the indicator of education that is part of the UNESCO Indicators of Culture for Development (IUCD) that 4% of the Colombian population between the age of 17 and 22 live in a situation of hardship of education, with an average of schooling allowing to acquire the basic reading, writing and numeracy skills, of less than 4years" also mention:

According to the National Statistical Institute (DANE), the illiteracy rate of the population of 15 years or older accounted for 5.8% of the total population in 2011, a rate that is higher in the rural environment. In fact, current barriers to education are mainly present in rural Colombia, where many teachers have difficulty accessing isolated places, and many children must drop out of school to work with their families. Another major challenge is to reach areas where armed groups outside the law are present and children are at risk of being victims of forced recruitment, excluding them from education and other personal



development projects (UNESCO, 2014).

### **Performance of Colombian Students in International Assessments**

As expected, the aforementioned inequality is not only evidenced in access to culture and education affecting the academic results of students, which according to the analysis made by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) on the data of the SABER 2009 tests show that these inequities are associated at the socio-economic level of families and the type of management and geographical area of the schools they attend, the distribution of resources and school processes, stressing that there are high inequities with a clear disadvantage for schools serving the poorest pupils and urban and rural public schools, which in turn is associated with the increased risk of its students getting unsatisfactory results in the SABER test (Duarte, Bos, & Moreno, 2012).

The Saber test is a standardized evaluation, carried out annually by the Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education (ICFES) to assess basic primary, secondary and professional education, and provide information to improve the quality of education in the country. Accordingly, to the ICFES webpage the lowest average for 11<sup>th</sup> grade students calendar A is English with 46.9, out of 100 in 2020 (ICFES, 2021).

This poor performance in national tests is also evident in international Programme for International Student Assessment PISA tests according to the OECD the results for the PISA test in 2018 which evaluates the performance of the 15 years old which assesses the extent to which they have acquired fundamental knowledge and skills for their full participation in society. The assessment focuses on the mastery of reading, mathematics and science and in an innovative field, the key results highlight that “Colombian students performed below the OECD average in reading (412 points), mathematics (391) and science (413), which establishes as the media of 487, 489 y 489 respectively for the subjects” (OECD, 2018).

The low academic performance evidenced in the aforementioned tests accounts for problems faced by education in the country, but education is not only affected by external factors mentioned above (economic factors, political and historical partner of the country) but also by internal factors such as teaching resources, teaching staff, teaching entities, the notion of collective education that is available in Colombian society, the methods and subjects that are given the greatest preponderance among others.

### **Organization of the Education in Colombia**

According to what is stipulated by the Colombian Ministry of Education, education is defined as three things: 1<sup>st</sup> a Right of the person, 2<sup>nd</sup> a Public Service and 3<sup>rd</sup> a Process of, Personal, Cultural and Social permanent training that is based on an integral conception of the person. The Colombian Educational System is made up of: Initial Education, Preschool Education, Basic Education (primary five grades and secondary four grades), Middle Education (two grades and culminates with a bachelor's degree), Higher Education and Education for Work and Human Talent (Ministerio de Educación Nacional , 2020).

Accordingly, to the 1991 national constitution Article 67: The State, society and the family are responsible for education, which will be compulsory between the ages of five and fifteen and which will comprise at least one year of preschool and nine of basic education.

Accordingly, to article 23<sup>rd</sup> of the law 115 of 1994 to achieve the objectives of basic education, mandatory and fundamental areas of knowledge and training are established that will necessarily have to be offered in accordance with the curriculum and the Institutional Educational Project. The groups of compulsory and fundamental areas that will comprise a minimum of 80% of the study plan are the following: 1. Natural sciences and environmental education. 2. Social sciences, history, geography, political constitution, and democracy. 3.

Artistic and cultural education. 4. Ethics and human values education. 5. Physical education, recreation, and sports. 6. Religious education. 7. Humanities, Spanish language, and foreign languages. 8. Mathematics. 9. Technology and computing.

### ***Teaching Resources***

Troncoso and Castañeda in the inquiry, whose primary purpose was to identify the status of English teaching practices in Colombia, stated that: After analyzing the experiences of teachers, almost all the instances in which support didactic materials are developed arise from personal initiatives and only have an impact on the academic context of the classroom. On the other hand, the research showed that, generally, printed, and based materials are used for structural and functional language approaches (Troncoso & Castañeda-Peña, 2014).

With regard to teaching resources, they vary greatly among the countries that hold the title of the best educated in the world worldwide, countries such as Finland where classrooms although of traditional construction as mentioned by Jaana Nenonen teacher of a people in Finland in an interview for the *Diario de la Educación* has open spaces, group tables (Torrallbo, 2017) and have state-of-the-art technology but rely not only on it but on concrete materials that allow students to have a meaningful education day after day, unlike the case of China (Doyle, 2016) which also holds the position of one of the best educations according to the recent test results in 2019 published by BBC London (in which classrooms are totally traditional (BBC NEWS , 2019), and generally have the same teaching resources as almost any equipped classroom in the world (books, schools supplies, desks, chairs, and a smart or traditional board). This fact highlights that teaching resources do not affect the quality of education by their quantity but by their quality and relevance.

In the case of Colombia, the teaching resources available to schools and schools that offer basic education are as diverse as the schools themselves, however at the national level, various digital content has been enabled for the access and use of the various educational campuses such as Red Aprende and Colombia Aprende; despite these efforts, the specific and digital teaching resources available to a campus are equally delimited by its geographical location and purchasing capacity. Examples of this are departments such as Chocó that has neither infrastructure nor internet access as evidenced in the report made by the national newspaper El Espectador (Ardila, 2020).

### ***About the Teaching Workforce***

Regarding educators despite the fact that in Colombia there is the teaching career and the *Escalafón Docente*, which is assigned by the National ministry of Education according to academic training, experience, responsibility, performance and competencies of the educator for their salary remuneration (Decree 1278) only an undergraduate (in many cases not in education) or the bachelor's degree for the development of the profession in schools is required, as it is explained in the decree 2277 article 5 " For the Primary Basic Level it is only required to practice teaching in public schools to be experts, technicians or educational technologists, graduates in educational sciences or postgraduate degrees in this level, or scaled staff. It is not required to have a bachelor's degree in education to teach in basic levels which affects the effectiveness of the teacher as mentioned by the head of the Education Division of the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington in interview with the magazine *Semana*. (Vega, 2016).

On teaching personnel comparing the type of qualifications teachers need to be part of the teaching and learning process, taking first the best rated models in the PISA tests, it should be

noted that in the case of Chinese teachers are highly trained professionals who have, not only their undergraduate degree in education but also a master's degree and are constantly training and receiving mentors for the purpose of carrying out their work properly (Embajada de la Republica Poppular China en la Republica de Colombia , 2021). In the case of Finland entering the teaching career is a privilege that only some may have (only the 5th part of those applying enter the career) since it takes 5 years of education to be a teacher and a master's degree in teaching in addition to a large number of hours of supervised practice in the university and in the classroom (Saavedra, Alasuutari, & Gutierrez, 2019).

### **Didactics**

Topics such as didactics will be discussed next from a general perspective and then specifically to address the didactics of languages and the difference between foreign languages and second languages to better understand the Colombian reality regarding language learning. Then the relevance of didactics and didactic research in the field of foreign languages is addressed to provide the reader with a clear perspective of the impact of didactics in the case of the teaching languages in Colombia's reality.

#### ***Didactics: General and Particular Aspects***

An important aspect to take into account when referring to the quality of education is didactics, understood as Sarramona defines it: Didactics is: the branch of Pedagogy that deals with guiding the systematic educational action, the resources that the educator has to apply to positively stimulate learning and the integral and harmonious formation of students (Sarramona, 1984) and it is in this conception of science that the student becomes the center of the educational process and is here where what is known as the paideocentric revolution begins, in

which an open school is promoted, allowing life to “enter” the school so children can live their present in school, as a way of developing in a creative way towards the future (Feldman, 2010).

Now, didactics according to Mallart has an inner classification: general didactic, (that consist in planning and organizing successful processes of students’ learning) didactic technology (It refers to the study of the influence of technology upon didactics), specific didactic and differential didactic, for the purpose of addressing the before mentioned problem of this document, we will only address the last two, beginning by its definitions (Mallart, 2001).

Specific didactics are those which focus on the applicable standards and methods for learning a specific subject; on the other side, differential or differentiated didactics are applied to specific teaching situations, where aspects such as age, characteristics of the learner and their intellectual skills are taken into consideration. Therefore, differential didactics deals with the fact that the contents of the school curriculum must be adapted for the different types of audience (Mallart, 2001).

Didactics as science has two objects of study: the material object, that refers to the teaching-learning processes and the formal object, that consists of giving predetermined methods and strategies to favor the teaching-learning processes (Mallart, 2001). Nevertheless, these two objects as Ferrández (1984) confirming Nérici (1969), share the components of general didactics:

- The teacher: Person who promotes and guides learning,
- The student: Person to whom the teaching is directed.
- Learning objectives: educational goals that reflect the expected learning achievements of learners.
- Subject: Contents to be taught and learned. They are formally embodied in the curriculum.

- Teaching methods: Procedures followed to promote learning. That answer the question of how to teach.
- The learning context: Scenario where the teaching-learning process takes place; includes the social, cultural, and geographic environment. (Ferrández & Sarramona, 1984) (Nérci, Rocardo, & Eguibar, 1969).

The interrelationships and interdependencies between these components constitute an organized totality, called the didactic system which, to achieve the objectives of this document, it is necessary to analyze from the perspective of the specific didactics of languages.

### *Didactics of Languages*

Language didactics constitutes a field of knowledge that aims at the complex process of teaching and learning languages to improve practices and adapt them to the changing situations in which this activity takes place (Camps A. B., 2010). In a further explanation, Bronckart states that language didactics is a discipline that pursues the study of language and communication and its teaching within the framework of social interactionism insofar as it leads to the analysis of human behaviors as contextualized or situated actions, in which structural properties are a product of socialization (Bronckart, 2013).

The purpose of the didactics of languages points towards 3 specific objectives:

First, communicate which means to produce and understand different texts orally and in writing and is indispensable for participation in daily life and guarantee access to culture and knowledge.

Second, reflect on language and communication, which target is to reflect on the functioning of the system of communication and use of language to acquire a conscious mastery of verbal language.

Third, build cultural references, which refers to the knowledge related to the history, uses, norms and heritage of the language, basically in literary texts. Therefore, as Dolz, Gagnon and Mosquera quoting Dolz and Wirthner (2003) point out: “recognizing the values of cultural heritage is essential in the relationship that the student establishes with language and with its various manifestations (Dolz, Gagnon, & Mosquera, 2009).

Because the bond between language and culture is multiple and complex as Kramersch explains it “language expresses cultural reality” since language expresses and creates experience and knowledge, through the sharing of facts, ideas and events of people through spoken, written or visual interaction, furthermore language is a system of signs with inner cultural value since social groups and societies identify themselves through the use of an specific language and communities of language users who share social conventions, norms of social appropriateness thus establishing the limits of their own culture (Kramersch & Widdowson, 1998).

However, societies and therefore culture evolve, and one clear example of this is the globalization, understood as a multidimensional process on a world scale that consists of the growing communication and interdependence between the different countries of the world, uniting their social interactions through a series of economic, technological, political, social, and cultural transformations that give them a global character (Wikipedia, 2021).

Furthermore, Siguan mentions: “A very clear consequence of the globalization process is that it brings together many people who speak different languages” (Siguan, 2007). Historical examples can be found for example in the Middle Ages when the influence of Rome linguistically impacted with the Latin from Ireland to Poland and the Mediterranean to the Arctic. Later thanks to the illustration French became the first international language. In the 19th century, it was joined by German and English. In the middle of the 20th century, with the end of



the great war, English became decidedly the first language of international communication (Siguan, 2007).

It should be noted that even the father of the didactics Comenius in chapter 22 of his work *Magnus Didactic* (1983) shares ideas about the teaching of languages that evoke the principles and theoretical foundations of the didactics of languages that are still valid now days (Montejo Lorenzo, 2011).

### ***Foreign and Second Languages***

Language understood as “set or system of oral and written forms or signs that serve for communication between people of the same linguistic community” (Banco de la Republica de Colombia, 2017) requires for its acquisition of a necessity and of a learning process as states in page 178 of *Magnus Didactics*:

Languages are learned, not as part of scholarship or wisdom, but as an instrument to increase scholarship and communicate with others. Therefore, they must be learned, the necessary ones only, which comprehend: the own [the country language or mother language to communicate] regarding domestic life and the neighboring languages, in terms of communication with neighbor countries (Montejo Lorenzo, 2011).

These “neighborhood languages”, can be divided for didactic purposes in two which according to Gargallo 2008 can be defined as:

- Foreign: language that is learned in a context that lacks a social and institutional function.
- Second: language that fulfills a social and institutional function in the linguistic community in which it is learned.

In words of Luque 2008: If the language is used in the community or in part of it, a second language is spoken; if, on the other hand, there is no presence of second language

speakers, we will be talking about a foreign language. Both aspects influence the way in which the language can be learned. In the first case, formal instruction with natural exposure could be used, since there would be the influence of the context, of the relationships between the groups and their culture, among others. In the second case, however, only formal instruction can be used (Luque, 2008).

Koskenniemi (1978 p.71) is of the opinion that in didactics, one should be more interested in how the teacher gets the learner to learn than in how the learner learns.

“All teachers are interested in deepening our knowledge of the process of learning, that is, in psycho-affective, social, educational factors, etc. that affect this process; since the more we know about this process, we can better orient the teaching, in the sense that it contributes to speed up and facilitate the use of the new language” (Santos Gargallo, 2008).

Santos Gargallo (1999 p.22) and Zarate (1995 p. 71) indicate in the lines following when he points out: “By closely adopting his practices of teaching to the local context, the teacher confirms the technicality of his profession, not only mastering the language he teaches, its references and its disciplinary field, but also by analyzing the particular relationship between the cultural environment of their teaching and the language and culture it teaches” (Byram & Zarate, 1997).

### ***Colombia and the Languages***

In the case of Colombia since 1994 law of education recognized the importance of learning a foreign language. In the definition of the compulsory areas of the basic and the medium education included: "Humanities, Spanish language and foreign languages" and defines after a study four types of schools as the table Ministry of education:

**Table 1***Types of Schools according to the MEN*

| <i>Type of school</i>  | <i>INTERNATIONAL<br/>BILINGUAL</i>  | <i>NATIONAL<br/>BILINGUAL</i>   | <i>WITH INTENSITY<br/>IN ENGLISH</i>  | <i>NOT<br/>BILINGUAL.</i>  |
|------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| <i>Characteristics</i> | <p><i>The institution has close ties with official organizations of a foreign country.</i></p> <p><i>Teachers are mostly foreign bilinguals.</i></p> <p><i>Receive direct financial support or send foreign teachers to work at the school.</i></p> <p><i>Intensity of contact with the foreign language in the curriculum More than 50%</i></p> <p><i>Two or more languages are used as teaching-learning means of different curricular areas.</i></p> <p><i>Use materials and texts imported from abroad.</i></p> <p><i>It promotes direct contact of its students with the foreign country through exchanges or internships.</i></p> <p><i>Requires its graduates to pass an international foreign language exam in addition to passing the Colombian curriculum.</i></p> <p><i>Promotes a bicultural orientation (equalitarian knowledge of Colombian culture and the culture of the country of the foreign language taught) or intercultural (critical comparative analysis of aspects of one's own culture and aspects of foreign cultures)</i></p> | <p><i>Bilingual Teachers are mostly Colombian.</i></p> <p><i>Intensity of contact with the foreign language in the study plan is more than 50%</i></p> <p><i>Two or more languages are used as teaching-learning means of different curricular areas.</i></p> <p><i>Use materials and texts are not imported.</i></p> <p><i>Promote to a greater or lesser extent. knowledge of the culture of the foreign country whose language is taught.</i></p> <p><i>Requires its graduates to pass an international foreign language exam in addition to passing the Colombian curriculum.</i></p> <p><i>Promotes an intercultural orientation (critical comparative analysis of aspects of one's own culture and aspects of foreign cultures)</i></p> | <p><i>Only foreign language teachers speak the foreign language and are mostly nationals.</i></p> <p><i>They have an intensity of 10 to 15 hours of English per week.</i></p> <p><i>Only in language teaching Foreign English is addressed.</i></p> <p><i>Use national materials and texts.</i></p> <p><i>Requires its graduates to pass a foreign language exam.</i></p> | <p><i>Use National materials and texts to teach English.</i></p> |

*Table taken from article-364450. [mineducacion.gov.co](http://mineducacion.gov.co)*

Nevertheless, in 2013 the national bilingualism law modified articles 13, 20, 21,22,30 and 38 of Law 115 of 1994, General Law of Education in relation to foreign languages and National programs like: National Bilingualism Program (PNB by its acronym in Spanish) 2004-2019, Program for the Strengthening of Foreign Languages (PFDCLE by its acronym in Spanish) 2010-2014 and National English Program (PNI by its acronym in Spanish) 2015-2025 were formulated by the government to make of Colombia a competitive and bilingual nation by promoting the insertion of human capital into the knowledge economy, developing English communicative skills in in educators and students (Univesidad de Antioquia, 2020).

However, the objective that promotes bilingualism as a language policy has been criticized by authors such as Mufwene 2010, who calls it "the fallacy of global English", which consists of the overvaluation of the role of the English language in the globalized economy which corresponds to an ideological process of control (Mufwene, 2010). Control of the culture which according to Areiza 2011, the globalization process originally thought in terms of the economic and cultural development of the peoples is being carried out behind the backs of the interests and the invigoration of particular cultures (Areiza Londoño, 2011). In this regard, Fandiño-Parra, Bermúdez-Jiménez, & Lugo-Vásquez (2012) quoting Vargas Tejada and Colmenares (2008) explain that PNB seems to encourage or, at least, promote the ignorance of regional characteristics, local cultures and the contexts of educational institutions by favoring a hegemonic model of society that nullifies or belittles the difference.

Regarding the implementation of the PNB, Cárdenas (2006) points out that: “the PNB has been criticized for not having opened the discussion to all parties directly connected to ELT and for having disregarded suggestions or reactions coming from teacher educators”. Furthermore,

this author questions the suitability of the country's conditions for bilingualism, since few hours are established for the teaching of English, there is a shortage of materials and qualified teachers, the classes are numerous and, in general, there are few opportunities to use English in authentic communication. For Cárdenas, the PNB brought with it, the definition of national standards for the learning, teaching, and evaluation of foreign languages without a deep analysis of their implementation considering the social, cultural, and economic characteristics of our country. The author emphasizes that the PNB led to the completion and the obligatory nature of a series of exams that seek to measure language levels without including discussions on curricula and methodologies appropriate to the reality of the country (Cárdenas, 2006).

However, to make up for these shortcomings in terms of curriculum and part of the methodological, the Ministry of National Education issued two documents in 2016: The first one titled Suggested English Curriculum and the second under the name Basic English Learning Rights addressed to the Transition and Primary school levels of the Colombian educational system. The first document contains “the scope and sequence, syllabi, and methodological and assessment suggestions and presents the aim at giving teachers the tools to consolidate school English curricula that can contribute to, the achievement of the learning goals established for the country” (Ministerio de Educación Nacional , 2016). And the second one intends to display teachers’ tools that allow the consolidation of English area plans that contribute to the achievement of learning goals that the country has proposed (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2016).

Regarding these two documents is worthy to mention that:

Were built considering the needs and characteristics of the teachers of basic primary education in the official sector, which allowed establishing transversal axes adaptable to

these contexts. It is a proposal also addressed to the Secretaries of Education, to the Schools Normales and the Faculties of Education of the country, because they are said actors who in their curricular autonomy, will be able to analyze, adapt and implement each one of the elements within the framework of the teaching and learning processes of English in their educational institutions (Ministerio de Educación Nacional , 2016).

Considering the autonomy that educational institutions had to put into practice the methodological routes for the teaching of English in Colombia, as mentioned in the research under the title “Implementation of the National Bilingualism Program in Colombia”, official actions towards the achievement of the objectives proposed by the PNB have focused mainly on improving the communication skills of teachers and, to a lesser extent, in the development and updating of methodological skills for teaching English (Ramos & Cardenas, 2014).

In addition to this, the availability of resources for bilingual teaching and human talent are determining variables that continue to increase the gap between public and private education in the Colombian educational system (Gaviria, 2002). As Ramos and Cardenas (2014) state, private institutions have more resources specialized in teaching English than the public ones, see *table 2* regarding the human resources, Colombian legislation (Decree 1278 MEN, 2002) points out that to be a teacher in the level of Basic Primary in Colombia the academic title required is “normalista”, graduate or professional in any area. To teach English in basic is not compulsory to own a degree in languages (MEN, 2002). Standing out, as can be seen in the table 3, is a great difference with respect to the management of human talent between public and private institutions, among what stands out as the allocation of graduates in foreign languages for primary school and teachers in language courses and methodology, among others.

**Table 2**

*Specialized resources for learning English. Source: (Ramos & Cardenas, 2014)*

|                                 | Public sector<br>(n = 18) (%) | Private sector<br>(n = 22) (%) | Total<br>(n = 40) (%) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Second Language Laboratory (L2) | 11,1                          | 36,4                           | 25                    |
| Dictionaries L2                 | 55,5                          | 77,3                           | 67,5                  |
| Texts                           | 16,7                          | 90,9                           | 57,5                  |
| Audio tapes                     | 22,2                          | 68,2                           | 47,5                  |
| Audio CD                        | 11,1                          | 86,4                           | 52,5                  |
| Flashcards                      | 44,4                          | 68,2                           | 57,5                  |
| Posters                         | 33,3                          | 59,1                           | 47,5                  |
| Videos                          | 22,2                          | 72,7                           | 44,9                  |
| Software                        | 22,2                          | 45,5                           | 35                    |
| Content-based books             | 11,1                          | 36,4                           | 25                    |
| Big Books                       | 11,1                          | 22,7                           | 20                    |
| Work Guides                     | 55,6                          | 81,8                           | 70                    |

**Table 3**

*Human talent management. Source: Ramos & Cardenas (2014)*

| School administration process. | Categories           | Sub categories  | Public sector (n=18) | Private sector (n=22) | Total (n= 40) |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|---|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| <b>Human Talent</b>            | Teacher's assignment | Licensing assignment in foreign languages for Basic.                  | 16,7 %               | 72,7 %                | 47,5 %        |
|                                |                      | Language level diagnosis of English teachers with standardized tests. | 44,4 %               | 40,9 %                | 42,5 %        |
|                                | Teacher's Evaluation | Existence of mechanisms for evaluate teacher performance.             | 77,8 %               | 81,8 %                | 80 %          |

|                                       |   |        |        |        |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------|--------|--------|
|                                       | Existence of mechanisms for teacher self-evaluation | 66,7 % | 86,4 % | 77,5 % |
| Professional development For teachers | Teachers in language courses and methodology        | 66,7 % | 40,9 % | 52,5 % |

*Taken from: Implementación del Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo en Colombia: un balance intermedio.*

(Ramos & Cardenas, 2014)

As highlighted by the investigators Ramos and Cardenas (2014) in their research carried out in Santiago de Cali, English teachers in the basic school sector do not meet the basic profile of a language teacher in their teaching skills. Richards (1998), Roberts (2016) and Cochran-Smith & Keneth (2009) also highlight that another aspect in which primary language teachers fall short is their lack of linguistic training and methodological training, which is essential for good teaching and learning within specialized theoretical frameworks.

The word “Specific” should probably be highlighted, since when referring to Educational Sciences, an area of knowledge is required to generate specific didactics (Gallego, 2010).

### ***Pertinence of Didactics***

Regarding the specific didactics, Gallego 2010 argues that they have been despised throughout history from the two sources that originate them: the educational sciences and the specific sciences, in the case of the first ones, arguing that in themselves, they can solve all the problems that affect teaching and in the case of the second ones, because they claim that in order to teach a specific science, it is enough to know it, and that from that specific science itself and from the knowledge about it, everything necessary to be able to teach it effectively can be teach (Gallego, 2010).

The author continues his argument explaining that:

General Didactics, cannot be expressed in the “curricular classroom” other than through each Specific Didactics, with which these, in short, come to constitute one of the ranges of specialization of [the didactics] [therefore] the role of teacher is to become a decoder



of knowledge. To be able to carry out this task, a teacher must be a deep connoisseur of his matter because that's the only thing that will allow him to decode it and a deep connoisseur of educational sciences, because that is the only thing that, it will allow to assign new codes to restructure [knowledge] at the service of the student” (Gallego, 2010).

About the decoding, Mendez Ayuso (1995) emphasizes in the context of teacher training those specific didactics form an essential and precise basis, for the didactic applicability provided for in initial training that will serve for subsequent reflection on the specific problems of the classroom (Menéndez Ayuso, 1995). In words of Widdowson 1998, referring to the pertinence of the didactics, teachers have to act as intermediaries between theory and practice, between the worlds of academic research and concrete pedagogy (Widdowson, 1998).

Which leads us to one of the characteristics of didactics, its indeterminacy, which is a consequence of the complexity of the subject, student and, the object of Didactics [teaching processes], as well as of the sociocultural contexts in which it takes place, which justifies its artistic and innovative dimension ( WEBSCOLAR, 2021).

And it is that the didactics of languages have been characterized by being of an evolutionary nature, since when it finds a deficiency then a methodological proposal arises that allows its evolution and adjusts to various variables and contexts. An example of this is found in the evolution of language didactics, as mentioned by Méndez Hernández (2011), starting at the beginning of the 20th century in which the traditional method of teaching Latin as a cultured language was based on grammar-translation with a lexical morphological and syntactic emphasis on memory.

Later, the Direct Method in Europe made oral communication prevail over written fluency, then in the mid-20th century, the rise of behavioral psychology with the Audio-Oral method sought to achieve a balance between its predecessors by establishing phonetic repetition and the automatic performance of written exercises to fix grammatical structures; however, this method continued to present shortcomings that British foreign language schools sought to solve with an inductive approach that sought to fix grammar rules.

Following the cognitive boom since 1975, the methods were varied, including the Sugestopedia by Lozanov in 1978, which sought meaningful learning that united the previous experiences and concepts of the students with new ones in an environment of relaxation and concentration, limiting grammatical structures to comments made by the teacher. Then in 1982, Asher with his method: Total Physical Response seeks to learn the foreign language in the same way that the mother tongue is learned.

A year later, Krashen and Terrel reduce written production to a minimum and give preponderance to listening comprehension and Vigotsky in 1931 with his Cultural Historical Approach again proposes a bridge between the planning function of language and the communicative function, applying methodological resources. The terms method and approach were developed, evolved, and modified for the teaching-learning process of foreign languages, increasingly denoting the search for didactic flexibility (Méndez Hernández, 2011). Because after all as Álvarez 1997 mentions, Didactics [as ] a science, [is] not finished,

[but]under construction, which is nourished by the educational reality subjected, in turn, to the analysis and reflection of educators and students and for its development, it applies methods and techniques typical of research that enrich it and contribute to its theoretical and practical growth (Álvarez, 1997).

### *Didactic Inquiry in the Field of Foreign Languages*

As Barriga states, each didactic situation is unique and unrepeatable, and that each teacher-student relationship is built in a specific time frame. This is the reason why approaches such as Freinet's, who invites didactic scholars not to propose methods (because this is a set of facts that implicitly forces their application) but to make the enunciation of the fundamental principles and present the results of a work in the classroom (technique) as an example, so that teachers are able to create their own proposal (Barriga Díaz, 1998).

In this regard, the author deepens:

*The teaching technique is important but articulated with its necessary conceptual plane; an anti-normative vision of didactics requires teacher training and creativity on the contrary, the instrumental proposals have shown that they are clearly insufficient to improve the functioning of the educational system (Barriga Díaz, 1998).*

The author supports his statement with the perspective of Hernandez Ruiz (1972) who regrets that the new generation of teachers is limited to applying the formalities that are established in textbooks or school curricula, which that has caused, in the words of the author, that teachers lose the meaning of the role of the method in didactics (Hernández Ruiz, 1972).

To define what should be taught, the teacher/didactic investigator first needs to know the legal and social context and status of the place where the teaching is to be carried out. Educational legislation will currently provide us with important information about what our students should learn and when they should do it. Knowledge of the social context is important to adapt those contents to the reality in which the students live (García, 2010).

Interpretive approach of didactic inquiry seeks to describe the processes of interaction education in the classroom, to provide elements for the social construction of senses of what

happened. In each human-social situation meanings are constructed, and it is important for this model of inquiry to provide elements to describe the interpretations that subjects make of what they are actors in: the interaction didactic. His working method is based on qualitative research (Contreras, 1990).

### **Foreign Language Didactics and its Role in Meaningful and Contextualized Learning**

Even though the didactics of foreign languages is a still recent and emerging field, it sustains its knowledge in different sciences: pedagogy, psychology and modern linguistics, and it is from all of them, that the different methodologies are born, each one with a linguistic theory, learning theory and a pedagogical methodology (Fontallvo, 2013), all of them considering the three determining factors that are part of the didactic act namely: the learner, the teacher and the teaching content which interrelated make the didactic system of learning.

Camps, states that due to the nature of learning not only are the processes of teaching and learning languages dynamic, but so are the activity systems that affect it. For this reason, research and innovation are vital to the didactics of foreign languages since it requires the adaptation to the changing contexts that social and scientific dynamics that in the act of communicating (Camps A. , 2012). Therefore, the didactics of languages cannot be inquired out of context and function.

Function that on words of Camps, Guasch and Ruiz Bikandi, is the process of teaching and learning languages to improve practices and adapt them to the changing situations in which this activity takes place (Camps Mundó, Guasch Boyé, & Ruiz Bikandi, 2010).

In this field of the didactical innovation, the significant learning can be an strategy to foster the meaningful teaching and learning process, since it is the learning strategy related to the

socio-educational context of the learner in such a way that learning becomes knowledge, which can be used in different situations (Baque-Reyes & Portilla-Faican, 2021).

The significant learning proposed by Ausubel (1976) is learning theory that proposes that new knowledge is related to old information in the student's cognitive structure, giving meaning to his own experiences and knowledge, (known as subsumidors) in such a way that, their condition what they learn and, if the subsumidors are made explicit and appropriately guided, can be used to improve the learning process itself and make it meaningful based on what he/she already know (Ausubel, Novak, & Hanesian, 1976), making the student (component of the didactic act) the main character of their own leaning process.

Referring to the other component of the didactic act ,the content, De Posada (1994) mentions

that, for the material to be learned in a meaningful way: it must have psychological significance for the student, that is, new conceptions must be able to be inserted in a non-arbitrary way in the networks of meanings already constructed in the course of their previous learning experiences, which are a cumulus of experiences, situations, events, etc., that create in all the student's own ideas with which to connect the new material. Some of them connect with previous schemes of the individual and acquire a specific situation in the conceptual hierarchy, others do not. The importance of this cognitive structure in the ordering of the individual's knowledge would be that the function of cognition would be adaptive and would serve the organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of ontological reality, so students can have strong ingrained conceptions.

The author goes further and affirms that if the inclusive factors are not adequately treated in the teaching-learning process, even if ideas are considered, learning would not be truly

significant because a reinterpretation of the individual's experiential environment would be missing. If the situation is not specified through the inclusive factors, the student could assume that they are working in an environment far from their daily experience and therefore would not actively associate with what they already know (De Posada, 1994).

The third component of the didactic act, the contents, understood as the knowledge that is part of the culture, is significant and is intended to be taught in school. Knowledge becomes content when we choose it to be taught in the school environment, but didactics face three main problems when choosing the contents: selection, sequencing, and organization.

**Sequencing:** It refers to the order in which the knowledge will be given. The criterion of the teacher is put into play to make the design of the sequence.

**Organization:** It refers to the grouping of knowledge to transmit, group and link knowledge. For this, logical and pedagogical criteria are considered.

Now, it is important to highlight that the contents are classified into three types, namely: conceptual contents (data, fact, or definitions), procedural contents (activities that the student must progressively do to achieve something), attitudinal contents (values, and behavior.).

### ***Contents, Contextualization, and International Standards in Application for Learning Foreign Languages in Colombia***

In the case of the contents of foreign languages and particularly in the Colombian case, the contents are normally guided by international standards that take into account the culture where the language is spoken as a mother tongue, based on the premise that the individual does not address the learning a foreign language without integrating it into cultural knowledge (Zarate, 2002).

In the case of the foreign languages in Colombia, being more specific English, it was included as part of the mandatory subjects that the schools of formal basic education develop, in the General Law of Education from 1994. Furthermore, to give coherence to this plan, the adoption of a common language was necessary to establish performance level goals in the language through the different stages of educational process. For this reason, the Ministry of Education chose the “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment”, a document developed by the Council of Europe (Ministerio de Educación Nacional Republica de Colombia, 2006). Nevertheless, the only adjustment that was considered to adapt the European Standard to the national reality was, as the same document mentions it, regarding the terminology, relating them with the names traditionally used by teachers to refer to the various levels of performance adopting a same nomenclature but introducing no adaptation to the socio-cultural reality of the country.

It is also worthily to mention that, the CEFRL was designed to strengthen linguistics skills in Europe, therefore, it focuses on relationships within the continent as it is explained in the introductory chapter of the document: *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment book*, where a short series of recommendations is promulgated by the Council of Europe: Only through a better knowledge of modern European languages will be possible to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different languages, in order to promote mobility on the continent, mutual understanding and cooperation and to maintain and develop the richness and diversity of life, European cultural heritage through a greater knowledge of the national and regional languages, even those with less teaching. Furthermore, the document is specific about the Common European Framework

providing a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe (Council of Europe, 2001).

Additionally, in the case of Colombia, the gap between the proficiency levels in the use of English as a foreign language of basic and media students is not only dictated by their own capacities but also by the type of school and curriculums they followed, since in Colombia now there are 4 different types of offers of educational establishments, as to know:

- Establishments without deepening in foreign language
- Establishments with intensification in foreign language
- National bilingual establishments
- International bilingual establishments

Within the bilingual schools, the international ones are distinguished, which in many cases are schools that operate in Colombia but offer curricula from other countries and in most of the cases require its graduates to pass an international foreign language exam, in addition to passing the Colombian curriculum (Ministerio de Educación Nacional Gobierno de Colombia , 2018).

On the other hand, the establishments without deepening in foreign language and the establishments with intensification in foreign language do not promote a bicultural orientation (more or less egalitarian knowledge of Colombian culture and the culture of the country of the foreign language taught) or intercultural (critical comparative analysis of aspects of one's own culture and aspects of foreign cultures) (Ministerio de Educación Nacional Gobierno de Colombia , 2018), which increases the didactic gap between students of basic education in Colombia.

Nevertheless, there are some proposals that look forward to shortening this didactic gap considering the cultural identity of the students in the country. Examples of Colombian cultural



identity in EFL Didactics, with the aim of integrating the curricular contents in English with the cultural identity of the students, diverse teachers, and investigators in Colombia, have recently documented various didactic proposals, among them the following stands out:

- *Integrating the Coffee Culture with the Teaching of English* by Zuluaga Corrales, López Pinzon and Quintero Corzo, (2009), investigation developed with the Universidad de Caldas whose objective was to sensitize the academic community about the importance of rescuing the cultural identity of students in rural schools through innovations in the curriculum by integrating coffee culture into the content of English courses. Among the results of the study, it is identified that the contents were more significant for the students, the teachers were more empathic with the social situation. economics of the students' families, the students developed greater awareness regarding their own region, the development of more attractive classes generated a higher level of motivation in the students (Zuluaga Corrales, López Pinzón, & Quintero Corzo, 2009).

- *Gamification, didactic strategy to teach and learn English* by Laura Alejandra Navarro, teacher at IE Diosa de Chía, this strategy implements the use of traditional games in the classroom such as concentration, hangman, board games, etc. allowing students to generate meaningful learning by linking everyday situations with academic content in English (Navarro, 2021).

## Methodology

This qualitative research seeks to analyze the problem from the Why, exposing the factors that compose it, as well as some possible solutions to it.

As mentioned by Taylor and Bogdan:

In qualitative methodology, the researcher sees the scene and the people in a holistic perspective; people, settings or groups are not reduced to variables, but considered as a whole. People are studied in the context of their past and the current situations in which they find themselves (Taylor & Bogdan, 1987).

For the purposes of the research, it will be a descriptive, explanatory, and evaluative study; descriptive because as mentioned by Tamayo and Tamayo (2006), it includes the description, registration, analysis, and interpretation of the current nature and the composition or processes of the phenomena: The focus is on dominant conclusions or on how a person, group, or thing works in the present; descriptive research works on factual realities, fundamentally characterized by presenting a correct interpretation. (Tamayo, 2006)

It is also explanatory because, as Sabino mentions: It focuses on determining the origins or causes of a certain set of phenomena. Its objective, therefore, is to know why certain events happen, analyzing the existing causal relationships or, at least, the conditions in which they occur (Sabino, 2014).

And finally, it is evaluative because it applies procedures to accumulate valid and reliable evidence about the way and the degree to which a specific set of activities produces concrete results or effects (Rutman, 1977).

This monograph that explores “The Student's Socio-Cultural Environment: A Determining Factor in Didactics for Learning a Foreign Language in Basic Education in

Colombia” corresponds to a theoretical research work as it was developed through the collection of data through a matrix of topics related to the problem posed, in which information from various documentary sources such as journal articles, sections of books, website documents, interviews, conference proceedings among others was collected, selected and tested in order to be part of this paper; all the contents were organized and classified in a matrix (See Figure 1) in order to keep a register of the information used for the purpose of this monograph.

## Figure1

### Monograph content matrix

#### Monograph bibliography matrix classification specification

| Topic   | Name   | Link   | Pages  | Apa   | Type Of Reference       |
|---|--|--|--|---|-------------------------|
| Subject that served for the documentary search related to the objectives proposed for the documentary investigation | Name of the documentary source from which the information was obtained | URL address from which the information was obtained and / or online address of the documentary sources | Specific number of pages of the documentary source from which the information was obtained | Reference with the American Psychological Association model of the documentary source | Referential source type |

| Monography bibliography matrix |   |   |       |   |  |
|--------------------------------|---|---|-------|---|--|
| TOPIC                          | NAME  | LINK  | PAGES | APA   | TYPE OF REFERENCE  |
| Didactics                      | <i>Principios, características y elementos de la didáctica.</i> | <a href="https://www.webscolar.com/principios-caracteristicas-y-elementos-de-la-didactica">https://www.webscolar.com/principios-caracteristicas-y-elementos-de-la-didactica.</a>  | 1     | WEBSOLAR. (4 de 06 de 2021). <i>Principios, características y elementos de la didáctica</i> . Obtenido de Principios, características y elementos de la didáctica: <a href="https://www.webscolar.com/principios-caracteristicas-y-elementos-de-la-didactica">https://www.webscolar.com/principios-caracteristicas-y-elementos-de-la-didactica.</a> | BOOK SECTION, MAGAZINE ARTICLE, NEWSPAPER ARTICLE, CONFERENCE MINUTE, REPORT, <b>VARIOUS DOCUMENTS</b> , INTERVIEW, CASE, VARIOUS. |
| Curriculum                     | <i>Hacia un currículum integral y contextualizado</i>           | <a href="https://docplayer.es/172516924-Hacia-un-curriculum-integral-y-contextualizado-r-m-alvarez-de-zavala.html">https://docplayer.es/172516924-Hacia-un-curriculum-integral-y-contextualizado-r-m-alvarez-de-zavala.html</a> | 1-4   | Álvarez, R. M. (1997). <i>Hacia un currículum integral y contextualizado</i> . Tegucigalpa: Académica, Ed. Universitaria.   | <b>BOOK SECTION</b> , MAGAZINE ARTICLE, NEWSPAPER ARTICLE, CONFERENCE MINUTE, REPORT, WEBSITE DOCUMENT, INTERVIEW, CASE, VARIOUS.  |

Matrix link:

[https://unadvirtualedu-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/adcontreras\\_unadvirtual\\_edu\\_co/EfN3N4P-U4BEk2kW1kDTkgYBbn-uyN2WSfRda08hGEDGbw?e=OlkjiM](https://unadvirtualedu-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/adcontreras_unadvirtual_edu_co/EfN3N4P-U4BEk2kW1kDTkgYBbn-uyN2WSfRda08hGEDGbw?e=OlkjiM)

## Results and Discussion

Based on the recollection of data from different written sources the findings regarding the importance of considering the socio-cultural context of the students to design and apply effective didactics in the teaching-learning process of a foreign language in the Colombian context must consider that:

The right to high-quality education in Colombia faces Socio-Economical obstacles (including lack of educational opportunities, poverty, pressure to start working, conflict, and violence.) limiting young people's access to education. Generating low school attendance rates, a poor transition between levels, high dropout rates, and a significant number of children who do not enter the education system.

Education in the country is not only affected by external factors but also by internal factors such as teaching resources, teaching staff, teaching entities, the notion of collective education that of the Colombian society, the methods and subjects that are given the greatest preponderance among others.

Although the number of teaching resources does not affect the quality of education, they affect it in regards to its relevance. High-quality and relevant materials ease the labor of the teacher and give better opportunities to the student to get knowledge in a meaningful way.

In the case of the teaching workforce when compared to the best ranked educational systems accordingly to PISA, the fact that in Colombia it is not required to have a bachelor's degree in education to apply for a teaching job and that it is not required to have knowledge of didactics to teach affects the effectiveness of the teacher.

Over the years and the governments, different plans and laws have been delivered in order to foster the bilingualism in Colombia but objectives that promote bilingualism as a

language policy have been criticized by authors arguing that role of the English language is overvalued in the globalized economy which corresponds to an ideological process of control which is not odd considering that the pluricultural background of the country, accounts since times of the Colony for a constant process of cultural dominance of foreigners over natives, achieving a crossbreeding of cultures only when the foreign culture does not have expansive and/or controlling intentions.

Other authors criticize the suitability of the country's conditions for bilingualism since few hours are established for the teaching of English, there is a shortage of materials and qualified teachers, the classes are numerous and, in general, there are few opportunities to use English in authentic communication.

Due to the reasons mentioned above, the country is still far from reaching the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the UN in the country due to the lack of relevance, integrality, and equity in education.

In Colombia, official actions towards the achievement of the objectives proposed by the PNB have focused mainly on improving the communication skills of teachers and, to a lesser extent, on the development and updating of methodological skills for teaching English.

Nevertheless, didactics seem to offer a path to deal with the mentioned obstacles considering that one characteristic of didactics, its indeterminacy, which is a consequence of the complexity of the subject (student) and the object of Didactics (teaching processes), as well as of the sociocultural contexts in which it takes place, which justifies its artistic and innovative dimension.

Didactics as a science is not a finished product, but under construction, which is nourished by the educational reality subjected, in turn, to the analysis and reflection of educators

and students, and for its development, it applies methods and techniques typical of research that enrich it and contribute to its theoretical and practical growth.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to illustrate the new generation of teachers that in many cases is limited to applying the formalities that are established in textbooks or school curricula, which has caused, that teachers lose the meaning of the role of the method in didactics, therefore research and innovation are vital to the didactics of foreign languages since it requires of the adaptation to the changing contexts in social and scientific dynamics in the act of communicating.

Based on the aforementioned results, the author of this documentary research presents the reader with the following questions to be considered:

There are factors that shape the reality of foreign language learning in the country and that affect the results obtained by students in both national and international tests, and that account for the state of bilingual education in Colombia.

These factors can be divided into two: First, those specific to the cultural and socio-economic situation of the country and, second, those specific to the educational model applied in Colombia to the teaching of a foreign language. Finally, it is proposed to adopt an inclusive didactic approach based on research to address these problems with the intention of improving the teaching-learning process of a foreign language in the country and thus achieve the objectives set out in the national bilingualism plan.

### **Factors Referring to the Socioeconomic Situation of the Country**

Colombia as a developing country has to its credit a large gap of social and economic inequity that impacts every aspect of the lives of its inhabitants, including education. This gap, which is not only evident in the difference regarding the educational quality of private (with

more resources) and public (with fewer resources) institutions, is also observed in the disparity between urban and rural education, the latter being affected by the condition constant violence that exists in the Colombian countryside.

It is also important to consider the history of the country with respect to culture; since its origin as a society, foreign models have been welcomed (practically in every social aspect) without taking into account its own culture in order to achieve the long-awaited development.

Although the aforementioned factors have a significant impact on the educational reality from the perspective of foreign languages in the country, these are not the only variables to take into account, there are also intrinsic factors of education that must be considered for an informed discussion.

### **Factors of the Bilingual Educational Model Applied in Colombia**

Despite the fact that as a nation Colombia has clear guidelines and standards, regarding what is expected of students at each stage of the academic process, including training in foreign languages, there is a significant disparity regarding: the suitability of teachers, the resources used, the relevance and applicability and significance of the contents and methods, which clearly affect the performance of students in national and international tests, accounting for important problems in bilingual education in the country. Such problems will be broken down one by one below.

To begin with, in Colombia it is acceptable for a certified professional with an acceptable level of command of the language to teach bilingually, and it is not required that they have a degree in said specialty, thus affecting the quality of education that their students receive due to their lack of knowledge regarding educational science and the knowledge that supports it, since there is a difference between knowing something and knowing how to teach it.



In addition, the resources used to teach a foreign language in the country when they are available (which happens in educational institutions that have sufficient resources for their acquisition) are frequently inadequate for teaching in the context of the language, since they obey standards and particularities of Anglo-Saxon cultures or where the language is taught as a mother tongue or a second language, ignoring the reality of the Colombian student.

The same happens with the contents and methods since national curricula are generally copied from international standards without making adaptations that consider the social, cultural, and economic context of the students. And this is why, in the opinion of the author of this document, a didactic reflection is required that allows approaching the teaching of the foreign language from a significant perspective and according to the reality of the country.

### **Didactic Reflection for the Optimization of the T-L Process of Foreign Languages in the Country**

There is no magic formula that solves the multiple factors that affect the performance of the vast majority of Colombian students in national and international standardized tests that measure their level of bilingualism, however, reflection and didactic research that allows a more assertive teaching practice in the classroom could generate a bridge that shortens the gaps between what is expected and what has been achieved regarding the learning of a foreign language in the country.

### **Didactics**

Since its beginning, didactics has proposed to optimize the methods, techniques, and tools that are part of the art of teaching in such a way that everyone (equally) has access to a comprehensive and high-quality education (Comenius, 1657).

To achieve the above, it is not enough to adopt and apply didactics that have proven to be successful in various places or to know the subject matter and the standards that must be achieved; it is also required to know the social, cultural, economic, physical and emotional environment of the person doing the work, that is the students applying a pedagogical approach to didactics that includes their socio-moral formation and enables them to participate in the reality they are part of.

### **Didactic of Foreign Languages**

Within this science of knowledge, specialization has allowed the emergence of various specific didactics, such is the case of the didactics of foreign languages, which is understood as: *"The study of the transmission and the appropriation of languages, in particular, on the processes of construction of practices and linguistic knowledge developed in the context"* Dolz, J., Gagnon, R., & Mosquera, S. (2009). The context must be taken into account if effectiveness, relevance, and significance are expected from the didactic process.

Based on the above, a foreign language didactics that does not take into consideration the impact of the sociocultural reality of students, it is a didactic doomed to failure, due to a lack of meaning and context. Therefore, the first thing a teacher or a didactic planner must bear in mind before planning a didactic sequence in the field of foreign languages is to be aware of the economic and socio-cultural reality of the student, their previous knowledge and internal motivations to learn, to make the process of learning a meaningful and goal-centered activity.

Any other practice, in the appreciation of the author of this monograph, will be a mere attempt to follow other teaching rules and a utopian vision of the teaching and learning process, that will continue to widen the sociocultural gap in the country and will not respond to the evolutionary and generative nature of didactics as a science of education.

In the case of Colombia and the teaching of foreign languages, the adoption of foreign methodologies that highlight conceptual contents (data, facts, or definitions) and procedural contents (activities that the student must progressively do to achieve something) but ignore attitudinal contents (values and behavior) result in incipient bilingualism processes and outcomes below expected international standards. Furthermore, having the professional didactic knowledge to teach a foreign language adequately is not a requirement in the country, and as a consequence, the didactic act will always be in deficit, since if the teacher does not have the knowledge to teach, the student can, as happens today, fall short in their learning process.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The following conclusions are derived from the documentary research carried out:

The socio-cultural reality of a country like Colombia that has been in constant conflict and with significant fluctuations at the economic and political level over the years, directly affects the way in which students access knowledge in formal educational environments such as basic education in the country.

Despite the multiple initiatives and proposals both at the national and local level that seek to ensure that Colombia is linked to modern society and improve its image in the face of new globalizing trends, making its students competent bilingual. No significant improvements are observed in the results obtained by students, which indicates problems in the teaching-learning process of the foreign language in the country, such as:

First, the fact that primary school students in Colombia learn English based on foreign teaching models and didactic methods far removed from the sociocultural reality of students (imported models), thus omitting the context, makes it difficult for students and teachers to build meaningful knowledge.

This problem becomes even greater when only the international standards that certify the mastery of a foreign language are taken into account, and although these are decisive for the construction of effective teaching, they are not the only variable to consider when designing didactics for FL, since the contents without contextualization generate an imbalance in the teaching act, affecting the results in both national and international tests.

Another factor to consider is the availability of resources for bilingual education and human talent, which are determining variables that continue to increase the gap between public and private education in the Colombian education system.

For all the above, a didactic reflection of foreign languages that considers not only the contents but also teachers and students can result in a significant education with higher rates of real bilingualism in Colombia as evidenced by some initiatives developed in isolation in the country.

The following recommendations are derived from the documentary research carried out:

Integral and contextualized learning is possible thanks to didactic reflection, in the case of foreign languages, reflecting on the sociocultural background of students is a determining factor to achieve the object of study of didactics as proposed by Sevillano (2011) teaching-learning process, in a specific and interactive context, which allows the apprehension of culture to achieve the integral development of the student." (Sevillano, 2011).

One of the most important methodological problems that the didactics of foreign languages must solve is to achieve a balance between content, contextualization and international standards in its field of action.

Colombia is a country that has multiple sociocultural realities, separated by gaps that are increasingly extensive due to the political and economic phenomena facing the country, which is why the teaching of foreign languages must consider these variables to offer students a quality education and connected to their particular reality.

This theoretical research should be the starting point for a greater reflection that motivates studies and inquiries of political entities, teachers, didactic researchers, and all those involved in education, on the relevance and impact in the current design and didactic planning and application of foreign languages in Colombia, which is not only consistent with international standards but assessing the possibilities of a radical change from language policies, to cover the heterogeneity of our populations with coherent and structured action plans.

The suggested didactics must start from the cultural identity of the student and their social reality, to minimize the educational gap between the various social classes of the country and achieve the goals and objectives set by the educational reforms and so many laws and programs that seek to achieve a level of bilingualism in the country.

Taking as a premise that the foreign language is not an acculturating element to achieve as mentioned by Torres Martínez, S. (2009) in his article "The vicissitudes of language teaching in Colombia" a common search of all Latin Americans for an accepted and acceptable identity within Western culture and, of course, reconciled with modernity through the yearning for economic redemption (Torres Martinez, 2009) but on the contrary as an element to promote a meaningful education based on self-culture to increase the quality of life not only of the individual but of society, because, as the journalist Flora Lewis says and I quote: "learning another language is not only learning different words for the same things but learning another way of thinking about things".

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