Linguistic imperialism, English, and development: implications for Colombia

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ABSTRACT

This article critically analyses the extent to which research in the field of English and development in the global South supports the claim that English can contribute to development. Particular reference is made to the Colombian context, which, along with several other countries in Latin America, has prioritised English language teaching in recent years through a series of initiatives. In doing so this paper highlights domains where English skills may be more or less useful in developing contexts in general and in Colombia more specifically and identifies factors which may influence the role of English in development. To aid in this analysis, this article draws on Phillipson's (*Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford University Press, 1992) **[Q1]** theory of linguistic imperialism and relevant literature which looks at the role of English and development in the global South. The paper argues that although English may foster development in domains such as employment, trade, migration, and education, this is contingent upon a range of personal and contextual factors including ~~geographical location,~~ level of English~~, educational background,~~ and socioeconomic status. It is also argued that, regardless of the contribution that English can make to development, interests in the global North are benefitting from the proliferation of this language in developing contexts. ~~The paper concludes by suggesting directions for future research and additional conceptual tools which can be used to interrogate the interface between English and development~~ **[Q2]**.

KEYWORDS

- English
- development
- Colombia
- linguistic imperialism
- developing
- global Ssouth

Introduction

English is currently the most widely spoken language on the planet (Eberhard et al., 2020). This global lingua franca not only facilitates the flow of capital, goods and labour across national borders (Canagarajah, 2017); it also dominates 'the research and knowledge system' (Marginson, 2007, p. 326). As such, mastery of the English language forms an important component of knowledge capital in a globalised world driven by neoliberalism and is recognised by the governments of developing economies as key to their development (Rassool, 2013; Sayer, 2015). Indeed, the positive relationship between English and development, often understood to mean economic development, permeates official language policy discourse in the global South (e.g. Euromonitor, 2010; Mohanty, 2017; Sayer, 2015). In Colombia, the context of the current study, the Ministerio de Educación Nacional[1] (MEN, 2006) provides an example of such discourse:

> Being bilingual is essential in a globalised world which demands that one can communicate better, open borders, understand other contexts, appropriate and circulate tastes, understand and be understood, enrich oneself, and play a decisive role in the development of the country. Being bilingual broadens the opportunities to be more competent and competitive. (p. 3, author's translation)

As other scholars have pointed out, the term 'bilingualism' is used by the government of Colombia (GoC[2]) to refer exclusively to English and Spanish (Guerrero, 2010; Valencia, 2005). This quote therefore reveals how the GoC predominantly views dual competence in these hegemonic European languages as a tool for fostering the country's development rather than as an end in itself (Fandiño-Parra et al., 2012; Martínez, 2017). The link between development and English is further underscored by the inclusion of English in the GoC's national plan for development for 2014–2018 on the grounds that 'it is currently the most commonly spoken language in the world for education, business and the dissemination of culture' (Departamento Nacional de Planeación[3] [DNP], 2015, p. 100, author's translation).

Underpinned by this discourse of English and development, the GoC has implemented a range of English linguistic policies in

recent years. Such policies may be justified so long as English does, in fact, lead to development, but no study could be found which examines this relationship in Colombia. The current paper therefore critically reviews to what extent research in the field of English and development in the global South, including relevant literature from Colombia, supports the MEN's claim that English can 'play a decisive role in … development'. In doing so it also highlights domains where English skills in Colombia may be more or less useful as well as factors which may influence the contribution of English to development. To aid in this analysis, I draw on Phillipson's (1992) theory of linguistic imperialism.

Such research is particularly relevant given the recent decision by many governments in the global South to prioritise initiatives which promote English language education in their respective countries (Cronquist & Ariel Fiszbein, 2017; Khan, 2019; Wedell, 2011). In Latin America these initiatives include the Programa Nacional de Inglés[4] in Mexico; Inglés Abre Puertas[5] in Chile; and Inglés, Puertas al Mundo[6] in Perú (Miranda & Valencia Giraldo, 2019). Thus, insights regarding the potential contribution that English can make to human development are not only of value to practitioners, English language providers, and policy-makers working in the field of ELT in Colombia, but may also inform language policy debates in other countries in Latin America and in the global South more generally.

This paper is divided into five main sections. I start by outlining the view of the development which underpins the current study. Next, I provide a brief overview of the development challenges facing Colombia before outlining this study's theoretical framework. I then draw on the literature to critically examine the ways in which English can foster development in the global South and Colombia in particular and explore the implications of this research. The paper ends by summarising this paper's conclusions and highlighting directions for future research.

Understanding development

Since understandings of development are contested (e.g. Arcand & Grin, 2013; Ferguson, 2013), it is important to state here that the view of development which informs the current paper is consistent with the human development approach (HDA). The HDA contrasts with the human capital approach (HCA) to development which views humans as important but only insofar as they contribute to the ends of economic growth and productivity (Anand & Sen, 2000). The HCA has dominated educational policy discourse since the 1970s and underpins the neoliberal agendas of organisations such as the World Bank and the OECD (Appleby, 2010; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). This paradigm, however, far from addressing global inequities, may have served to exacerbate them (Appleby, 2010; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Conversely, the HDA, which represents the most influential shift in our understanding of development in recent years (Chimbutane, 2017; Coleman, 2017), holds that development is about 'expanding the choices people have to lead lives that they value' (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2001, p. 9). From this perspective, human beings are considered the 'primary ends as well as the principal means of development' (Anand & Sen, 2000, p. 83). Perhaps the most well-known application of the HDA is in the Human Development Reports of the UNDP, but it also informs the Human Development Index and the Sustainable Development Goals (Anand & Sen, 2000; Chimbutane, 2017). The HDA has also been adopted by the biannual Language and Development conferences which provide a platform for engaging with language and development concerns (Coleman, 2017). This more inclusive view of development as freedom has led to a greater engagement with the impact of development efforts at the local and individual level (Erling & Seargeant, 2013).

Colombia: the development context

Colombia is an upper-middle-income country of approximately 48 million inhabitants, with a quarter of these living in rural areas (UNESCO, 2016). Afro-Colombians (6.8%) and indigenous peoples (4.3%) constitute the largest minority groups, though the vast majority are a mix of ethnicities (CIA World Factbook, 2020). In terms of development, the UNDP (2018) ranks Colombia 90th out of 189 countries and territories. Although the country is in the high human development group, its performance is below average both for this group and for countries in Latin America (UNDP, 2018).

One major barrier to Colombia's development is the unequal level of income distribution, which was the second highest in Latin America in 2019 (World Bank, 2021). The employment situation in the country can partly account for such inequality (World Bank, 2015). For example, Colombia's jobless rate for the first quarter of 2020 (prior to the COVID-19 lockdown) was 11.2%, the fifth highest among all OECD countries (OECD, 2020), and an estimated 50% of the Colombian workforce subsists on either the minimum wage[7] or less (OECD, 2017). Moreover, according to official statistics from the GoC, around 46% of the working population were informally employed from July to September 2019 (Departamento Nacional Administrativo de Estadística[8] [DANE], 2019). Informality is more likely to affect young people, and is characterised by job insecurity, poor remuneration and working conditions, and a lack of social benefits (OECD, 2016; Radinger et al., 2018). Thus, a lack of quality, well-paid employment presents another major challenge to Colombia's development (Radinger et al., 2018).

Another key obstacle to development is the decades-long civil war, which, in spite of the peace accords signed in 2016, is still being fought by paramilitary groups in different areas of the country, and has resulted in lower rates of participation in compulsory education in rural areas (OECD, 2017). The ongoing conflict is also partly responsible for another barrier to

Colombia's development: outward migration (Louidor, 2018). Indeed, in recent decades, Colombia has been a net exporter of migrants, with 4.7 million Colombians resident in foreign countries in 2014 (Louidor, 2018).

The education system also reveals profound inequality with the public and private sector education segregated according to social strata (Radinger et al., 2018). As a result, socioeconomic status is a strong predictor of educational success with school life expectancy for those from the poorest backgrounds half that of students from the wealthiest (OECD, 2016). At the international level, Colombia is also at a significant disadvantage. For example, the average Colombian is much more likely to repeat a grade than his/her counterparts in other OECD countries, and performs far worse on the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2017).

In sum, Colombia is a country divided along economic, geographic, political and educational lines, which has implications for the country's development. Having highlighted the key development challenges facing Colombia, I now turn to this study's theoretical framework.

Theoretical framework

Writing within the field of critical applied linguistics, Phillipson's original work, Linguistic Imperialism (1992), examined whether and to what extent foreign aid in the domains of education and English language instruction had contributed to development in the global South. In this book, Phillipson brings together concepts from the fields of critical theory, development studies, post-structuralism, and post-colonial theory in order to draw attention to the hidden structural forces driving the spread of English (Phillipson, 1992, 2010). Phillipson (1992) shows how the expansion of English around the globe and its status as the global language benefits the 'core English-speaking countries' (p. 17) where English is spoken as a first language (i.e. Britain, Canada, the US, Australia, and New Zealand), at the expense of the 'periphery' (p. 17) (i.e. countries where English is used as an international or second language). Phillipson ~~The author~~ (1992) **[Q3]**defines linguistic imperialism as 'the dominance of English asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural (material properties) and cultural (ideological properties) inequalities between English and other languages' (p. 42). For Phillipson (1992), linguistic imperialism is a subcategory of cultural imperialism and is bound up with other mutually supportive forms of imperialism, including but not limited to economic, political and military imperialism. Linguistic imperialism is not unique to the current globalised era. Indeed, for the Roman Empire and the Soviet Union, Latin and Russian, respectively, also acquired the status of hegemonic languages. Notwithstanding, the most recent manifestation of linguistic imperialism, which is the focus of the vast majority of Phillipson's intellectual output, is English.

Reasons behind the spread of English

According to Phillipson (1992), the global expansion of English can be attributed to several factors. One key factor is the past and present promotion of English by the UK and US governments, and by organisations wedded to Anglo-American interests such as the World Bank and the British Council (Phillipson, 1992). Support for the global proliferation of English by the core English-speaking countries should come as no surprise given that English is the second largest commodity for the UK after North Sea oil, and highlights how the multi-million dollar ELT industry, which sustains Centre-based publishing houses, exam providers, academic institutions, and industry professionals, is implicated in the spread of English (Phillipson, 2010).

Another key driver behind the onward march of English towards worldwide linguistic domination is the notion that English contributes to development, often understood to mean economic development:

> The growing craze for English all over the world is associated with the rhetoric of English and development permeating into popular perception of its significance … often without any critical scrutiny. Broadly, English is projected as a global language … or a language needed for maintaining a competitive edge in a globalised world. (Mohanty, 2017, p. 261)

In other words, an uncritical assumption persists that English linguistic capital fosters socio-economic progress by increasing competitiveness (Phillipson, 1988). In Latin America, this ideology is reflected in the phrase 'English opens doors', which, as we have seen, lends its name to the English language initiatives of the Chilean and Peruvian governments, and also features prominently in discussions about the value of English in the region (de Oliveira, 2019; Sayer, 2015). Indeed, in the Colombian context specifically, the view of English as the 'language of opportunity' is widespread at both the local and national level (Miranda & Valencia Giraldo, 2019, p. 284). As Mohanty suggests above, this belief in the promise of English is also linked to globalisation, which is often used as a justification for the promotion of this hegemonic language in the global South, including in Colombia (Miranda & Valencia Giraldo, 2019; Williams, 2011). The discourse of development, which has been largely propagated through English (Shamim, 2011), has given the West a pretext to continue advancing its political, cultural and economic objectives in former colonies (Pennycook, 2017; Phillipson, 1988). One such objective has been to establish the superior status of English over other languages by fostering greater dependency on the global lingua franca, which, in turn, legitimises and reinforces Western dominance over the global South (Pennycook, 2017; Phillipson, 1988).

Criticisms

Some have criticised Phillipson's politicisation of the spread of English, arguing instead that the current global hegemony of English is the result of fortuitous circumstances (e.g. Crystal, 2003; Spolsky, 2004). Seen from this perspective, the spread of English is incidental, apolitical and agentless (Pennycook, 2017). However, this view fails to account for the political, cultural, economic, and historical dimensions shaping language policies thus absolving English of ~~any~~ responsibility for any injustices that it might generate (Pennycook, 2017). Aside from leading to a disengagement with critical issues relating to the global hegemony of English (Pennycook, 2017), a repudiation of English linguistic imperialism also suggests that language management decisions by governments, institutions and corporations to safeguard local languages against the inexorable diffusion of English are futile, which seems to be Spolsky's (2004) contention.

One consequence of an apolitical stance is that it leaves no room for resistance: since the spread of English is a natural process, it cannot be opposed. This leads us to a second criticism of Phillipson's theory, namely, that an excessive focus on the structural forces driving the penetration of English de-emphasises the role of agency in resisting them (Appleby, 2010; Pennycook, 2017). However, this appears to be a misreading of Phillipson (2018), who has made clear that, 'linguistic imperialism is invariably contested and resisted' (p. 1).

Taken together, Phillipson's theory can shed light on questions of power, ideology and inequalities which are linked to the past and present promotion and spread of English in educational systems in developing contexts (Phillipson, 1992; Tikly, 2016). In addition, this framework helps us to understand the decisions of developing countries such as Colombia to adopt English language policies as an interaction between macro and micro level processes (Phillipson, 2010). At the macro level, these processes include neoliberal globalisation, which is foregrounded in the status of English in transnational entities ranging from CNN and Coca Cola to the EU and the World Bank, while at the micro level these include the language ideologies of individuals (Phillipson, 2010).

English and development

As stated above, a key reason for the promotion of English language instruction in Colombia is to foster development, a claim which the current paper aims to critically analyse in some depth with the help of Phillipson's framework. Having outlined this framework and some related criticisms, I now turn to this paper's central endeavour. Due to the paucity of existing research on the relationship of English in development in Colombia, this section also draws on relevant literature from other developing contexts. Some attempts have been made to outline the broad domains where English can foster development (e.g. Chan, 2016; Coleman, 2010; Focho, 2011), and the section which follows is a synthesis of these typologies. I first discuss the linkages between English and the economy under the subcategories of earnings and employment, and trade and economic growth. I then focus on the relationship between English and international mobility, which includes the subdomains of migration, and study abroad, before discussing access to schooling, academia, the internet, and aid~~,~~ under the heading Unlocking development opportunities and knowledge.

English and the economy

Earnings and employment

A body of research has focused on the economic gain of acquiring English linguistic capital in developing contexts (e.g. Aslam et al., 2010; Azam et al., 2013; Euromonitor, 2010; Levinsohn, 2004~~7~~ **[Q4]**). For example, Azam et al. (2013), using data from the India Human Development Survey, conclude that fluency in English can increase wages in India for women by 22% (34% for men), while some knowledge of English can increase their earnings by 10% (13% for men). Similarly, Euromonitor (2010) conducted interviews with 42 companies in Bangladesh, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Pakistan, and Rwanda. The majority of respondents stressed the importance of English skills for their businesses, and reported salary increases of up to 30% for English-proficient employees.

While such studies highlight the positive benefits English can confer on speakers, at least three observations can be made about them. First, they use aggregate figures as indicators of development, which tell us little about the benefits of English at the individual level, nor the challenges individuals can face in turning their English linguistic competence to their advantage (Erling, 2017). Second, these studies reveal how contextual factors can impact on outcomes, which make it difficult to establish a causal relationship between earnings and English skills (Ferguson, 2013). For instance, in Azam et al.'s (2013) study, English speakers from India's Scheduled Caste reported lower returns for their English skills than those from higher castes. This is in line with Levinsohn's (2004) research based on household surveys which found increased financial gains for white English-speakers during South Africa's period of opening up to the world economy, but no such gains for B~~b~~lack English-speakers. Thus, greater returns do not merely reflect better English skills, but are also partly contingent upon race and societal status. Another factor which impacts the benefits to individuals of their English linguistic capital is education. For example, participants in Azam et al.'s (2013) research did not see an increase in earnings unless they had completed secondary schooling, and this increase was significantly lower for

newcomers to the workforce. Similarly, roughly 50% of respondents from companies in the five countries in Euromonitor's (2010) study would rather hire employees who were educated in the private sector since it is considered superior to publicly-funded education. This suggests that returns are also influenced by level and sector of education. Yet another factor which may impact earnings for English speakers is gender. This is illustrated in Azam et al.'s (2013) and Aslam et al.'s (2010) studies, which both report differential earnings increases for women and men. Interestingly, though, while the former study provides evidence of greater gains for men in India, the latter study contradicts this finding, claiming that earnings of Indian English-speaking women were 6% higher (26%) than for men. An additional factor which may impact on the dividends to English-proficient individuals is mentioned in the research conducted by Euromonitor (2010). This study reports that 68% of large businesses in the countries surveyed are situated in urban areas. As such, geographical location may be the difference between whether an individuals' English skills yield benefits or not, with a greater likelihood that such skills will be beneficial in urban contexts. A final factor which influences whether English can yield employment-related benefits is an individual's level of English. According to the Euromonitor study, the vast majority of companies surveyed expected employees to have achieved an intermediate level of English, which suggests that English in certain contexts only becomes beneficial after a certain threshold level has been reached. Given these intersecting enabling and disabling contextual factors, it seems clear that English alone is insufficient to get ahead (Erling, 2017; Kubota, 2011).

A third and final observation we can make about the aforementioned studies is that they were conducted in settings which differ significantly from the Latin American context. One key difference is that in all of the countries surveyed, with the exception of Rwanda and parts of Cameroon, English is the language of colonialism while in Latin America, this language is Spanish. The differential status of English in these settings may have a bearing on the contribution that English language skills can make to ~~an~~ individuals' lives. This interpretation is consistent with Grin (2001) who found that in German-speaking Switzerland, English competence is more highly valued whereas in French-speaking Switzerland, German skills are worth more~~more highly valued~~. The shifting value of English depending on the context appears to be related to the number of speakers and the demand for their language skills in any given region (Arcand & Grin, 2013; Grin, 2016). In other words, since English is a positional good, the benefits it confers on speakers are context-dependent (Grin, 2001).

Although no studies could be found – quantitative or otherwise – which explore the relationship between earnings and English in Colombia, Herazo et al.'s (2012) research provides evidence of the demand for English skills in the Colombian labour market. Their analysis of databases and job portals from 2007 to 2012 found that between 0.08% and 6.75% of jobs listed English as a requirement, depending on the source and year. They conclude that 'the mobility of Colombians and their chances of interlingual contact with English speakers may be too few and far between to provide opportunity and incentive for learning English' (pp. 209–210). More recently, a British Council (2015) survey of 1000 individuals and 78 employers in the country found that English skills were needed in the workplace by only 8% of respondents. This suggests that the need for English linguistic capital may be on the increase in Colombia. At the same time, these more recent figures are still very low, and only provide information about opportunities to use English in the formal sector where English seems much more likely to yield benefits (Bruthiaux, 2002; Ferguson, 2013). This highlights yet another factor which affects the value of an individual's English language skills: the type of employment she or he~~an individual~~ is engaged in (Grin, 2001).

One employment sector which has grown substantially in Colombia in the years since Herazo et al.'s (2012) study is business process outsourcing (BPO) (Gott & Sethi, 2017). In various parts of the world, this sector has flourished as a result of deregulation and technological advances which have enabled enterprises in the global North to offshore~~relocate~~ a significant portion of their information technology operations to predominantly English-proficient developing nations such as India and the Philippines (Ferguson, 2013; Rassool, 2013). In Colombia alone, BPO employs around 230,000 staff according to one source (Invest in Bogotá, 2020). As a result, it has been argued that the principal objective of the MEN's promotion of EFL is to provide the BPO industry with a pool of English-speaking labourers (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016).

Clearly, then, the BPO sector may provide some English-speaking Colombians with formal employment, but what evidence is there that this leads to human development? The organisation Invest in Bogotá (2020, para. 10), which exhorts foreign investors to relocate their call centres to the Colombian capital, states that 'competitive' starting salaries for Colombians are US$340 per month. However, these salaries are only a little over the minimum wage in Colombia. Furthermore, as De Groot and Pérez (2014) point out, 'BPO is a very volatile industry with few barriers to entry and exit, where most companies are in constant search of lower costs' (p. 27). As such, the dividends of learning English may only last as long as wages for English speakers remain lower than in other developing contexts. Thus, while it may be true that BPO provides bilingual individuals with employment they would not otherwise have, given the potentially huge investment of resources needed to become proficient in English, combined with the volatility of such work, English, far from raising living standards, might trap workers in poverty (Bruthiaux, 2002). It is also important to highlight that, although the BPO sector employs a substantial number of Colombians, not all of them are required to use English, and such employment is restricted to Colombia's major cities (Herazo et al., 2012). Thus, BPO, at best, will only improve the lives of a relatively small number of Colombians living in urban areas.

Trade and economic growth

Another way that English can improve individuals' employment prospects is through the trade of goods and services, with obvious benefits in terms of economic growth. Evidence for the positive relationship between English language skills and trade can be found in Ku and Zussman's (2010) quantitative survey of 100 non-English speaking countries. Using GDP and national scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) over the last 30 years, they find that English improves international trade. Lee's (2012) research, which also used TOEFL test scores and GDP to explore the relationship between English and economic growth, is less conclusive. This study found differential benefits based on geographical region, providing evidence for stronger economic growth for Asian and European economies with good English language skills, but not for Latin American and African economies. This again underscores the importance of contextual factors which can limit or increase an individual's potential to turn their English language abilities to their advantage (Kubota, 2011; Lee, 2012). Finally, Arcand and Grin's (2013) study of postcolonial countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, which also uses TOEFL scores and GDP as proxy indicators, found no relationship between English and economic development, and they demonstrate how multilingual societies actually have a higher GDP than those which are less linguistically diverse. The authors therefore caution against using results to justify a linguistic policy which prioritises English since other languages may also act as a trading language.

One important caveat regarding the aforementioned findings is that they use TOEFL scores as a proxy for English proficiency levels. However, in developing countries only the wealthier quintiles have the means to take such tests. Thus, as with quantitative studies more generally, they may provide a distorted picture of the relationship between English and trade. At any rate, these studies yield few insights into the contribution that English makes to trade in Colombia. In fact, although free trade treaties have been used as a justification for the promotion of English in Colombia (Miranda & Valencia Giraldo, 2019; Sánchez, 2013; Usma, 2009), no evidence could be found to support a positive correlation between trade and English in the country. On the contrary, these commercial agreements, along with a series of reforms by successive neoliberal governments, offer transnational organisations from the global North favourable business conditions which impede the country's development (Valencia, 2013). These conditions, which include, inter alia, protections against lawsuits and the expropriation of assets, lax environmental regulations, tax breaks, tariff discounts, and reduced benefits for workers, have not only facilitated the flow of profits and mineral wealth to countries such as the US and Canada, but have also eroded employment rights and labour conditions (Valencia, 2013). Unsurprisingly, this neoliberal agenda has both deepened inequities in the country and widened the gap between Colombia and its wealthier counterparts in the global North (Aviles, 2006; Usma, 2009; Valencia, 2013). Indeed, while English may promote international trade, those Colombians most likely to benefit from this trade are the English-speaking elites, whose interests are aligned with those of multinational corporations in the global North (Aviles, 2006; Usma, 2009).

English for international mobility

Migration

Another key way in which English is linked to development relates to the role it can play in various forms of either temporary or permanent migration. Migrants can contribute to the development of their home countries in several ways, two of which will be discussed here: (a) by returning to their home countries equipped with skills and qualifications they have acquired in host countries; and (b) by sending home remittances (Debnath, 2016; Özden & Kone, 2017). In terms of the first category, Colombia has introduced programmes to foster a return of migrants (Mojica, 2015), although findings suggest that more educated Colombians are less likely to resettle in their home countries, thus limiting the contribution that reverse migration can make (Medina & Posso, 2011). In terms of the second category, Colombians working abroad in 2017 sent home US$5.58 billion, which corresponded to roughly 1.8% of Colombia's GDP (Inter-American Development Bank [IDB], 2018). The fact that the US and the UK accounted for 14.5% and 18.7% of these remittances respectively (IDB, 2018) suggests that English skills may indeed play a role in Colombia's development. However, findings are inconsistent regarding the impact of remittances on developing economies with some studies suggesting that the positive effects of remittances are very limited or are cancelled out by other factors (Lim & Simmons, 2016). These other factors highlight the methodological difficulty of establishing a clear relationship between remittances and development (Freitas & Pécoud, 2012). One key factor is the loss of human capital resulting from the unequal transfer of expertise from the global South to the global North (Banya, 2010; Pedraza, 2013). Although some debate continues regarding the effects of this brain drain (Beine et al., 2008; Cepeda, 2012; Stark, 2003), the efforts made by developing countries to stem this flow of human talent, not to mention the efforts by developed countries and global corporations to facilitate migration for their own gain, suggest that its impact is negative for the former (Altbach et al., 2009; Medina & Posso, 2011; Pedraza, 2013). In human capital terms, the consequences of this brain drain for developing economies include skills shortages, particularly in the fields of health and education (Banya, 2010; Pedraza, 2013), and a depletion of public finances both with regard to the tax revenues that higher earners generate and the loss of government investment in such human capital (Lozano-Ascencio & Gandini, 2012; Özden & Kone, 2017).

At the national level, then, English, by facilitating mobility, can be both detrimental and beneficial to a country's development.

However, this does not necessarily reflect the role of English in migration at the individual level. Indeed, migrants in host countries may enjoy a range of benefits such as 'higher wages, greater freedom, economic and social mobility, escaping persecution, and pursuing better careers' (Pedraza, 2013, p. 33). In terms of higher wages and economic and social mobility, a body of evidence suggests that proficiency in the language of the receiver country affords greater economic opportunities (e.g. Chiswick & Miller, 2002; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Grin, 2016). However, due to the quantitative nature of most studies exploring the relationship between English and migration, which focus predominantly on the financial or work-related benefits of speaking English, a range of considerations impacting development at the individual level are neglected, including the hardships faced by migrants in different contexts, and individual responses to such adversity (Erling et al., 2019). One exception is Erling et al.'s (2019) qualitative analysis of the relationship between English and the migratory experiences of rural Bangladeshis. The authors show that participants viewed English as an important form of linguistic capital, but they also illustrate barriers which impact the potential of English to expand an individual's capabilities such as 'the costs of migration, the recruitment process, the type of visa obtained, the type of employer and the length of time spent abroad' (Erling et al., 2019, p. 272). These barriers leave individuals from poor backgrounds at a disadvantage not least because, as Guerrero (2010, p. 298) remarks, they 'lack the social capital (of the right sort) and the economic capital' to secure the necessary visa. Notably, Erling et al.'s (2019) study also shows how migration can have a range of negative consequences such as exploitation, insecurity, family separation, ill-health, and discrimination. As such, while migration to English-speaking countries may in some cases expand 'the choices people have to lead lives that they value' (UNDP, 2001, p. 9), this depends on other factors such as the availability of financial resources, work-related skills, employment conditions, living situation, and luck (Erling et al., 2019; Guerrero, 2010). Thus, in the same way that English on its own does not expand economic opportunities for speakers of the language, so too is the contribution that English can make to development in the domain of migration contingent upon a variety of internal and external factors.

Study abroad

Another way in which English may play a role in facilitating an outward flow of Colombians is highlighted by the fact that most student migration worldwide is to highly-ranked English-medium institutions in the global North (Altbach et al., 2009; Özden & Kone, 2017). Moreover, the predominantly English-speaking US is by far the most popular foreign study destination for Colombians (British Council, 2015), and in 2012 over 50% of Colombian PhD students in the US planned to stay there after completing their studies (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). Perhaps surprisingly, given its attempts to promote reverse migration, the GoC is also partly responsible for encouraging foreign study opportunities. The value of such opportunities was highlighted by former Colombian President Santos (2016) during his visit to the UK in 2016: 'the UK will continue to be a top destination for Colombian students in pursuit of world-class postgraduate and technical education, to develop the skills that the new world economy requires' (para 41). To this end, Santos, who himself studied in the UK and speaks fluent English, agreed to expedite the validation process for higher education qualifications in both Colombia and the UK (Santos, 2016). By signing such an agreement, the former president may have hastened the flight of skilled labour from Colombia to English-speaking countries in the global North labour (Mackenzie, 2020). Thus, by promoting study abroad, which in turn leads to an outward flow of human capital, the GoC and English language skills may be contributing to the brain drain (Mackenzie, 2020).

In addition to human capital, English is complicit in the unequal transfer of financial capital from Colombia to the global North in the form of tuition payments, visa fees and living costs (Mackenzie, 2020). Indeed, given that, in 2010, foreign students represented nearly £23 billion for the UK economy (Phillipson, 2010), it is hardly surprising that student migration has been actively promoted by core governments through organisations such as the British Council (2019), which is 'influential in attracting international students, international tourists and foreign direct investment' (p. 17) to the UK. The role of such inter-state actors in facilitating a South–North flow of human and financial resources shows how the proliferation of English in the global South is far from incidental, apolitical and agentless (Pennycook, 2017) and serves to benefit interests in core countries.

Unlocking development opportunities and knowledge

Thus far we have looked at two key domains where English may foster development at both the individual and national level – English for financial gain and English for mobility – and we have also analysed how English is interwoven with injustices in these domains. A third area where English may be beneficial for development is by facilitating access to knowledge and development opportunities, and most research into the role of languages in development falls into this category.

Access to schooling

A body of research has focused on the use of language in childhood education in Asia and Africa where several local languages are spoken alongside an official, imported language (e.g. Bruthiaux, 2002; Chimbutane, 2017; UNESCO, 2012; Williams, 2011). Access to schooling, the argument goes, can be expanded in multilingual societies if instruction is in a mutually intelligible language such as English. However, a wealth of research suggests that, rather than using European languages such as English or French, which are negatively associated with colonialism, early childhood instruction should be conducted in learners' L1, or at least in a familiar language (Laitin & Ramachandran, 2015; UNESCO, 2012; Williams, 2011). Moreover, in Colombia, unlike many

developing contexts, English is not required in childhood education to ensure that schooling is conducted in a mutually intelligible tongue since less than a million of the country's inhabitants speak a minority language (Ministerio de Cultura, 2018). Thus, at least as far as compulsory education in Colombia is concerned, English medium instruction is unlikely to play a role in development, and, as a wealth of evidence suggests, may actually be detrimental to the learning process.

Academia

While it may not be necessary as a medium of instruction in compulsory schooling, at least not in Colombia, knowledge of English in higher education is beneficial, not only because English language education is mandatory in most Colombian higher institutes of learning (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016; Martínez, 2017), but also because the vast majority of academic research is published in this language (Lillis & Curry, 2013). In terms of the latter, this is creating a vicious circle whereby 'everything needs to be translated into English because that is the language people speak, and people learn English because everything is produced in English' (Guerrero, 2010, p. 305). As such, the hegemonic status of English in higher education may be restricting the scope of scientific endeavour in other languages, including Spanish (Guerrero, 2010). This, in turn, may be leading to the adoption of English in educational contexts where its relevance has not been established (Altbach et al., 2009). In the long term, this can result in language death, or 'linguicide' (Phillipson, 1992, p. 18), and linguistic homogeneity as speakers of minority languages have no choice but to acquire competence in the linguistically dominant tongue (Coleman, 2017; Mohanty, 2017; Phillipson, 2010). Thus, while English can clearly benefit societies and individuals as a result of its status in higher education, it may also, in certain contexts, stifle development.

The internet

Outside of higher education, the spread of English as a result of neoliberal globalisation provides many opportunities for English speakers to marshall their linguistic resources to gain access to knowledge. Undoubtedly the most important way of accessing such knowledge in contemporary society is the internet, and the fact that, according to one estimate, over 80% of virtual content is in English (Steger, 2017) underlines the value of English linguistic capital in this regard. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that 21% of Colombian English learners surveyed by the British Council (2015) were learning the language so that they could access knowledge, including through the internet. However, for those lacking in the language skills needed to participate in the international knowledge economy, English can act as a barrier to access, thus exacerbating the 'digital divide' (Pattanayak, 2017, p. 13). This highlights once again the potential of English both to promote and constrain development.

Aid

The disbursement of aid has been central to the efforts of the core to develop the periphery, and a substantial amount of aid from Anglophone donor countries has been allocated to ELT projects (Coleman, 2017; Wedell, 2011). For example, a report by the Inter-American Dialogue, a US-based think tank, identified English instruction as an area where USAID could contribute to improvements in education in Latin America (Fiszbein & Stanton, 2018). However, while a low level of English language skills within a given society might justify such aid projects, it is unclear how English language skills in themselves can be used to attract financial assistance from the international community. Moreover, the role of USAID is not neutral as it tends to prioritise programmes and regions related to the United States' national security priorities (Fiszbein & Stanton, 2018). In Colombia specifically, Williams and Disney's (2015) analysis of US aid to the country reveals that the vast majority of this money was earmarked for military purposes in order to protect US economic interests; to continue to wage the war on drugs; and to intensify the GoC's efforts to violently repress opposition to its neoliberal policies. The consequences of this aid have included deforestation, increased paramilitary and military violence, and a weakening of democracy in the region (Williams & Disney, 2015).

The above example highlights how the efforts of core governments and organisations can be seen as ~~merely~~ a front for their countries' involvement in the political and economic affairs in the periphery (Appleby, 2010; Phillipson, 1988). From this perspective, it is not surprising that the language ideology of English and development is espoused by influential transnational actors. For example, in 2016, the British Council pledged to invest over £16 million in Colombia in order to contribute 'to shared prosperity and development through projects which support improvements in young people's education and skills for employability, [and] strengthen English language teaching and learning and promote the development of arts and culture' (Department for International Development [DFID], 2019, para. 5). The reference to 'shared prosperity' highlights how this allocation of funding is not only intended to benefit Colombia. Indeed, the distribution of foreign aid in Colombia provides the British Council with a platform to advance its own interests, which includes sales of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test and other exams; the promotion of the UK education sector; and the enhancement of the UK's international profile (British Council, 2019). This highlights how 'TESOL … itself is a significant export item – teaching materials, examinations, know-how, teachers et al. – for the British and Americans, and a vital dimension of English linguistic neoimperialism' (Phillipson, 2010, p. 111). Thus, pronouncements from global players in the ELT industry on the positive relationship between English and development may be better interpreted as strategies for expanding their customer base (Pennycook, 2017).

Conclusion

Two main conclusions emerge from this discussion of English and development. First, English may contribute to development in a range of domains although this is contingent upon a range of enabling and disabling factors (see Table 1). For instance, English might increase earnings for people working in tourism, but not for those working in manufacturing. For the former group, economic sector would thus operate as an enabling factor while for those employed in manufacturing it would act as a disabling factor. Similarly, English skills may promote international mobility for individuals with the required financial resources, but not for those who are unable to afford the costs of such foreign study. In this scenario, socioeconomic status would function as an enabling factor for well off individuals, while for the poor, it would be a disabling factor. It should be noted, however, that the list of factors presented in Table 1 is not exhaustive, and, due to space limitations, we also have not explored all potential areas where English might promote development in Colombia. It should also be noted that, as we have seen, even if English fails to expand the horizons of individuals living in the global South, the core English-speaking countries stand to gain from the spread of English in such contexts, including in Colombia. In other words, while English may promote social mobility for some, it also reinforces the dominance of powerful interests in the global North and precipitates social injustices such as those described above. This highlights how the role of English in many contexts embodies a contradiction or paradox (Phillipson, 2001), and illustrates the need for conceptual tools which can be used to interrogate the relationship between development and the diffusion~~spread~~ of English in periphery contexts. In this paper, I have shown the potential of Phillipson's framework in this endeavour.

Table 1. English and development: domains and influencing factors.

Domains	Influencing factors
The economy • *Earnings and employment* • *Trade and economic growth*	• Internet access • Geography (urban/rural) • Type of employment (informal/formal) • Employment sector (e.g. BPO, education, tourism) • Financial resources/socioeconomic status (class/caste) • Luck • Living situation • The status of English in the community/society • Level of English • Work experience and skills • Level and type of education (private/public/secondary/tertiary) • Gender • Race • Country of origin • Age
International mobility • *Migration* • *Study abroad*	
Unlocking development opportunities and knowledge • *Access to schooling* • *Academia* • *The Internet* • *Aid*	

The second conclusion which emerges from this critical review of the literature on English and development is that most research in this field has focused on the economic value of English at the macro level, paying only very limited attention to its non-instrumental benefits (Ferguson, 2013). Such research tells us little about the ways in which English does and does not contribute to development at the individual level, or the range of contextual factors influencing this relationship (Erling, 2017; Ferguson, 2013; Kubota, 2011). This underscores the importance of conducting situated, qualitative studies in a variety of contexts to deepen our understanding of the interface between English and development at the micro-level. In this regard, the capability approach as developed by Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2011) offers a useful framework since it is consistent with a view of development as the expansion of individual freedoms; can shed light on the real opportunities – or capabilities – that English can make available to individuals; and can also enhance our understanding of factors that are instrumental in this process (Calitz, 2019; Erling, 2017). In this regard, the domains outlined in Table 1 point to capabilities – or substantive freedoms – that English can promote while the influencing factors suggest conversion factors that shape capability formation (Sen, 1997).

Notes

1. National Ministry of Education.

2. As the MEN is a ministry of the GoC, the terms MEN and GoC are used interchangeably in this paper.
3. National Planning Department.
4. National English Programme.
5. English Opens Doors.
6. English, Doors to the World.
7. As of May 2021, the Colombian minimum wage was 908,526 Colombian pesos, or just under US$250 a month (Salario Minimo Colombia, 2021).
8. National Administrative Department of Statistics.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s **[Q5]**).

Notes on contributor

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