

CRITICAL INTERCULTURALITY AND ELT MATERIALS: THE CASE OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS FROM A PUBLIC SCHOOL

INTERCULTURALIDAD CRÍTICA Y MATERIALES DE LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS: EL CASO DE DOCENTES Y ESTUDIANTES DE UNA INSTITUCIÓN EDUCATIVA PÚBLICA

INTERCULTURALIDADE CRÍTICA E MATERIAIS DE ENSINO DE INGLÊS (ELT): O CASO DE PROFESSORES E ESTUDANTES DE UMA ESCOLA PÚBLICA

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Abstract

This article reports a case study focused on critical interculturality and ELT materials at a public school in Florencia, Caquetá, Colombia. The study aimed at analyzing the extent to which ELT teachers embed critical interculturality in the design, adaptation, and use of materials at Institución Educativa Jorge Eliécer Gaitán according to teachers' and students' perceptions by following a qualitative approach. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews to five ELT teachers, and a Likert-scale survey to sixty-three tenth and eleventh

Cómo citar:

Fecha Recibido: 12/01/2026 Fecha Aceptado: 01/02/2026 Fecha Publicado: 31/03/2026

Agudelo Bedoya A., Mosquera Núñez, D. A. & Aguilar Cruz, P. J. (2026). Critical Interculturality and ELT Materials: The case of teachers and students from a public school. *Maestros & Pedagogía* Vol. 8(1). ppt. 9-37



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graders, and analyzed with ground theory approach. Results evidenced that the ELT materials incorporated critical interculturality to a limited extent due to restrictions related to the existing education system. However, critical interculturality might potentially be integrated in materials with proper academic support.

Keywords:

Interculturality, critical interculturality, ELT materials, colonialism, and decoloniality.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un estudio de caso centrado en la interculturalidad crítica y los materiales de enseñanza del inglés (ELT) en una institución educativa pública de Florencia, Caquetá, Colombia. El estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar en qué medida los docentes de inglés integran la interculturalidad crítica en el diseño, la adaptación y el uso de los materiales en la Institución Educativa Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a partir de las percepciones de docentes y estudiantes, siguiendo un enfoque cualitativo. Los datos se recopilaban mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas a cinco docentes de inglés y una encuesta tipo escala Likert aplicada a sesenta y tres estudiantes de décimo y undécimo grado, y se analizaron utilizando el enfoque de la teoría fundamentada. Los resultados evidenciaron que los materiales de enseñanza del inglés incorporan la interculturalidad crítica en una medida limitada, debido a restricciones relacionadas con el sistema educativo existente. No obstante, la interculturalidad crítica podría integrarse potencialmente en los materiales con un adecuado acompañamiento académico.

Palabras clave:

Interculturalidad, interculturalidad crítica, materiales ELT, colonialismo y decolonialidad.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta um estudo de caso centrado na interculturalidade crítica e nos materiais de ensino de inglês (ELT) em uma escola pública de Florencia, Caquetá, Colômbia. O estudo teve como objetivo analisar em que medida os professores de inglês incorporam a interculturalidade crítica no design, na adaptação e no uso dos materiais na Instituição Educativa Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, de acordo com as percepções de professores e estudantes, seguindo uma abordagem qualitativa. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com cinco professores de inglês e de um questionário

em escala Likert aplicado a sessenta e três estudantes do décimo e décimo primeiro anos, e analisados com base na abordagem da teoria fundamentada. Os resultados evidenciaram que os materiais de ensino de inglês incorporam a interculturalidade crítica de forma limitada, devido a restrições relacionadas ao sistema educacional vigente. No entanto, a interculturalidade crítica pode ser potencialmente integrada aos materiais com o devido apoio acadêmico.

Palavras-chave

Interculturalidade, interculturalidade crítica, materiais de ELT, colonialismo e decolonialidade.

Introduction

In Latin American, particularly in Colombian contexts, ELT has been historically settled from views that privilege external and hegemonic perspectives of culture. Despite English language is conceived as a global communication means, materials guiding teaching and learning procedures have reproduced narratives that underline predominantly values, customs, and epistemic frameworks from Anglophone countries, leaving aside local realities, identities, and voices (Nuñez-Pardo, 2018; Henao Mejía, 2019). Some scholars such as Núñez-Pardo (2020a, 2022), and Oviedo-Gómez (2024) argue how textbooks and other official resources limit the possibility learners to construct a critic relation with their socio-cultural environments, generating instead a symbolic dependence towards dominant cultures. In this framework, the notion of critical interculturality emerges into how a decolonial approach that seeks to dismantle cultural hierarchies existing in education, promoting spaces for dialogue, reflection, and reciprocal recognition. Conceived in this way, ELT is transformed into not merely a linguistic practice, but rather into a space to question how power, politics, and cultural representations directly influence learners' educational formation.

The aforementioned ideas converge and become similar in terms of ELT materials. Núñez-Pardo (2020b) purport that critical interculturality is far away to be embraced as a result of decontextualized ELT materials which barely include learners' culture. By this means, the English language remains confined to linguistics paradigms, neglecting ELT students to develop critical thinking towards culture. In line with this concern, researchers such as Soto-Molina and Méndez (2020), Gutiérrez (2022), and Oviedo-Gómez (2025) argue the requirement to implement materials that emancipate Euro and North American centered insights to enable, and empower ELT students' concepts of local cultures. In this regard, the resources teachers traditionally utilize in ELT processes often maintain colonial thinking that understates and diminishes local societies.

In reference to Colombia, official materials by the Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN) as *Way to Go! And English, Please!* bestow relevance to this discussion since they are part of the educational resources ELT teachers have access to. These textbooks have been questioned for their limited inclusion of local contexts and for perpetuating superficial and stereotypical representations of culture. This situation is further shaped by the repetitive practice teachers design, use, and adapt without clear guiding principles regarding critical interculturality, resulting in a heterogeneity that may perpetuate both colonial perspectives and acts of cultural resistance. As a consequence, learners might perceive English as a code linked to foreign realities disconnected from their daily life, which dismisses the target language potential to value and project their own culture. In this regard, exploring how teachers select, adapt, and design materials permits not only to comprehend the criteria guiding such decisions, but also to evidence the extent they integrate perspectives that strengthen learners' cultural identity and foster critical lens of the world.

Methodological Framework

This section presents the conceptual framework. In this part, we define all the constructs this proposal entails. It includes interculturality, critical interculturality, critical interculturality in ELT, materials, ELT materials, textbooks, and ELT. Together, this part provides the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the main theoretical concepts of this study.

Interculturality

The concept of interculturality involves the interaction and dialogue of different cultures to encourage the exchange of knowledge (Castañeda, 2012; Goldstein, 2015; Meraji & Zamanian, 2014). In reference to education, Ajideh and Panahi (2016), and Zhang (2017) argue that interculturality enables the sharing not only of knowledge but also of viewpoints, and teaching and learning practices, aiming to cultivate individuals' sensitivity toward diversity. However, Bandura and Sercu (2005), and Gómez Rodríguez (2015) note interculturality is frequently limited to the exchange of traditions and festivities, without deeper analysis. In contrast, interculturality requires reflection, understanding, and critical questioning of cultures and the relationships among societies (Álvarez Valencia, 2022; Lee, 2009). In this sense, interculturality by itself is not enough and it demands to be addressed from a critical approach to have a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics which shape the power relations among the so-called developed countries in contrast to underdeveloped ones.

Building on this thought, interculturality in ELT implies shallow cultural bouterings. This often leads to integrating themes such as daily practices, artistic expression, food, among others which facilitates cultural exchange

through conversation instead of reflection (Álvarez Valencia & Bonilla, 2009). In this sense, cultural awareness in classrooms looks forward to establishing relations among individuals and groups in order to share experiences, ideas, and values to respect differences. Yet, Guilherme and Dietz (2015), and Kramsch (2013) purport that interculturality lets behind social transformation, structural inequalities, the way knowledge is produced, local narratives, and the examination of global issues that affect ELT learners. In this regard, education has the responsibility to move beyond celebratory perspective about culture and integrate a more reflective view that enables not only to consider positive cultural experiences, but also to analyze power imbalances, historical and contemporary injustices and challenges that really affect their lives.

Critical Interculturality

As noted by Salih and Omar (2022), interculturality points to the cultural exchange essential due to globalization requirements. However, some authors such as Hidalgo (2005), Zárate Pérez (2014), Soto-Molinay Méndez (2020), Ibrahim (2022), Walsh (2010a) and 11 Arrollo Ortega (2016) claim that education should adopt a critical interculturality perspective to question colonial power relationships that still shape relations among cultures. Likewise, these authors conceive interculturality as a dynamic concept which is in constant transformation, promoting an equal cultural exchange in educational contexts. In line with this view, Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel (2007), Granados-Beltrán (2016), Bernardes et al. (2019), Álvarez Valencia (2021), and Ramos-Holguín, (2021) contend that critical interculturality responds to the need to confront the hegemonic practices teachers encounter in the school system, including the materials and resources used for pedagogical work. In essence, critical interculturality serves as a decolonial framework intended to dismantle hierarchical relations in education and promote more balanced cultural interactions.

Critical interculturality has therefore gained relevance across Latin America and other postcolonial contexts as a lens for questioning the enduring coloniality. This goes in accordance with Núñez-Pardo' (2020a) view due to persistent coloniality of power, knowledge, and being. Although formal colonialism ended long ago, European worldviews still exert a strong influence on sociocultural life, particularly in education (Correa & Usma Wilches, 2013; Gutiérrez, 2022; Layne & Lipponen, 2014). Acknowledging this reality, Holmes and Corbett (2022), Oviedo-Gómez and Jaramillo-Cárdenas (2023), and Oviedo-Gómez (2024, 2025) emphasize the importance of embedding critical interculturality in teaching as a dialogic practice that embeds local cultures. Similarly, Tlostanova and Mignolo, (2009), Song (2013), Quijano, (2014), Henao Mejía et al. (2019), Oviedo-Gómez and Álvarez Guayara (2019), and Mikander (2023) purport that education should go beyond pragmatics approaches to engage deeper with learners' socio-cultural realities. In accordance, by integrating critical interculturality, both teachers and learners might challenge and destabilize the entrenched colonial system.

Following the aforementioned ideas, critical interculturality fosters relations based on dialogue and equality. In fact, it highlights cultural expressions have to come not only from foreign environments, but also from local experiences, traditions, and historical events that determine learners' daily life. That is why providing relevance to local values makes learners become active individuals in knowledge construction instead of being receptors of the established external discourses (Oviedo-Gómez, 2024). From this view, education focuses on reflection and critical questioning, motivating learners to analyze how social, political, and historical factors influence in their own communities and identities. Considering this, teachers engage learners to confront hegemonic narratives, to take into account power relationships consequences, and to explore alternative forms of sharing based on reciprocal respect (Luke, 2012; Núñez-Pardo, 2018; Oviedo-Gómez, 2025). In this way, through the integration of global and local perspectives, critical interculturality empowers individuals to construct intercultural connections without dismissing their own context, promoting a society more open to dialogue.

Critical Interculturality in ELT

Taking into consideration the need to overcome the colonial legacies existing in education, critical interculturality proposes ELT analyzes its aims as well as its practices and beliefs it is rooted in as Amerian y Tajabadi (2020), Lozano (2021) and Morales-Llano (2022) state. This view underscores the persistent colonial ideologies in English classrooms that 13 pretend neutrality, where English is often represented as an inevitable access to modernity or economic development. Other authors like González-Moncada (2007), Castañeda-Peña (2018), and Granados-Beltran (2018a, 2018b) problematize the conventional perception of English acquisition, which is conceived as essential merely because of its universal character and its association with dominant cultures. In this sense, these authors also warn that such notions reproduce hegemonic thoughts and maintain unequal global relations by privileging English speaking countries over other cultures. Therefore, promoting English only as a means of communication or job opportunities advancement implies reinforcing colonial hierarchies that critical interculturality seeks to challenge. In this regard, recognizing such dynamics allows to comprehend how power, ideologies, and the English language connect in the classroom, determining learners' conceptions in relation to their own culture and other individuals'.

Following such notions, the materials ELT teachers use for their pedagogical practices strongly affect the way English is considered in students. For this reason Su (2016), Núñez-Pardo (2020b), Soto-Molina and Méndez (2020), and Ortiz-Rivero (2022) advocate for the development of materials and classroom dialogues that reframe English as a medium for critical engagement with the inequalities and hierarchies of contemporary society. Nonetheless, these authors also mention ELT teachers are often consumers of materials instead of creating or adapting them to their surroundings. Such practices might emerge

from implications regarding time, resources, lack of support, and others that incentivize ELT teachers to continue employing the ones that are already created and contain hegemonic paths. Adding this argument, Chan and Cheuk (2020) and Núñez-Pardo (2022) insist that ELT educators should incorporate locally grounded and culturally relevant community knowledge that allow students to consider their knowledge is also worthy and important. These scholars also argue that the established materials do not represent the students' contexts due to stereotypes from English speakers' countries. In substance, critical interculturality in ELT endeavors to confront socio-cultural domination beyond linguistic boundaries, extending its challenge to the ideological, political, and pedagogical forces that shape classroom practices and the production of knowledge itself.

Materials

When considering materials, it is indispensable to conceive them as a fundamental resource of the educational process. These resources, ranging from text-based (books, textbooks), to audio visual sources, and any others that teachers utilize (Tomlinson, 1998, 2010), serve classes by providing instructional content and shaping overall learning experience. However, far from only transmitting linguistic structures, materials also entail cultural perspectives according to the context they were created as Núñez-Pardo et al. (2004) has analyzed. Consequently, every material employed in education embraces cultural narratives alongside academic awareness. Nonetheless, Ramírez (2004) explores the relation between what materials offer and the real needs students have, which is in some situations, contradictory since they might be decontextualized and excluding students' surroundings. That is why selecting and adapting materials becomes pivotal since it impacts students' experiences and insights in relation to society and cultural awareness at the time they achieve their academic goals.

ELT Materials

ELT materials can be considered as the resources English language teachers employ to support their pedagogical practices. Therefore, these materials, whether textbooks, audiovisual resources, teachers' self-created materials, or others cover both, content related to the linguistic component of the target language, and the cultural awareness in which it is contextualized (Núñez-Pardo & Téllez, 2015). In this regard, Pedgley et al. (2016), Núñez-Pardo et al. (2004) suggest that educational materials should ideally represent students' local knowledge, realities, and experiences to consider students' real difficulties and guide them toward meaningful solutions or questioning. These authors along with Duarte and Escobar (2008), and Núñez-Pardo and Téllez (2009), and Tomlinson (2010, 2011) emphasize the need of adapting, and more importantly, designing materials in language education to address the limited representation of local cultural environments which is barely included. Having that in mind, when ELT materials integrate these dimensions, English acquisition becomes an opportunity to use the English language as a tool of identity representation, and

intercultural dialogue. In this sense, ELT materials should value and consider students' contexts to achieve a more transformative language education.

Textbooks

Textbooks are instructional materials that serve as guides for teachers and students to achieve target language acquisition (Chan & Cheuk, 2020; Hsiang et al., 2022). This type of material is designed to support teaching practices through lesson preparation aimed at developing learners' linguistic skills. However, considering that textbooks strongly influence students' perceptions of society and their own contexts, concerns have been raised about their limited cultural scope (Vitta, 2023). In parallel, scholars have noted that many textbooks are likely to depict superficial aspects of culture, reinforcing stereotypes related to racism (Mikander, 2023) and gender roles (Lee, 2014, 2018;), and offer restricted or surfaced cultural representations (Rico Troncoso, 2011; Gómez Rodríguez, 2015). Accordingly, textbooks have been critically examined as linguistic, cultural, and ideological instruments that shape learners' understanding of the world and their capacity for intercultural reflection. Aligning these ideas with Nuñez-Pardo' (2022), textbooks perpetuate imperialist dynamics in politics, culture, economy, aesthetic, and more disquieting, in education. Such circumstances lead students to develop inequitable thoughts of their realities. In light of this, despite textbooks often portray linguistic content aimed to enrich the English language acquisition, it appears to require further examination, and possible adjusting.

English Language Teaching (ELT)

English Language Teaching (ELT) refers to the language acquisition of individuals whose first language is not English, whether as a Second Language (ESL) or as a Foreign Language (EFL) (El Yazidi, 2023). Over time, ELT has developed into a wide ranging field that sets on linguistics, and education to refine how English is learned and taught. Traditionally, it has encompassed a variety of methodologies based on cognitive and behaviorist theories that aim to strengthen language acquisition and effective communication (Wulantari et al., 2023). Within this framework, some authors as Ginting (2021), Derakhshan et al. (2020), Hazaea et al. (2021), Hiver et al. (2024), and Guerrettaz et al. (2021) declare that every strategy, tool, and classroom practice has the purpose of contributing to students' linguistic competence, develop their communicative abilities, and enhance their capacity to interact in diverse social contexts where the target language is required. In accordance, ELT includes not only the formal teaching of grammar and vocabulary but also the design of tasks that promote listening, speaking, reading, and writing as integrated skills. In many settings, it also involves the creation of supportive learning environments as it is the case of authentic materials such as literature and media, and, when it is possible, the incorporation of technological resources to simulate real world communication. As a whole, ELT's principal goal has long been to facilitate English language

acquisition so that students become users of the English language in academic, professional, and other situations.

However, this field has gradually moved beyond a purely linguistic orientation instead of more critical and socially engaged approaches. Given this, early influences emerged from critical pedagogy, which, as Joseph Jeyaraj and Harland (2016), Heggernes, (2021) explain, invites educators to design classroom practices that spark socio-political awareness and encourage students to analyze their surroundings. Following this notion, Wallace (1999), Abednia and Izadinia (2012), Quijano (2014), and Micalay-Hurtado and Poole (2022) advocate that ELT can address and even transform social inequities through the development of critical language awareness. Accordingly, Walsh (2009) and Potes-Morales (2025) have studied the critical interculturality, as a way to critique the dominance of English speaking nations and the power structures they reinforce. When it comes to critical interculturality in ELT, Oviedo-Gómez (2025), Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009), Walsh (2010b), Walsh (2013b), Siqueira (2021), and Granados-Beltrán (2022), argue that students can use the target language to challenge these hierarchical relationships.

Methodology

Approach and type of study

This study follows a qualitative approach because as researchers, it allowed us to explore the participants' experiences in depth and interpret the meanings that emerge from their context. (Elliott, 2005; Heigham & Croker, 2009; Richards, 2003). In accordance, we decided to carry out a case study framed within an interpretative perspective. In agreement with Creswell (2007), Yin (1984, 2009), and Hesse-Biber (2010), a case study permits a detailed and contextualized understanding of educational practices and perceptions that the participants provide to research.

Considering that, we could analyze the extent to which ELT teachers embed critical interculturality in the design, adaptation, and use of materials at Institución Educativa Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. To achieve this main aim, we set three specific ones. The first one was to explore ELT teachers' perceptions regarding the integration of critical interculturality in the design and adaptation of materials according to teachers' and students' perceptions. Then, the second one was to identify tenth and eleventh graders' perceptions of the ELT materials they use in classes, including MEN's official textbooks (Way to Go and English Please!) and teachers' self-created and adapted resources in relation to critical interculturality. Finally, the last one was to evaluate how the materials ELT teachers use incorporate critical interculturality beyond linguistic and functional learning.

All of this led us to formulate the research question that guided the advancement of this research. To what extent do ELT materials (both official and teacher's self-created or adapted) incorporate elements that promote critical interculturality beyond linguistic and functional objectives according to teachers' and students' perceptions?

Participants

The participants of this study entail five ELT teachers (see Table 1) and sixty-three tenth and eleventh graders (see Table 2) at Institución Educativa Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. This urban and public school located in Florencia, Caquetá, Colombia, has approximately 1.900 students enrolled, which are distributed into three campuses. One is for primary school, another is for primary and lower secondary (sixth and seventh grades), and the third one is for upper secondary (from seventh to eleventh grades). Additionally, the school offers three emphases for tenth and eleventh-grades students. These are accounting, agro-industry, and English language learning.

Concerning the participants, the selection of the ELT teachers comes from the need to understand the pedagogical practices they carry out in their classes in relation to critical interculturality and its integration into the materials they use. In this sense, the ELT teachers are the ones who make decisions about the materials selection which aligns with the main aim of this study. Finally, the participants have considerable experience at teaching English language in this school, having taught students from sixth to eleventh grades over the years.

Table 1.
Interview participants' demographic information

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	
Gender	Female	4	80%
	Male	1	20%
Age	From 18 to 60		
	Bachelor's	5	100%
Higher qualification	Specialisation	1	20%
	Master's	5	100%
	PhD	0	0%
	Below 5 years	0	0%
Teaching experience	1-5 years	0	0%
	6-10 years	1	20%
	Above 10 years	4	80%

Note. *Authors' own elaboration.*

On the other hand, the tenth and eleventh graders were chosen as they have been taught by most of the English teachers of this public school during their

school trajectory in comparison with other levels, which provides them with a broad perspective on the different teaching materials they have experienced. In addition, these students have had greater exposure to the cultural content integrated into the materials their teachers have used in English classes. As a final consideration, the participants decided to take part of this study voluntarily.

Table 2.
Survey participants' demographic information

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	
Gender	Female	37	58%
	Male	27	42%
Age	14, 15, 16, 17, 18.		
Grade	10 th	39	61%
	11 th	25	39%

Note. *Authors' own elaboration.*

Data Collection

The data gathering process was implemented with a Semi-structure interview to five ELT teachers and a Likert scale survey to sixty-three tenth and eleventh graders. These instruments permitted us to explore ELT teachers' perceptions regarding the integration of critical interculturality in the design and adaptation of materials, and to identify tenth and eleventh graders' perceptions of the ELT materials they use in classes, including MEN's official textbooks (Way to Go and English Please!) and teachers' self-created and adapted resources in relation to critical interculturality.

Interview

The semi-structured interview with ELT teachers aimed to explore ELT teachers' perceptions regarding the integration of critical interculturality in the design and adaptation of materials. Hence, for the development of the semi-structure interview this objective was divided into specific categories that indicate the main dimensions of the inquiry. Subsequently, we developed topics for each category, which helped refine the expected questions. In accordance with this process, we formulated one question per objective, category, and topic resulting in a total of nine questions.

We continued this process by implementing the semi-structured interviews in a period of one month considering the ELT teachers' availability. Before each interview, we explained to the ELT teachers the purpose, and the implications of this study so they could read, agree, and sign the informed consent. As the researchers are native speakers of Spanish, the instruments were elaborated and implemented directly in Spanish. To gather the information, we used a recorder which was then transcribed on Tactiq website followed by participant validation of the transcripts through member checking. Then, the interviews

were translated into English. Each interview lasted from twenty to thirty-five minutes, in which the researchers asked not only the pre-established questions but also spontaneous ones coming from the ELT teachers' insights.

Survey

As part of the data collection process, we applied a Likert-scale survey to the sixty-three tenth and eleventh graders. The Likert-scale survey was developed by a structured process. Similar to the semi-structured interview, we focused on the second specific aim of this study. To identify tenth and eleventh graders' perceptions of the ELT materials they use in classes, including MEN's official textbooks (Way to Go and English Please!) and teachers' self-created and adapted resources in relation to critical interculturality. In this regard, we divided the objective into five categories, from which three statements emerged for each category, resulting in a total of fifteen statements. Therefore, considering Barua (2013), Joshi (2015) and Jebb et al.'s (2021) insights regarding Likert scale surveys, we incorporated five response options 1: Strongly disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, and 5: Strongly agree, allowing students to indicate the degree to which they identified with each statement.

The Likert-scale survey entailed two sections. The first one covered the demographic information of the tenth and eleventh graders like gender, age, and grade. The second section included the fifteen statements intended to collect the participants' perceptions. Since the Likert-scale survey was created using Google Forms, the researchers provided it along with the informed consent to the tenth and eleventh graders by the WhatsApp groups they are enrolled in for academic information sending. To complete the survey and deliver the informed consent, the participants had at least two weeks. Due to the school duties, time was not enough for researchers to supervise the tenth and eleventh graders' develop the survey. However, researchers reminded the participants by WhatsApp during the two weeks to complete it.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis we employed the grounded theory approach, as it enabled us the generation of new and broader conceptions derived from the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Corbin, 2014; Creswell et al., 2007; Seliger & Shohamy, 1989; Stottok et al, 2011). We used ATLAS.ti 25 to identify codes following open, axial and selective coding procedures. In addition, students' responses in the surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Likewise, we validated the collected data through methodological data triangulation as Lincoln and Denzin (1994) and Freeman (1998) state, it allows the analysis and consideration of different perspectives from multiple data collection instruments. Finally, related them to the existing literature.

Findings and discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion gathered from the semi-structure interviews and the Likert scale survey. We structured the outcomes into three categories that emerged from the data analysis. This process arranged a triangulation procedure that included both instruments and directly connected to a discussion that involves critical interculturality literature and responds to the third and last aim of this study. More specifically, it intended to evaluate how the materials ELT teachers use incorporate critical interculturality beyond linguistic and functional learning.

Participants' conceptual tension between interculturality and critical interculturality in ELT

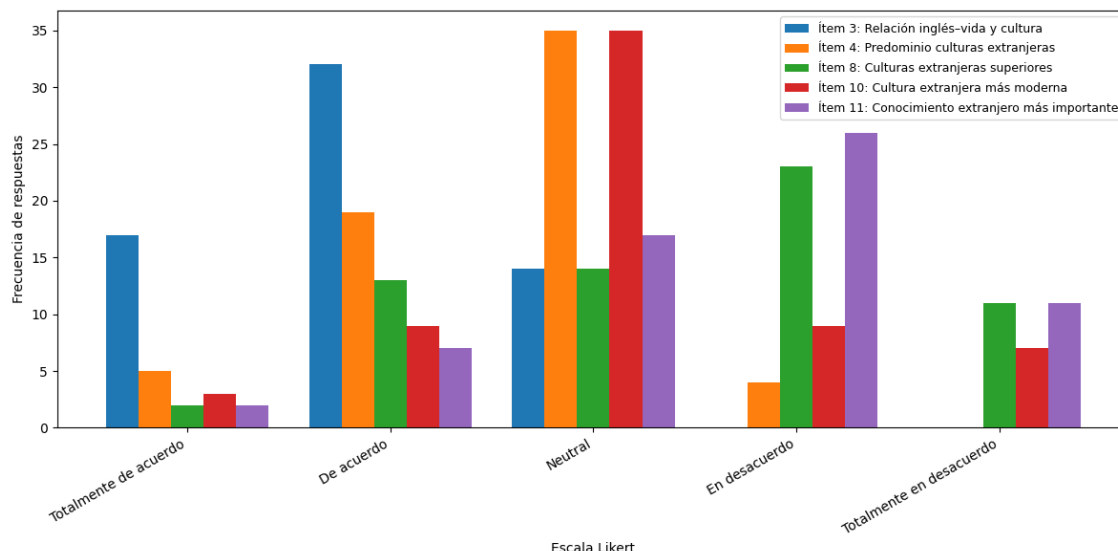
Interviews findings reveal that the ELT teachers tend to confuse interculturality with critical interculturality. These participants stated they conceived critical interculturality as matter of respect for habits, traditions, and semantics related to cultural interchange. They also affirmed that critical interculturality consisted in exploring what other cultures have to offer and to understand diverse viewpoints. Additionally, the participants mentioned that critical interculturality involves how individuals can integrate other cultures into the Colombian one to be more inclusive. Hence, the semi-structure interviews data indicates the ELT teachers commonly perceive critical interculturality as an approach to promote tolerance and inclusion, while terms such as power relations, inequality, or colonialism remain restricted.

"...yo recuerdo que interculturalidad crítica es cómo se pueden relacionar de alguna manera diferentes puntos de vista. A partir de las diferentes culturas, hábitos, tradiciones que existen en nuestro exterior y en nuestro interior. Cómo ellas se pueden relacionar. Y crítica tiene que ver con mi opinión, pero también cómo yo llego a respetar." Participant 1.

"También es importante entender el contexto de las palabras. Por ejemplo, una palabra puede tener un significado diferente según la región. En Colombia, una palabra puede significar algo distinto para los costeños, para los paisas o para nosotros los caqueteños." Participant 3.

"Yo pienso que interculturalidad crítica es precisamente todo lo relacionado con las otras culturas y el respeto que se debe tener hacia ellas y cómo de una u otra manera logramos integrarlas en la nuestra, ¿sí? no sé, que sea un poco como más inclusiva, por decirlo así, ¿sí? También partiendo siempre del respeto y demás por las demás culturas." Participant 4.

Figure 1.
Students' perceptions of cultural reflection and power relations in English classes.



Note. Authors' own elaboration.

In this regard, the figure 1 indicates a notably high tendency regarding “neutral” category towards the reflection of social inequality, stereotypes, racism, and other issues related to critical interculturality. Likewise, a significant proportion of responses denoted the limitation of these themes, while other ones point out to minor integration of them in classes. The remaining participants' answers suggested either a full awareness about the topic or had no knowledge about it.

From a critical interculturality perspective, intercultural education has to transcend from cultural diverse recognition to focus on questioning power relations, inequality, and colonialism that entail educative procedures (Walsh, 2013a, 2013b; Zárate-Perez, 2014). In accordance with Granados-Beltrán's (2016), ELT may reproduce cultural and epistemological hierarchies when interculturality dismisses critical approaches. In this sense, these findings suggest the existence of a conceptual tension between interculturality and critical interculturality in the ELT teachers who tend to comprehend critical interculturality from a functional and descriptive perspective as Núñez-Pardo (2020b) and Oviedo-Gómez (2025) have analyzed it. As observed on the data, the ELT teachers focus on habits, celebrations, and include diverse cultures in Colombia context, which reinforces the idea that culture is superficial and neutral. These outcomes align with the Likert-scale ones, in which the participants affirm they are conscious on the cultural aspects their teachers address in class, but remain neutral, implying that the concept of critical interculturality might be unclear despite their willingness to become active in the subject.

ELT Materials and Critical Interculturality: Opportunities for Improvement and Limitations

The semi-structure interview findings suggest that the ELT materials used in classes usually contribute to the promotion of interculturality. Some of the ELT teachers reported using materials that entail environmental issues, traditions, festivals, and how they relate to the students' lived experiences. On the other side, other ELT teachers stated they do not address any cultural content in their classes since time is restricted or there is no interest about it. Nonetheless, data also suggests limitations when using materials to promote critical interculturality oriented to power. The ELT teachers recognize the relevance of addressing culture in their classes, but not from critical lenses. In accordance to the participants, there is a need for guidance, training, and orientation for them to identify the type of materials and topics they should use to promote critical interculturality. Moreover, the ELT teachers declared that material adaptation should be meaningful and deep instead of superficial, as it is a current practice. The participants also stated structural limitations that required support from the Government.

"...hay una tradición en X país, un festival X. ¿Cómo entonces nosotros desde acá, nosotros los colombianos percibimos eso que hacen ellos allá en ese país? ¿Qué le modificarías o qué tomarías de allá que te parecería interesante? que se hiciera en Colombia, y que de pronto no, pero también dando su argumento." Participant 1.

"La problemática, por ejemplo, del medio ambiente es una problemática que no la podemos ver solamente en nuestro espacio, en la casa o en el barrio o en el colegio, sino que también es un problema que encierra a toda la población." Participant 2.

"No, para ser completamente honesta, no trabajo esos temas. Dentro de los libros vienen algunos temas, pero de manera muy general. Yo no traigo actividades diferentes específicamente para trabajar esos temas." Participant 3.

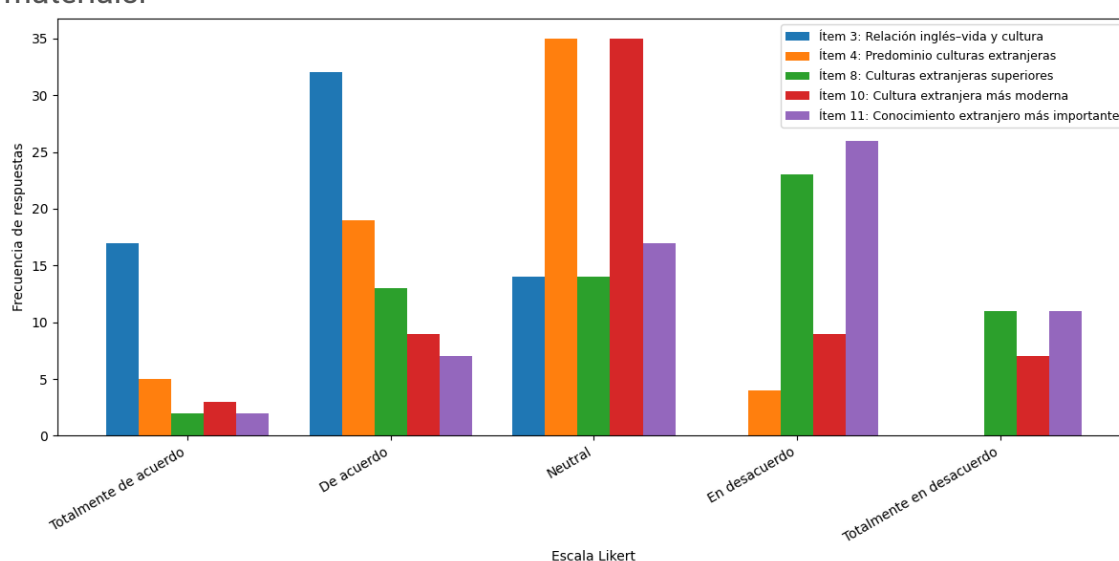
"Sí, necesitamos acompañamiento, capacitación, orientación sobre qué temáticas se pueden incluir y qué tipo de materiales se pueden usar. Tener charlas sobre este tipo de temas para poder trabajar de manera más segura y no simplemente ensayar a ver si funciona o no." Participant 3.

"No, para nada. Realmente hay dos cosas que son determinantes yo trato de ser muy práctico entonces digamos que esos elementos de reflexión no están en los materiales porque los materiales van pues como a lo que necesita, ¿cierto? Entonces a veces uno por de pronto desgastarse en reflexiones que son valiosas pues quita tiempo de desarrollar esos contenidos lingüísticos." Participant 5.

"...yo veo mucha gente que dice, es que yo contextualizo los materiales, porque en lugar de poner Paul, ponen Pablo o que porque en lugar de decir I am from New York, dicen I am from Florencia, pues eso es una contextualización muy superficial, no toca las cosas de la realidad y creo que eso también hay que entender, contextualizar no es solo relacionar, sino entender qué cosas de la realidad son las que uno debería realmente tocar para ser más significativo para los estudiantes, entonces ese es el reto." Participant 5.

Figure 2.

Students' perceptions of cultural representation and knowledge hierarchy in ELT materials.



Note. Authors' own elaboration.

Consistently, the figure 2 evidences the tenth and eleventh graders value positively their teachers self-adapt and self-create the materials used in classes. Similarly, the participants seem to recognize the existing relation between ELT and culture as they reject any type of separation of both subjects. These findings also show that some of the tenth and eleventh graders consider learning English is not only a functional process, but an opportunity to include culture. Notably, the results demonstrate there is considerable dominance of foreign cultures in the materials the participants make use of in classes. In contrast, other participants demonstrate to be neutral or not interested in the matter.

Within this perspective, ELT materials should not be generic resources, but pedagogical and ideological tools that challenge cultural discourses and power relations (Núñez-Pardo, 2018; Oviedo-Gómez, 2024). Therefore, these ideas contrast these findings, which indicate that materials, whether self-created, self-adapted or the MEN's official textbooks, allow cultural reflection, but rarely as critical interculturality lenses. In particular, some of the ELT teachers mentioned they included general cultural aspects such as customs, and traditions, which

might be seen as a functional interculturality, which is particularly what the scholars Ramos-Holguín (2021), and Velásquez-Hoyos and Lopez (2024) have questioned.

Similarly, the tenth and eleventh graders had a variety of responses in terms of ELT materials and critical interculturality. The majority of these participants showed neutrality, implying a possible lack of interest. This outcome reflects underrepresentation of critical intercultural practices, mostly influenced by the materials they use, and restricted pedagogical intervention. However, the tenth and the eleventh graders also highlighted their commitment to reflection towards the integration of critical interculturality aspects, even if they are not aware of it, at all. That suggests that even limited attempts by the ELT teachers to include superficial cultural content hold meaningful potential to move toward critical interculturality. In essence, the findings reflect that despite ELT materials have meaningful potential to promote critical interculturality, materials continue reinforcing functional language learning instead of creating a space for questioning cultures critically.

Cultural local representations and knowledge hierarchies in ELT materials

Along these lines, the findings from the semi-structure interview reflect predominance of global and foreign cultural representations, and limited visibility of local culture and contextual knowledge. The ELT teachers claimed the MEN's official textbooks tend to frequently privilege foreign cultural representations associated to Anglophone cultures. Despite these textbooks contain some content from Colombia, it is limited, and generally does not cover students' local contexts. In fact, the participants noted that these textbooks do not incorporate Caquetá region culture. Likewise, some participants emphasized they do not make use of self-created materials to include local culture, even if the materials they rely on present absent of such content.

"Los del Ministerio de Educación, sí, sí, total. Aunque ellos claramente incorporan, digamos, temáticas o costumbres de otros países, sobre todo los países anglosaniones," Participant 1.

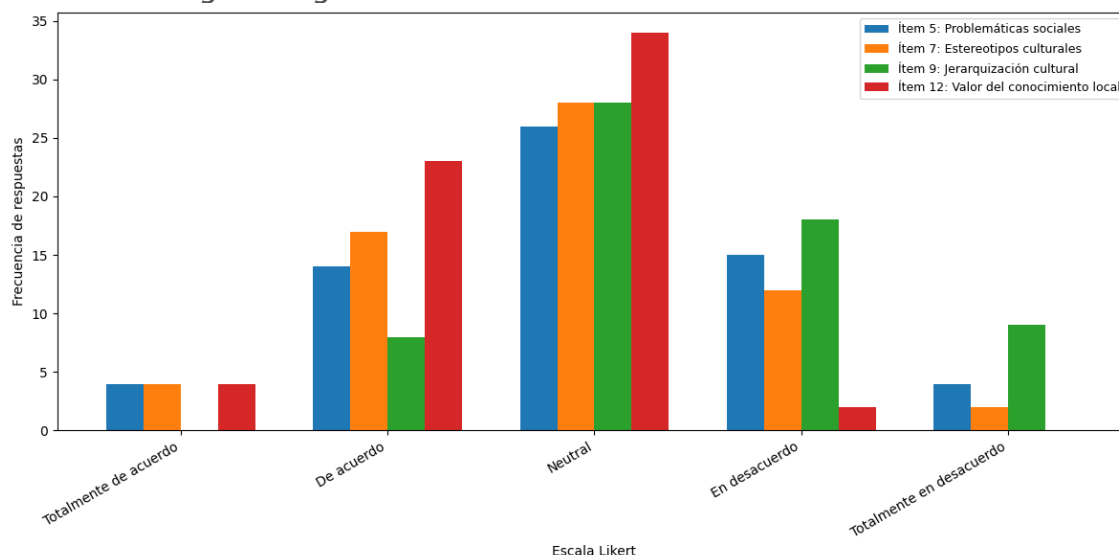
"Usted coge un libro de English, Please! y no ve nada de Florencia. Falta material propio. Antes hubo una cartilla en Caquetá, pero luego se dejó a un lado. Nos toca crear nuestro propio material si queremos hablar de nuestra región. Nos toca adaptarlo." Participant 2.

"Dentro de los libros vienen algunos temas, pero de manera muy general. Yo no traigo actividades diferentes específicamente para trabajar esos temas." Participant 3.

"Yo siento que de la cultura local a veces no tanto. Hay ocasiones en las que sí, pero son mínimas." Participant 4.

Figure 3.

Students' perceptions of critical intercultural practices, power relations, and local knowledge in English classes.



Note. Authors' own elaboration.

The figure 3 indicates that from the tenth and eleventh graders' perspective, the integration of local culture is limited. The participants' majority of responses resulted neutral when statements reflected the incorporation local culture into the English classes. Moreover, the participants expressed disagreement in various statements associated to cultural supremacy. This co-currency shows that the tenth and eleventh graders are aware of these representations. Although local knowledge is moderately valued, the findings suggest that critical interculturality is not consistently or explicitly integrated into ELT practices. Overall, responses tend to cluster around neutrality, particularly in relation to the discussion of social issues, cultural hierarchies, and the questioning of stereotypes.

In light of this, ELT materials tend to privilege Anglosaphon cultural narratives and marginalize local awareness as Nuñez-Pardo (2018, 2020a) has carefully examined. The findings show materials from the MEN, and the ones the ELT teachers adapt reproduce cultural hierarchies that place foreign discourses as the central matter of English acquisition. This pattern has been studied by Álvarez Valencia (2016) and Henao Mejía et al. (2021), and Jaramillo-Cárdenas (2023), who claim ELT has been influenced by the imperialism of dominant cultures in pedagogical and methodological practices. This challenge is further reinforced, as including local knowledge relies on the individual ELT teachers' wiliness. In this regard, implicit global dominant knowledge shapes ELT classes, without integrating local culture. This is evidenced since the tenth and eleventh graders show neutral responses, indicating they remain on the margin of the issue, possibly due to the absence of these topics being addressed in class. On the other side, few of the he tenth and eleventh graders point to be interested

in it, however, these efforts appear not to be enough to transform the colonial thinking embedded in ELT processes.

Conclusion

This case study allowed to analyze the extent to which ELT teachers embed critical interculturality in the design, adaptation, and use of materials at Institución Educativa Jorge Eliécer Gaitán according to teachers' and students' perceptions. Outcomes suggest that interculturality is present in pedagogical discourses and some classroom practices in this public school. Nonetheless, such interculturality approach remains predominantly functional and descriptive, giving limited attention to the existing power relations, inequality, and colonialism in ELT. The ELT materials such as MEN's official textbooks, and teachers' self-designed and self-adapted resources, incorporate cultural content related to social problems, and environmental issues positioning English learning beyond a mere linguistic practice. However, these elements do not engage students to question cultural hierarchies, colonialism, supremacy, and historical influence in knowledge production. Whenever critical perspectives appear, they seem to be implicit and rely on teachers' pedagogical intervention, instead of being structurally embedded in the materials themselves.

This leads us to revisit Walsh's (2009) notions who remarked a contrast between functional interculturality and critical interculturality. While functional interculturality responds to social institutional needs, fostering tolerance and coexistence, critical interculturality is a construction from individuals who have endured a history of subordination, marginalization, and epistemic exclusion. Following these ideas, findings revealed that the ELT community explored in this study has been constrained in a system that reproduces colonial logics, instead of questioning them. On this basis, the limited integration of critical interculturality in materials may be a result of systemic constraints. As examined by Oviedo-Gómez and Jaramillo-Cardenas, (2023) insufficient training, governmental barriers, and other structural constraints restrict ELT teachers' pedagogical agency. Giving to this, this study found out that the ELT teachers from Institución Educativa Jorge Eliécer Gaitán do not integrate critical interculturality in the design, adaptation, or use of materials due to time issues, curriculum, and policy driven limitations.

In conclusion, the ELT materials in this case study integrate critical interculturality to a limited extent according to teachers' and students' perceptions, mainly supporting linguistic process and functional intercultural reflection. The critical interculturality engagement in materials remains restricted, implicit, and contingent on teachers' wiliness, instead of being structural included within the materials. However, this study also reveals potential to engage critical

interculturality in the ELT community. Considering this an emerging trend, the outcomes indicate that the limited pedagogical commitment might be expanded by teachers' intervention, professional training, and the integration of critical, and transformative content within the materials ELT teachers make use of.

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