

## Imagined Identities and Imagined Communities: Colombian English Teachers' Investment in Their Professional Development

Las identidades y comunidades imaginadas: la inversión de los docentes de inglés colombianos en su desarrollo profesional

Marcela Ovalle Quiroz

Adriana González

Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia


English teachers' professional development responds to individual needs and societal discourses about teaching, learning, and language use. This paper reports the findings of a case study that explored the factors that increased or limited the active and committed participation of nine Colombian teachers of English in professional development programs. Findings suggest that English teachers are invested in their professional development if they may develop three imagined identities—as proficient English speakers, ELT experts, and ICT competent users—and their affiliation to an imagined community of “bilinguals.” The teachers' journey to the imagined identities and the imagined community is full of conflicting emotions amidst the socio-political context of their work and the country's language education policies.


*Keywords:* English teaching, imagined community, imagined identity, investment, teacher professional development

El desarrollo profesional de los docentes de inglés responde a necesidades individuales y a discursos sociales sobre la enseñanza, el aprendizaje y el uso de la lengua. Este estudio de caso exploró los factores que incrementaron o disminuyeron la participación activa y continua de nueve profesores de inglés colombianos en programas de desarrollo profesional. Se encontró que los docentes de inglés invierten en su desarrollo profesional si pueden desarrollar tres identidades imaginadas —hablantes competentes de inglés, expertos en la enseñanza del inglés y usuarios competentes de las TIC— y afiliarse a la comunidad imaginada de “los bilingües”. El trayecto hacia las identidades imaginadas y la comunidad imaginada está lleno de ambivalencias generadas por el contexto sociopolítico de su trabajo y las políticas lingüísticas educativas del país.

*Palabras clave:* comunidad imaginada, desarrollo profesional docente, enseñanza del inglés, identidad imaginada, inversión

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Marcela Ovalle Quiroz  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6653-5663> · Email: [ovallemarcela@gmail.com](mailto:ovallemarcela@gmail.com)

Adriana González  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4522-0424> · Email: [adriana.gonzalez1@udea.edu.co](mailto:adriana.gonzalez1@udea.edu.co)

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## Introduction

Seeking to make the country a competitive nation in the global market, English language education and massive use of information and communication technologies (ICT) have become significant axes in the education agendas in Colombia for almost two decades. The two areas claimed particular importance when the country was admitted to the Organization for Economic Co-operation Development (2015). Since the beginning of the definition of the plans around the axes above, the National Program of Bilingualism (NPB) set goals in English proficiency for students in primary, secondary, and tertiary education, connecting competent use of the language to a prosperous future for all (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).

Primary responsibility for the attainment of the language targets has been assigned to local English teachers (González, 2020), and, as a consequence, their English language proficiency and the English language teaching (ELT) methodologies they use have been a priority for the government (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005). Since the early stages of the NPB design, policymakers assumed that most in-service Colombian teachers did not have the linguistic and methodological knowledge to face the challenges that the NPB posed (Cely, 2007). To address the English teachers' supposed deficiencies in their professional performance, the Ministry of Education proposed a professional development agenda for English teachers that included nation-wide initiatives. Primary actors in the professional development programs (PDPs) were the British Council and international publishing companies (González, 2007; Le Gal, 2018). As the demand for language proficiency and ELT certifications grew exponentially, local governments proposed numerous initiatives in association with universities (Álvarez et al., 2011).

The proliferation of PDPs for English teachers after launching the NPB conveyed growing interest in the study of professional development in Colombia (Buendía & Macías, 2019). Various local scholars have reflected on the

design and implementation of professional development initiatives highlighting important issues as the language education policies have historically shaped PDPs (González, 2021). Recent critical and locally-constructed knowledge about English teachers' professional growth includes the emphasis on coverage over sustainability and quality of PDPs (Álvarez et al., 2011), the limited access to professional development for English teachers in rural areas (Bonilla-Medina & Cruz-Arcila, 2013), and the predominance of colonial epistemologies in ELT, teacher education, and professional development (Fandiño-Parra, 2021; Granados-Beltrán, 2018; Guerrero, 2008; Usma-Wilches, 2015).

Traditionally, professional development has served to update teachers' knowledge and improved their teaching and assessment practices (Day & Sachs, 2004; Díaz-Maggioli, 2004). Other views of professional development see teachers as agents of change who act and resist the ideological structures of language learning and teaching (Musanti & Pence, 2010). This individual and collective agency supports the development of imagined identities and the affiliation to imagined communities (Barkhuizen, 2016; De Costa & Norton, 2017; Xu, 2012), and the development of these ideal ways of being is the result of teachers' investment.

Norton's (2000, 2013) work on investment in second language learning has illuminated different studies that explore teachers' investment (Karam et al., 2017; Sanches-Silva, 2013; Stranger-Johannessen & Norton, 2017; Waller et al., 2017; Xu, 2012). However, despite its importance, no studies address why or how English teachers become invested in their professional development. The lack of research in Colombia, and globally, on the reasons for such commitment motivated us to pose this research question: "What factors drive the investment of nine Colombian teachers of English in their professional development?"

In our analysis, we assume that different relations and structures of power in society frame language teaching and learning and, therefore, teachers' profes-

sional development. In this interrelation, identities are constructed and reconstructed at the individual and social levels (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). Ideologies and discourses about English, ELT, and professional development shape the teachers' identities and, therefore, their investment in their professional growth.

## Literature Review

### Investment

Norton (1995, 2000) proposed the construct of “investment,” in contrast to “motivation,” to explain the relationship between the identity of language learners and their commitment to learning a language. Investment is the concurrency of human capacity, power, and identity to pursue tasks with perseverance to increase symbolic and economic capital. People invest in something that boosts “the value of their cultural capital and social power” (Norton, 2013, p. 6). Darvin and Norton (2015, 2016) recreated Norton's initial investment model. They show how investment is a unity where the concepts of identity, capital, and ideology converge. Their model shows how ideologies define, shape, and reshape learners' identities and allow them to be positioned and position others in dynamic ways across time and space (De Costa & Norton, 2016).

Further analyses have derived from the investment reconceptualization of Darvin and Norton (2015) exploring English teachers' investment in their identity transformation. Karam et al. (2017) found that English teachers in refugee camps in Syria developed agentive roles and advocacy identities when they became invested in ELT. In Uganda, Stranger-Johannessen and Norton (2017) concluded that English teachers invested in a multilingual literacy digital initiative developed new identities as writers, readers, digital experts, and global citizens. Finally, Sanches-Silva (2013) showed how future teachers in Brazil struggled to define their identities as English learners, English users, and English teachers as they were invested in learning the language in their

teacher preparation program. In Colombia, Ubaque and Castañeda-Peña (2017) explored how some English teachers struggled in their school contexts to be invested in pedagogical practices that allowed them to develop their identity as teacher-researchers.

### Imagined Identity and Imagined Communities

Norton's works characterize identity as “fluid, context-dependent, and context-producing, in particular historical and cultural circumstances” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 419). Due to its complex nature, someone's identity may respond to societal demands or represent a conflict between what the person desires and what the social ideologies impose.

Teachers' identity is gaining importance in teacher education and ELT. Studies on teachers' identity show how personal histories, professional development, and job contexts shape teachers' professional identity through their affiliation to imagined worlds (Martel & Wang, 2015). A particular aspect of English teachers' identities is that they are framed by their status as native of non-native speakers of English (Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Pavlenko, 2003; Song, 2016; Wu, 2017; Xu, 2012; Yuan, 2019). For language teachers, Ruohotie-Lyhty et al. (2021) demonstrated how identity development involves an emotional basis because the socio-political contexts press their teaching to respond to societal discourses and realities. Teaching shapes their identity, and the new identities shape their teaching practice (Kharchenko, 2014; Xu, 2012).

Constructing an imagined identity is a way to enter an imagined community (Barkhuizen, 2016; Darvin & Norton, 2015). Xu (2013) shows that school contexts and societal dynamics mediate imagined identities and imagined communities. Even if the imagined identity and the imagined community represent the teachers' desires and aspirations, they may not be exempt from obstacles as they depend on educational decision-makers (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016).

## Professional Development

Professional development is a continual process, “a range of activities—formal (accredited) and informal (nonaccredited)—which meet the thinking, feeling, acting, life, context and change purposes of teachers along their teaching careers” (Day & Sachs, 2004, p. 12). Díaz-Maggioli (2004) adds that professional development is “a career-long process in which educators fine-tune their teaching to meet student needs” (p. 5). Despite the importance of professional development in the professional life of teachers, programs may not support changes in teaching that may be conducive to students’ learning. For most teachers globally, PDPs usually do not fulfill their expectations, and offers depend on societal representations of the kinds of professionals they should become (Groundwater-Smith & Dadds, 2004).

## Method

### Context and Participants

Deriving from a more extensive mixed-methods study,<sup>1</sup> we conducted a smaller qualitative study to explore the particularities of the investment of nine English teachers in their professional development. We chose qualitative research because it would allow us to know their direct voices and obtain more detailed descriptions of their experiences in the initiatives they have participated in (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The nine participants’ investments became the case of investigation (Stake, 2005). We selected the case after administering a survey in the larger study. Through data analysis, one of the five

municipalities emerged as the context where teachers reported the highest participation in professional development initiatives. In that municipality, 17 English teachers gave us their contact information and expressed interest in participating in another research phase. We selected the nine participants using a convenience sampling criterion (Patton, 2001). These teachers replied to our emails promptly and were available to meet with us after school for the interviews and the writing task.

The group of participants is diverse in terms of age, teaching experience, educational background, and participation in PDPs. Six of the teachers have two teaching jobs. The participants work in four public schools that may represent some of the country’s general conditions of urban public education. We assigned the schools the following fictitious names: Hill School, Round School, Station School, and Green School. A language center where the teachers took some English courses is presented with a made-up name. Although these schools face various challenges, teachers get access to different teaching resources, receive open support from administrators in curricular innovations, and participate actively in national and local professional development initiatives. These teachers possess higher levels of English language proficiency, as measured in a national testing initiative. The four schools have academic recognition in the municipality due to their students’ high scores on national standardized tests.

All participants signed a consent form. The document described the purpose of the study, explained the conditions of their participation, and informed them about the confidentiality of the data they shared. Table 1 includes academic and professional information about the participants (pseudonyms are used).

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<sup>1</sup> The larger study aimed at exploring how English teachers appropriated and interpreted the targets of the NPB in five municipalities of the Metropolitan Area of Medellín, Colombia.

Table 1. Participants' Information

Teacher	Gender	Age	Years of teaching experience	Academic training	School	Second job
Octavio	Male	58	22	BEd in Foreign Language Teaching, BS in Natural Sciences, specialization in pedagogical innovations and project management	Hill School	English instructor in a prison education program
Yuri	Female	27	3	BEd in English and French Teaching	Hill School	English teacher at a private language center
Gabriela	Female	46	20	BEd in English and French, specialization in Telematics	Hill School	English teacher at a private school
Camilo	Male	46	20	BEd in Foreign Language Teaching	Hill School	No
Nora	Female	42	11	BEd in Foreign Language Teaching, a specialization in Education and Technology, and an MA in Education	Round School	No
Esmeralda	Female	52	31	BEd in Foreign Language Teaching, specialization in English Teaching and learning	Round School	English adjunct instructor in a private community college
Mónica	Female	49	26	BEd in History and Philosophy, specialization in Democracy and Literary Studies	Station School	No
Mario	Male	43	15	BEd in English and French	Station School	English teacher in a private school
Mar	Female	35	11	BEd in English	Green School	English adjunct instructor in a community college

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection included the nine teachers' responses to the surveys used for the more extensive study. We collected demographic, academic, and job information and their participation in PDPs through the surveys. We also used semi-structured in-depth interviews, and later, we invited them to write a narrative of a meaningful experience in professional development. As requested, the participants used Spanish for the interviews and the narrative.

We used a narrative activity to externalize, verbalize, and systematically examine the teachers' voices (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). We focused on the possibility of externalization because narratives represent a possibility for teachers "to express their understandings and feelings by giving voice to their past, present, and even imagined future experiences" (Golombek & Johnson, 2017, p. 18). For the narrative activity, we invited the participants to write a retrospective account of a powerful professional experience in professional development. It could be a positive or negative experience because different views of the same event may coexist within an individual, or the same event may be perceived differently by different people (Day, 2005; Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995). We included negative experiences because they are "part of what constitutes and reifies a teacher's identity in (and out of) institutional settings" (Kitching, 2009, p. 142). Angelides (2001) highlights that a critical incident or problematic situation stimulates reflection and searching for a solution.

We conducted two semi-structured in-depth interviews with each teacher over a year. In-depth interviews allow a deep exploration of topics, as there is room for comments that reveal values, beliefs, and experiences (Kvale, 1996). The first interview explored if teachers were invested in their professional development across their teaching careers, and it was motivated by their responses to the survey. The second interview aimed to understand what led to the teachers' investment, as they reported it in the professional development experience in their narratives. We transcribed interviews using

regular orthography and later translated them and the stories into English for verbatim quotations.

We performed content analysis to make valid inferences from data and provide new insights. We used NVIVO<sup>TM</sup> 11 to analyze the teachers' stories and interviews. The coding process followed an inductive approach with open coding, creating categories and abstracting meanings (Saldaña, 2016). To assure trustworthiness, we conducted methodological and investigator triangulation (Guion et al., 2011) and used member checking in the interviews (Kvale, 1996).

### Findings

Findings suggest that for the participating English teachers two main factors drove their investment in their professional development: the support in constructing their imagined professional identities and the possibility of joining an imagined professional community. Teachers are invested in showing interest in the PDPs, committing to learning, and implementing new knowledge in their classrooms. They also express an avid desire to share what they have learned with their colleagues. On the contrary, if English teachers are not invested in their professional development, they ignore or decline calls for participation, do not show long-term academic commitment to the PDPs, or withdraw promptly.

### English Teachers' Imagined Identities

Three primary imagined teacher identities emerged in our analysis: proficient speakers of English, ELT experts, and competent ICT users. Under the demands of the NPB, the participants saw the three identities as a priority for improving their professional future. However, social and academic discourses around the quality of English in Colombia have produced some rankings in which language proficiency development is the primary drive for being invested in professional development initiatives. ELT methodologies appear in second place, and, finally, the use of ICT. Following the importance ranking, we describe the identities below.

### Proficient Speakers of English

Although the participants are fluent English speakers, and all had a B2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)—stated in the NPB as the minimum proficiency level for English teachers—all reported feeling some degree of insecurity about their linguistic competence. The negative appraisal was more evident for Nora, Octavio, Yuri, Mónica, and Mario, as they said in the interviews. Esmeralda and Camilo seemed more confident about their English proficiency. Still, their feeling of linguistic incompleteness was a primary drive to attend PDPs, as it was for the rest of the group. In the survey, Esmeralda reported having participated in numerous English courses the municipality financed or paid for to support her English language development.

All the participants want to see themselves as proficient English speakers in the future. In the first interview, they mentioned that PDPs that used English as the means of instruction and interaction among participants drove their investment as it led to improving or maintaining their language proficiency. When the PDPs did not allow the use of English, they were not invested and usually cancelled their participation.

A primary reason for the power they grant to PDPs in English is the teachers' limited opportunities to use the language in their schools. The participants stated that their regular classes allow for the use of English for classroom management, instructions for students' individual or group work, or drilling exercises. Additionally, they feel that their peer teachers are highly insecure about their language proficiency and avoid speaking English with them. In the first interview, Camilo said,

We talk all the time in Spanish about superfluous topics. Instead, it would be great if we discussed a reading on a specific methodology or issue that we need for our teaching practices. Besides, we should generate the habit of speaking English among ourselves.

Even when teachers started using English with some colleagues, the practice lasted only a short time. Nora reported in the first interview the need to create some spaces for language practice and improvement. However, she acknowledged the fear of being exposed, mainly when the interlocutor is a peer teacher: “We usually think that we do not pronounce properly and the other [teacher] will not understand us.” The individual insecurities and the feeling of not having peers who could provide corrective feedback hindered the language practice initiatives.

Esmeralda, Mónica, and Nora took English language courses in private language centers. Their registration fees were a scholarship from the municipality because it was a form of professional development. This opportunity boosted their linguistic investment. Teachers highlighted the quality of interactions with the English instructors and the classmates they had. This benefit was not permanent because it depended on the municipal authorities in power. The end of the English courses provoked frustration because teachers lost space for meaningful language learning and use.

Consequently, the lack of continuity in this PDP challenged the teachers' drive to achieve and maintain their imagined identity as proficient speakers of English. Nora described her experience as an English student as highly rewarding, but when the courses were interrupted, she felt frustrated. She externalized her frustration by saying, “we feel confused on how to continue” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

### ELT Experts

The participants insisted that the NPB has made their need to use communicative methodologies more explicit to meet the English national standards. When professional development allows teachers to feel acquainted with different ELT methodologies, they feel empowered. In the first interview, Mar said that her participation in “different online English teaching networks to be updated on the latest methodologies in

foreign languages” has substantially increased. Thanks to that experience, she reports knowing about “CLIL and task-based language learning.” In the second interview, Gabriela explained that the professional development she received in her second job in a private school has made her feel more confident and qualified as a professional with ELT expertise. There, she learned different teaching techniques that she also applies in her classes at Hill School.

Despite the positive feelings teachers gained through developing their imagined identity as ELT experts, some participants commented in the interviews that their investment was also a source of negative emotions. To all, this imagined identity is seldom constructed through the professional development offers of the local and national governments. These programs require specialized facilitators, a longer time, a classroom application phase, and more funding. Besides, the programs should ideally use English as a means of instruction and interaction to support their first imagined identity, but the teachers have received offers in Spanish. Some participants externalized this frustration in the narrative activity when the new ELT knowledge could not have a real application in their English classes. The main reasons causing their despair were the lack of support from the school administrators, the limited time for English instruction in the school curriculum, and the lack of teaching resources.

#### **ICT Users**

In this third imagined identity, the participants report having experienced the rapid development of ICT in their personal and professional lives. Although we found various skills in using computers and software in the interviews, the nine participants expressed their need to be updated in ICT for two main reasons. One, they know the importance of ICTs in improving students’ learning and motivation. Two, the national government’s discourse on teachers’ use of ICT is compelling. This emphasis is reflected on the many offers for professional

development and the subsidies and grants for graduate studies in that field. In the surveys, these nine teachers reported numerous references to PDPs that encourage the use of ICT and support the acquisition of technical skills.

In both interviews, Camilo said he decided to invest in his professional development to pursue a graduate degree in ICT. He aimed to cope with his students’ technology knowledge and perceived his lack of training as a primary professional need. He wanted to belong to the imagined community of technologically competent ELT teachers, distancing himself from the generalized idea of public school teachers as professionals who do not innovate in their teaching practices. He said,

We have been underestimated, maybe because, in the past, some of our colleagues did not need to innovate. They stuck to a book and continued teaching with it for the rest of their careers, but now things are different because we have innovative teaching practices, in my case, using ICT. (1<sup>st</sup> interview)

Regarding this imagined identity, Esmeralda, the teacher with the most extensive teaching experience and close to retirement, has been openly invested in becoming a proficient technology user through her participation in professional development initiatives. In the second interview, she reported: “Actually, my students tell me, ‘Teacher, my mom is your age, but she does not know how to use a computer, and you are a genius.’”

Being recognized as English teachers with high technological skills has brought about high professional self-esteem and job satisfaction for all. At the time of the interviews, Esmeralda and Camilo had become leaders in using ICT in their institutions and municipality. Esmeralda enthusiastically described her experience using the municipality’s platform for ELT. She said, “I taught the teachers of my municipality the way they can make their classes more appealing, meaningful, and fun through the use of these technological tools” (1<sup>st</sup> interview). Yuri, Mario, and Nora expressed in the



interviews that their school contexts and students' needs have influenced their interest in ICT.

Despite the importance of developing this imagined identity as competent ICT users, the participants reported that their investment is often affected by their schools' lack of technological resources. Mario, Esmeralda, and Nora declared that this issue becomes a discouraging factor for them to be invested in new PDPs. Recalling her experience in a professional development initiative that focused on the use of ICT, Nora verbalized and externalized her frustration about limited ICT resources:

I want my students to have access to laptops, games, varied materials, etc. It is really tough to put into practice what I have learned in training programs offered by local and national governments when you arrive in this setting and need more resources. (Narrative activity)

Esmeralda and Nora expressed in the interviews their mixed feelings about their investment to develop their identity as ICT experts. To solve the scarcity of resources, at one time, they paid from their own money for loudspeakers and broadband internet plans to teach better classes. Although that aspect made them highly dissatisfied with their job, they did not regret buying the equipment. They said their commitment to their students' learning and self-esteem as competent technology users compensated for their temporary frustration.

The three imagined identities are equally important to the teachers, but most programs need to support their professional development in an integrated way. Most of the courses focus on language, methodologies, or ICT. In very few cases, PDPs address the teachers' language proficiency and ELT methodologies. Four participants mentioned in their narratives that their best experience in professional development combined these two aspects. Nora described her experience as a student in an English language center as a powerful boost in her professional development investment. Not only did she improve her English but also, she learned

about innovative practices in ELT. She verbalized her satisfaction in the following excerpt,

The most positive professional development experience I have had was in the Mountain Language Center because I was a student there. I had the possibility of learning English from basic to advanced levels. Besides, they implemented interesting methodologies. I learned [English] through communicative activities and language games. We, as teachers, need to know these different methodologies to have alternatives for teaching. This experience allowed me to grow as a language learner, and from there, as a language teacher. Also, when I plan my lessons, I integrate all the methodologies I learned there.

At the time of data collection, none of the participants had been in a PDP that supported their three imagined identities.

### English Teachers' Imagined Community: "Bilingual English Teachers"

In our analysis, a second factor played an essential role in the teachers' investment in their professional development: The teachers' individual imagined identity as proficient speakers of English became a collective imagined identity where they could become members of the community of "bilingual teachers." Most participants believe their linguistic competence is not good enough and do not see themselves as "bilinguals" or "bilingual teachers." Nora, for example, explained her language needs in the following excerpt from her narrative: "I need a training program in which I can really improve my English proficiency, like advanced conversation clubs and advanced grammar and writing workshops." She extended that need to all Colombian English teachers, defining the challenge as follows,

What teachers do the least in their daily practice is improve their English proficiency. If the Ministry of Education asks for a B1 level [of the CEFR], [teachers] comply with that, or they may achieve a B2 level. However,

everybody should constantly aim to move forward to a higher level.

For the participants, some degree of validation of their language proficiency, and specific self-recognition of their linguistic skills, came from having contact with communities of English speakers in language immersion programs, traveling abroad, or interacting with the English Fellows.<sup>2</sup> Gabriela, Esmeralda, and Nora participated in an English immersion program in the Colombian Caribbean islands of San Andrés and Providencia.<sup>3</sup> For them, using English daily meant a close encounter with “bilingualism.” Gabriela defined the experience as “mind opening to continue enhancing my L2 proficiency.” For Octavio, the feeling of being bilingual resulted from traveling abroad, as he reported in the second interview. Using English with native and non-native speakers in his everyday activities on a trip to Switzerland showed him that he was part of that imagined bilingual community, something he did not feel in Colombia. He said: “This experience was very enriching because I could communicate with people there, and I understood everything, and I said to myself, “This is amazing! I can communicate with these people!” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview). In the first interview, Gabriela also defined travelling internationally as a key factor in practicing her English because she encountered native speakers. She extended the benefit to interactions in her family circle, saying, “some of my brothers live in the US, so they talk like native speakers.”

The English Fellows program got a solid national and local promotion as a primary resource to make the country bilingual. Conceived as a PDP, the presence of English Fellows was supposed to contribute

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<sup>2</sup> The English Fellows program was a national strategy of the NPB that hired foreign native and nonnative speakers of English as teaching assistants for public schools. This was advertised as a professional development initiative to support the teachers' language proficiency.

<sup>3</sup> The English language immersion program took place in the only territory in Colombia where English is used as a means of communication. It interacts with Creole and Spanish in a triglossic situation.

to improving the communication skills of teachers and students, mainly in their pronunciation. Only schools with outstanding academic scores and highly committed teachers received English Fellows. Nora, Esmeralda, Mónica, and Mario shared their teaching duties with one of these ELT assistants for almost a year. Esmeralda defined the strategy as highly enriching: “Having a native speaker who speaks with perfect pronunciation is wonderful because this motivates both teachers and students.” Nora insisted in the first interview that interacting with the English Fellows was highly beneficial to achieve the bilingualism targets. She said: “We should take advantage of every opportunity to practice, but it is also because we want to do it perfectly.”

Despite the apparent benefits, the presence of English Fellows in schools was only a satisfactory experience for some. For some of the teachers, speaking in English with them was intimidating. Without an open reference to a personal experience, some participants verbalized fear of being judged or mocked, which provoked insecurity. Nora acknowledged some anxiety when interacting with their Fellow in her school but concluded, “we should not be worried about that.”

The road to joining this imagined community of “bilinguals” has been rough. The participants believed that their investment was not valued. They regret missing opportunities for this affiliation due to a lack of professional development continuity and support. The immersion experiences in San Andrés were limited in coverage and no longer offered. The English Fellows program lasted only a few years. If they do not receive financial aid from the local or national governments, teachers cannot afford to travel abroad or participate in English immersion experiences. They insisted that language immersion in English-speaking countries was the golden ticket to accessing the imagined community.

## Discussion and Implications

The findings showed that the participants' investment in their professional development was boosted or

limited by two main factors: the development of their imagined identities and their affiliation to an imagined community. The teachers displayed high interest in joining, completing, and applying the knowledge acquired through their participation in certain PDPs to be recognized as proficient speakers of English, ELT experts, and competent ICT users. The participants also devoted their time, energy, and commitment to professional development initiatives that allowed them to feel they belonged to the imagined community of “bilingual English teachers.” If the PDP offers did not address these expectations, they would not be invested, and the lack of investment would mean not registering, dropping out promptly, or not applying new knowledge at schools.

The English teachers’ three imagined identities and the affiliation to an imagined community of “bilinguals” respond to transnational discourses of globalization and the obligation assigned to educators to prepare citizens for the labor market (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, 2016; Usma-Wilches, 2009, 2015). In Colombia, the NPB has perpetuated those ideas shaping teachers’ imagined individual and collective identities. Therefore, they become invested in PDPs that support their compliance with the language education policy standards and ideals about the ELT profession.

Under the premise of the benefits of teaching English using international standards, professional development has been shaped towards discrete aspects such as teachers’ language proficiency, use of ELT methodologies, and ICT competence (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2012). The three imagined identities reflect beliefs and values operating simultaneously at three levels (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). At a macro level, they exist through ideological policy design and implementation structures. At a meso level, they find a place at schools and decision-making instances that define the funding of professional development initiatives. Finally, they operate at a micro level where teachers create individual and collegial conceptions of

professionalism and pertinent professional development. The complexity of the teachers’ professional needs is still disregarded, and available PDPs barely address it.

After our data analysis, it was clear that English teachers’ voices are still unheard in most professional development agendas (Buendía & Macías, 2019; Cárdenas & Chaves, 2013; Fandiño-Parra, 2021). Most of the national government actions have placed the success of the NPB almost exclusively in the teachers’ hands (Cárdenas & Chaves, 2013). Unfurnished schools, little social appreciation, low salaries, and lack of administrative support not only hinder English teachers’ investment in PDPs. They are a constant in public education in Colombia and Latin America, making English teachers’ work a rampant challenge (Álvarez-Espinal, 2018; Arias-Soto et al., 2011; Bonilla-Medina & Cruz-Arcila, 2013; Correa & González, 2016; Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017; Sánchez-Jabba, 2013).

Although the professional needs that underlie teachers’ imagined identities and their affiliation to an imagined community are essential, they should not be the only priority in ELT. There is an urgent need to challenge the tenets of the national English language education policy as they reproduce discourses of colonialism and undermine teachers’ professionalism (Álvarez et al., 2011; González, 2007; Guerrero, 2008). Teacher educators and teachers are to work collaboratively, insisting on setting up new agendas that inform policymakers about the necessity of a paradigm shift in ELT and professional development (Fandiño-Parra, 2021; González, 2021; Granados-Beltrán, 2018; Le Gal, 2018; Usma-Wilches, 2015). Only through democratic, situated, and decolonial views of English, ELT, English teachers, and professional development can the country achieve its educational targets.

Our findings are aligned with other studies about teachers’ imagined identity and investment. The teachers’ imagined identity as proficient English speakers coincides with the educational community’s interest in the teachers’ linguistic level in Colombia (Cárdenas

& Chaves, 2013; Kostina, 2012) and internationally (Copland et al., 2014; Lantolf, 2009; Richards et al., 2013). The teachers' imagined identity as ELT experts coincides with knowledge of updated teaching methodologies for English teachers in China and Taiwan (Xu, 2012, 2013; Wu, 2017) and Brazil (Sanches-Silva, 2013). The clever use of ICT as an imagined identity that drives investment coincides with findings reported by Stranger-Johannessen and Norton (2017) and Méndez-Rivera and Guerrero (2018). Finally, the participants' struggle to be "bilinguals" agrees with findings reported by Pavlenko (2003) and Viáfara (2016).

We hope to have shed some light on Colombian English teachers' investment in their professional development despite the study limitations. We focused on a small number of teachers that work in public schools in an urban context. As English teachers' investment and identity transformation are becoming subjects of interest to the ELT community, we encourage new studies that consider teachers from private schools and rural areas in different regions of the country. Another critical aspect to consider is that we have discussed the professional needs of teachers who hold ELT degrees. Still, there is another significant number of teachers that do not speak English, nor are they acquainted with adequate language teaching methodologies. Their specific conditions challenge most current PDPs' foundations and require detailed exploration to understand their professional challenges. Our study may inspire other projects where teachers' imagined professional futures and imagined identities are explored in more detail to contribute to the quality of ELT.

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### **About the Authors**

**Marcela Ovalle Quiroz** holds an MA in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning (Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia). She is currently a World Language teacher (Spanish and ESL) in a private school in the US. Her areas of interest include teacher professional development, second language acquisition, critical literacies, and critical methodologies for SLA/EFL.

**Adriana González** holds a doctoral degree in Linguistics (State University of New York at Stony Brook). She is a professor at the Universidad de Antioquia in the undergraduate and graduate foreign language teacher education programs. Her areas of academic work include teacher professional development, language policies, world Englishes, and ELF.