

RESEARCH ON INTERCULTURALITY IN COLOMBIA: PERSISTENT CHALLENGES IN 21ST-CENTURY ELT TEACHER EDUCATION

INVESTIGACIÓN SOBRE INTERCULTURALIDAD EN COLOMBIA: DESAFÍOS PERSISTENTES EN LA FORMACIÓN DE DOCENTES DE ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS EN EL SIGLO XXI

PESQUISA SOBRE INTERCULTURALIDADE NA COLÔMBIA: DESAFIOS PERSISTENTES NA FORMAÇÃO DE PROFESSORES DE ENSINO DE INGLÊS (ELT) NO SÉCULO XXI

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Abstract

In the context of intensified global mobility and sociocultural diversification, interculturality has gained renewed prominence in educational debates. However, in English language teaching (ELT), it is frequently reduced to a superficial recognition of cultural difference, framed through national, essentialist, or celebratory perspectives that limit its transformative scope. This conceptual and critical paper examines the evolution of culture and interculturality through key developments in cultural studies, tracing a shift from modernist paradigms toward postmodern, critical, and decolonial perspectives that foreground power, discourse, and historical asymmetries. It critically differentiates multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, and interculturality, arguing that the latter has often been institutionalized in depoliticized ways that manage diversity rather than challenge inequality. Additionally, drawing on Colombian scholarship on interculturality

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in ELT teacher education, the paper identifies persistent challenges, including transmissionist models, curricular marginalization, and the prioritization of linguistic outcomes over critical intercultural engagement. Anchored in critical pedagogy, the paper conceptualizes interculturality as an unfinished ethical-political project and proposes practice-oriented actions to embed it structurally within ELT teacher education.

Keywords

Colombian ELT, culture, cultural studies, English teacher preparation, interculturality, pervasive challenges

Resumen

En el contexto de una movilidad global intensificada y una creciente diversificación sociocultural, la interculturalidad ha adquirido una renovada relevancia en los debates educativos. No obstante, en la enseñanza del inglés (ELT), con frecuencia se reduce a un reconocimiento superficial de la diferencia cultural, enmarcado en perspectivas nacionales, esencialistas o meramente celebratorias que limitan su alcance transformador. Este artículo de carácter conceptual y crítico examina la evolución de las nociones de cultura e interculturalidad a partir de desarrollos clave en los estudios culturales, trazando un desplazamiento desde paradigmas modernistas hacia enfoques posmodernos, críticos y decoloniales que ponen en el centro el poder, el discurso y las asimetrías históricas. El texto diferencia críticamente entre multiculturalidad, pluriculturalidad e interculturalidad, y sostiene que esta última ha sido frecuentemente institucionalizada de manera despolitizada, orientada más a la gestión de la diversidad que al cuestionamiento de la desigualdad. Asimismo, a partir de aportes de la producción académica colombiana sobre interculturalidad en la formación docente en ELT, se identifican desafíos persistentes, como modelos transmisionistas, la marginalización curricular y la priorización de resultados lingüísticos por encima de un compromiso intercultural crítico. Anclado en la pedagogía crítica, el artículo concibe la interculturalidad como un proyecto ético-político inacabado y propone acciones de carácter práctico para integrarla de manera estructural en la formación docente en ELT.

Palabras clave

Cultura, desafíos persistentes, ELT colombiano, estudios culturales, formación de docentes de inglés, interculturalidad

Resumo

No contexto da intensificação da mobilidade global e da crescente diversificação sociocultural, a interculturalidade tem adquirido renovada centralidade nos debates educacionais. Contudo, no ensino de língua inglesa (ELT), ela é frequentemente reduzida a um reconhecimento superficial da diferença cultural, enquadrado em perspectivas nacionais, essencialistas ou meramente celebratórias, o que limita seu potencial transformador. Este artigo de natureza conceitual e crítica examina a evolução das noções de cultura e interculturalidade a partir de desenvolvimentos centrais dos estudos culturais, traçando um deslocamento dos paradigmas modernistas para abordagens pós-modernas, críticas e decoloniais que enfatizam o poder, o discurso e as assimetrias históricas. O texto diferencia criticamente multiculturalidade, pluriculturalidade e interculturalidade, argumentando que esta última tem sido frequentemente institucionalizada de forma despolitizada, voltada mais para a gestão da diversidade do que para o enfrentamento das desigualdades. Ademais, com base na produção acadêmica colombiana sobre interculturalidade na formação de professores de ELT, o artigo identifica desafios persistentes, como modelos transmissivos, marginalização curricular e a priorização de resultados linguísticos em detrimento de um engajamento intercultural crítico. Ancorado na pedagogia crítica, o artigo concebe a interculturalidade como um projeto ético-político inacabado e propõe ações de caráter prático para integrá-la de maneira estrutural à formação docente em ELT.

Palavras-chave

Cultura, desafios persistentes, ELT colombiano, estudos culturais, formação de professores de inglês, interculturalidade.

Introduction

Due to the global dynamics that have characterized 21st-century societies over the last few decades, particularly the intensification of migration flows and the expansion of integrative cultural practices, whether driven by the pursuit of improved living conditions or by efforts to preserve traditional nation-state logics that frame cultural diversity as a defining trait, interculturality has gained sustained traction within both national and international academic communities. Traditionally, and often inaccurately, interculturality has been conceived as a field of knowledge and an educational approach primarily aimed at fostering awareness of cultural differences among groups. However, research in the field has shown that such approaches have frequently reduced culture to sets of national attributes (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) or to national–international identity

frameworks (Kottak, 1999), positioning individuals in society predominantly on the basis of nationality, international affiliation, or legal citizenship. These restrictive perspectives have limited a more robust understanding of intercultural communication and interaction. Consequently, intercultural studies have progressively distanced themselves from long-standing superficial, celebratory, and reductionist conceptions of culture, moving instead toward more complex and analytically sound approaches capable of adequately accounting for the diverse backgrounds of individuals engaging in so-called “third spaces” of interaction.

This reflective paper, developed as part of a doctoral seminar within the English Language Teaching program at Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia, aims to analyze how the concept of culture, and, by extension, cultural studies and related notions such as multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, and interculturality, has evolved in recent years. By explicitly articulating the relationships among these fields, this paper seeks to address persistent challenges that continue to shape the implementation of interculturality within national English language education. In addition, it proposes concrete, actionable strategies that language educators, specifically English teachers, may adopt to approach interculturality more effectively across diverse teaching contexts, regardless of educational level. Ultimately, this discussion aims to contribute to ongoing scholarly dialogue, as cultural studies and interculturality remain areas in need of sustained critical engagement and a decolonial reorientation, particularly given their relatively incipient development as fields of knowledge (Álvarez Valencia, 2014).

This paper is organized as follows. First, it presents a set of definitions of culture and establishes their connection to the field of cultural studies. It then examines the impact of the paradigmatic shift from modernism to postmodernism on this domain. Next, it clarifies the distinctions among multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, and interculturality, terms that are frequently used interchangeably and often inaccurately. Finally, it addresses the persistent challenges that interculturality continues to face within the national context. With this structure in place, the discussion now turns to the first section, titled:

Culture: Defining What It Is

Culture is undoubtedly one of the most complex and contested concepts in the social sciences. Commonly, it has been associated with religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, and observable patterns of behavior. While these elements are undoubtedly related to culture, such associations remain partial and insufficient to account for its full scope and complexity.

Early anthropological scholarship already recognized this multidimensionality. Boas (1938) defined culture as the totality of intellectual and physical activities and relationships that characterize the behavior of individuals within a social group, both collectively and individually, in relation to their natural environment,

other groups, and themselves. Subsequent conceptualizations, despite differing theoretical lenses, largely converge with this foundational view. Kroeber (1917), for instance, described culture as “superorganic” and “superindividual,” emphasizing that although culture is produced and carried by individuals, it is acquired through learning rather than inherited biologically. From this perspective, culture is transmitted socially and historically, allowing individuals to simultaneously participate in a shared cultural heritage while developing personal cultural trajectories.

Similarly, Hall (1959) conceptualized culture as the diverse ways of organizing life, thinking, and structuring assumptions about social institutions such as the family, the state, and economic systems. Malinowski (1972) and Tylor (1997) further emphasized culture as socially transmitted values and as a “complex whole” encompassing knowledge, beliefs, morals, customs, and acquired human capabilities. More recent theoretical developments have approached culture through the lenses of discourse, practice, ideology, and complexity theory. From a discursive perspective, Kramsch (1993, 1998, 2009) frames culture as a form of social affiliation grounded in shared historical and symbolic spaces, mediated through discourse and enacted within speech communities. From a practice-oriented stance, Risager (2006) defines culture as a dynamic set of practices in which meaning is continuously created and negotiated through interaction. In turn, Piller (2011) conceptualizes culture as an ideological construct mobilized by social actors to establish and maintain social categories and boundaries, while complexity-oriented approaches view culture as emergent from, yet not reducible to, human related interaction (Sealy & Carter, 2004).

These well-established theoretical contributions make evident that culture cannot be reduced to a single, universal definition. Rather, they suggest that culture may be understood either as cognition and lived experience, or as the accumulation, transmission, and transformation of values, practices, and meanings across generations. In this sense, the diversity of definitions does not represent theoretical contradiction but analytical complementarity. Given its evolving and dynamic nature, culture cannot, and should not, be confined to a single framework. Perhaps the most succinct and enduring formulation is offered by Lado (1957), who defined culture as “the ways of people.” This definition captures culture as both inherited and negotiated: shaped by the communities into which individuals are born, reconfigured through social interaction, and continuously reconstructed through personal agency. Culture, therefore, is learned, developed, and renegotiated over time, allowing individuals to simultaneously embody collective cultural patterns and evolving personal identities.

From this standpoint, Lado’s (1957) conceptualization is particularly valuable, as it explicitly acknowledges the ongoing and non-static nature of culture. However, when examining cultural practices within English language teaching

(ELT) in Colombia, culture continues to be treated largely as a skill, competence, or body of content to be transmitted in formal instructional settings. While the intrinsic relationship between language and culture cannot be denied, there is no language without culture, nor culture without language, traditional ELT practices in the Colombian context still tend to rely on fixed and essentialist representations of culture. Such representations are increasingly inadequate for capturing the heterogeneity and fluidity of contemporary cultural groups.

This situation is largely understandable given that Colombian ELT has historically been anchored in functional and structural approaches to language and culture (Rico-Troncoso, 2018). For decades, language learning was primarily framed through cognitive and linguistic paradigms that equated proficiency with approximating the speech, behavior, and identity of an idealized native speaker. As a legacy of modernist thinking, binary and static conceptions of culture have continued to shape pedagogical practices. Nonetheless, these approaches are gradually being challenged as broader epistemological shifts toward more critical, postmodern, and decolonial perspectives reshape understandings of language, identity, and culture.

Cultural Studies: A historical Perspective

Cultural studies is a field that has evolved in parallel with broader transformations in society and knowledge production. In its early formulations, scholars such as Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis conceptualized culture as “the best of what has been said and thought.” While not entirely inaccurate, since culture does encompass human productions and practices, this definition positioned culture as an exclusive asset attainable only by certain social groups. As a result, culture became associated with elite segments of society perceived as embodying intellectual and moral superiority, thereby reinforcing a rigid division between “high culture” and popular culture, the latter often dismissed as trivial, mass-oriented, or inferior.

Over time, however, this dichotomous understanding of culture began to be contested as epistemological approaches to society and knowledge shifted. The Frankfurt School played a decisive role in this transformation. By incorporating a Marxist lens into cultural analysis, thinkers such as Adorno and Horkheimer introduced the concept of the “culture industry,” arguing that cultural production under capitalism primarily served the interests of dominant social groups. High culture, from this perspective, functioned as a mechanism of exclusion, leaving little room for recognizing or legitimizing the cultural experiences of marginalized audiences, who were often portrayed as incapable or unworthy due to their failure to conform to dominant cultural norms.

Building on this critical momentum, Newbold et al. (2002) identify a subsequent phase known as British culturalism. The sustained contributions of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and E.P. Thompson were instrumental in consolidating

this movement, as they shifted scholarly attention away from elitist notions of culture toward the lived experiences and cultural practices of working-class communities. In particular, Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* and Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* were pivotal in legitimizing popular and working-class cultural expressions as meaningful and worthy of scholarly inquiry. As noted by Newbold et al. (2002), these works contributed to the consolidation of cultural studies as a fundamentally interdisciplinary field, informed by Marxism, feminism, semiotics, and literary theory, all oriented toward examining the relationship between culture and power. Viewed historically, the field of cultural studies has undergone a sustained process of reconstruction aimed at validating non-elitist and non-binary ways of being, knowing, and producing culture, an evolution that directly challenges the modernist legacy underpinning earlier cultural hierarchies.

These shifts are closely tied to broader paradigmatic transitions between modernism and postmodernism. As Harvey (1989) explains, modernism privileged logic, rationality, and universal explanations, often seeking to organize social reality through binary and standardized categories. Within this framework, individuals, groups, languages, and cultures were frequently reduced to fixed and oppositional classifications. Postmodernism, by contrast, emerged as a critical response to these assumptions, destabilizing claims to universality and foregrounding difference, contingency, and contextuality. Rather than viewing individuals and cultures as homogeneous entities, postmodernism emphasizes their situated, fragmented, and evolving nature.

Harvey (1989) further argues that this paradigmatic shift extended beyond cultural and linguistic studies to fields such as philosophy, literature, architecture, and cinema. A frequently cited cinematic illustration of postmodernism is Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), often regarded as one of the most representative postmodern films. Its non-linear narrative structure and sustained interrogation of truth, identity, and authenticity, particularly through the character of Rick Deckard, reflect postmodern concerns with ambiguity and instability. Notably, identity emerges as a central theme not only in this film but also in contemporary social debates more broadly.

In this regard, identity constitutes one of the most visible markers of postmodern thought. Drawing on Kumaravadivelu (2011), modernism can be understood as a project grounded in standardization and binary categorization, wherein individuals were classified along rigid lines such as male/female, white/Black, or privileged/unprivileged. While standardization may have served certain organizational purposes, it also produced exclusionary effects, marginalizing those who did not conform to dominant norms. Consequently, groups such as LGBTQ+ communities, as well as Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations, were frequently rendered invisible or subjected to systematic discrimination. As global societies continued to evolve, postmodernism generated tensions

with institutionalized discourses and normative frameworks, contributing to the fragmentation of knowledge and social structures and enabling historically marginalized voices to gain visibility and agency.

With these considerations in mind, the following chart presents a comparative overview of the defining features of culture from modernist and postmodernist perspectives.

Table 1.
modernism vs postmodernism based on Harvey (1989), Rico (2021)

Characteristic	Modernism	Postmodernism
Epistemological Basis	Positivist approach: belief in one absolute truth; rational planning under standardized rules.	Multiple truths are possible; knowledge is relative, situated, and context-dependent.
Concept of Culture	Culture tied to civilization or “way of life” of a nation; often led to stereotyping and fixed categories.	Culture seen as fluid, hybrid, and constructed through interaction; challenges rigid national labels.
Critical Outcome	Tendency to package, classify, and label people and ideas; produced rigid systems and bureaucratic rationality.	Resistance to fixed classifications; values plurality, diversity, and critical questioning of grand narratives.

Source: *Designed by the author*

In relation to these shifts, Kumaravadivelu (2011) argues that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries social conduct, identity, and acceptable ways of being were largely defined, if not imposed, by the rationalist and universalizing logics of modernism. Postmodernism, by contrast, progressively destabilized this status quo through cumulative intellectual and social efforts, creating space for individuals and communities to articulate their own voices and to negotiate who they are and who they aspire to become. This epistemological rupture has significant pedagogical implications, particularly within cultural studies and language education.

From a contemporary decolonial pedagogical standpoint, English language teachers occupy a strategic position in fostering critical intercultural competences, as classrooms constitute sites where discourse, ideology, and power intersect. As theorized by Foucault, power operates through micro-level practices and knowledge systems, establishing an intimate relationship between regimes of knowledge and the techniques through which social control and domination are exercised in localized contexts (Foucault, 1977). In this sense, English language teaching is inherently political rather than neutral, as it is continuously shaped by discourses of globalization, modernity, and normative constructions of linguistic proficiency.

Within this micro-political landscape, English teachers actively participate in the legitimation or contestation of particular ways of speaking, thinking, and being. However, attempts to engage with postmodern and intercultural perspectives

in ELT have often resulted in superficial or “folklorized” treatments of cultural difference, reduced to thematic content rather than critically interrogated social practice. Such approaches risk reproducing modernist hierarchies under the guise of innovation.

Students, in turn, are positioned as passive participants within these microcosms of power, expected to conform to predetermined standards of pronunciation, fluency, and language use. This emphasis on normativity frequently reinforces asymmetrical relations of knowledge and authority in the classroom, privileging dominant linguistic and cultural models while marginalizing alternative voices and experiences.

Having outlined the evolving trajectory of cultural studies and its pedagogical implications, the following section addresses three key concepts that are recurrent, and often used interchangeably, within the field: multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, and interculturalism. Each concept is examined in turn in order to clarify its scope and analytical relevance.

Multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, and interculturalism

Although multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, and interculturalism are recurrent concepts within cultural studies and language education, they refer to distinct approaches and should not be used interchangeably. To begin with, multiculturalism, more commonly discussed as multiculturalism, was formally introduced in Canada in 1971 as a policy-oriented framework aimed at managing the presence of diverse cultural communities, particularly those resulting from increased migration. In this sense, multiculturalism recognizes the coexistence of multiple cultures within the same social space without necessarily promoting meaningful interaction among them (Walsh, 2005).

It is precisely this limitation that has led critical scholars such as Žižek (2001), Muñoz (2002), and Coulby (2006) to argue that multiculturalism, despite its apparent inclusivity, operates as a refined or “polite” form of contemporary racism. By emphasizing tolerance and recognition without addressing power asymmetries or structural inequality, multiculturalism risks preserving dominant cultural norms while relegating minoritized groups to static, folklorized positions. Albeit with a modest extension, pluriculturalism follows a similar trajectory. While multiculturalism focuses primarily on coexistence, pluriculturalism acknowledges a certain degree of contact and communication among cultural groups. However, such interaction typically remains limited to descriptive or contextual recognition and does not necessarily challenge entrenched hierarchies or promote deeper forms of engagement.

Against these circumstances, interculturalism or interculturalism, as it is sometimes called, emerged as a more comprehensive and potentially transformative approach. As Castañeda-Trujillo et al. (2023) explain in their

study on pre-service EFL teachers' understandings of interculturality, the concept originated in the field of communication and was later adopted by disciplines such as education, business, linguistics, and healthcare (Dervin, 2016). Within education, interculturality developed primarily in European and North American contexts as a response to the challenges posed by globalization, intensified migration, and increasing cultural convergence. These processes resulted in more culturally and linguistically diverse student populations, prompting a need for new pedagogical frameworks.

Initially, however, interculturality was understood as interaction among different cultures, with an emphasis on comparison, mutual learning, awareness of difference, and conflict management. More recently, critical and emancipatory perspectives, particularly those emerging from both hegemonic and non-hegemonic contexts, have expanded this understanding beyond interaction alone. These perspectives foreground issues of power, inequality, and social transformation, leading to more nuanced conceptualizations such as the one proposed by Dietz (2018), who understands interculturality as...

The ensemble of interrelations that structure a given society in terms of culture, ethnicity, language, religious denomination, and/or nationality, an ensemble that is perceived through the articulation of different "us" versus "them" groups that interact in often changing majority, minority constellations. These relations are frequently asymmetrical with regard to political and socioeconomic power, and they often reflect historically rooted ways of showing or hiding, of emphasizing or denying diversity, of stigmatizing otherness, and of discriminating against particular groups (p. 2)

Meaning that beyond the superficial recognition of difference characteristic of multiculturalism, and, to a lesser extent, pluriculturalism, interculturality aspires to foster more symmetrical cultural and social relations while actively seeking to transform the structures, institutions, and power relations that shape social life (Moya Chaves et al., 2019; Walsh, 2005). Its transformative promise lies in challenging asymmetries rather than merely managing diversity. Nevertheless, this transformative potential is not always realized in practice. From Muñoz's (2002) perspective, interculturality, particularly in the form of intercultural education, has frequently been appropriated as a rhetorical banner of modernization, inclusion, and respect for diversity within Latin American contexts. Beneath this progressive discourse, Muñoz argues, operates a managed ideology that ultimately functions within, and reinforces, the very social order responsible for reproducing inequality. As Muñoz's (2002) cautions, contemporary multiculturalism and interculturality often coexist with processes of global homogenization. Within this framework, cultural difference is converted into an administrable object and a symbolic political resource that serves to legitimize state policies and international agendas, while leaving intact the colonial logics and structural asymmetries upon which these systems are built.

In their respective works, *Interculturalidad en educación*, *multiculturalismo en la sociedad: ¿paralelos o convergentes?* (Muñoz, 2002) and *Multicultural education and intercultural education today: Finding a topos in the discourse and promoting dialogue between continents and disciplines* (Palaiologou & Dietz, 2012), the authors situate interculturality within a clearly political and sociohistorical framework. Both contend that, in the absence of sustained critical engagement, the institutionalization of interculturality risks degenerating into a bureaucratic mechanism that manages cultural difference rather than confronting the structural inequalities that produce it.

Grounded in an understanding of culture as inherently political, Muñoz (2002) introduces the concept of institutional interculturality, referring to the stage at which intercultural policies are formalized and bureaucratized through legislation, programs, curricular guidelines, and pedagogical manuals, while the colonial foundations of the educational system remain largely unchallenged. In line with this argument, Walsh (2005) characterizes such processes as an “interculturality from above,” oriented toward the technical administration of diversity rather than toward the redistribution of power or the transformation of social relations.

For Muñoz (2002), the central challenge of intercultural education lies in the formation of multicultural subjects and citizens who recognize diversity as an ethical and political principle, as well as in the radical transformation of school practices through horizontal dialogue among communities, teachers, and universities. Although institutional interculturality frequently relies on the language of inclusion and diversity, Muñoz ultimately characterizes it as depoliticized in practice. Interestingly, the authors Palaiologou and Dietz (2012) address this issue from a complementary perspective, by conceptualizing interculturality as a set of standardized and often imported educational models. They argue that as intercultural frameworks circulate across national and cultural contexts, they risk becoming detached from their original critical intentions. This process gives rise to what they term “methodological nationalism” (p. 4), whereby the nation-state is uncritically assumed as the natural and unquestioned unit for the design and implementation of educational policies, thus limiting the transformative potential of intercultural education.

From these perspectives, Muñoz (2002) and Palaiologou and Dietz (2012) acknowledge that discourses surrounding interculturality, multiculturalism, and pluriculturalism possess undeniable analytical value in their efforts to account for the social dynamics shaping contemporary communities. Nevertheless, both caution that such discourses have frequently fallen into what Freire (1970) termed “false discourse,” insofar as the rhetorical foregrounding of interculturality does not necessarily imply a genuine commitment to improving the material and symbolic conditions of culturally minoritized groups. This critique I must say, is particularly salient in South America and, more specifically, in the Colombian

context, where ethnoeducation, despite its constitutional recognition, continues to be marked by persistent tensions between official discourses of recognition and institutionalized practices of silencing and marginalization. In this regard, both readings converge on a paradox that has long characterized educational reform in Latin America: the coexistence of progressive language with regressive practices.

Importantly, while Palaologou and Dietz (2012) advocate for an intercultural education grounded in reciprocity, equality, and mutual engagement, Muñoz (2002) asserts that such principles can only be realized through the transformation of the power relations that currently obstruct or neutralize them. Interaction without redistribution, and dialogue without epistemic justice, thus risk becoming mere forms of symbolic inclusion rather than vehicles for substantive change. Historically, unicultural educational models, that is, those characterized for privileging the norms, values, attitudes, actions, behaviors and epistemologies of dominant groups, have largely shaped how culture has been taught, reinforcing asymmetries that intercultural discourse ostensibly seeks to overcome.

Table 2.

Differences between unicultural, multicultural, and intercultural education models

Type	Focus	Characteristics
Unicultural Education	Promotes a single national identity/cultural norm	Emphasizes homogeneity, often marginalizing minority cultures.
Multicultural Education	Recognition of multiple cultures in one place. From nations colonized then populated by people from Europe, displacing Indigenous communities	Aims for coexistence of cultures and focuses on inclusion and cultural awareness.
Intercultural Education	Interaction, dialogue, and integration between different cultural groups. Mutual respect, learnings and teachings - transfer of cultural knowledge.	Emphasizes mutual understanding, respect, and learning experiences from different cultures: Equity and equality between them.

Source: *Designed by the author*

Muñoz's (2002) analysis demonstrates that, although educational policies targeting Indigenous cultural groups have been formally developed in countries such as Bolivia, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Mexico, these initiatives are characterized by a persistent contradiction between discursive progress and enduring structural constraints. This tension is particularly evident in the implementation of interculturality across these contexts. While several states have incorporated interculturality into their legal frameworks, related programs often remain marginal, reliant on external funding, and weakly aligned with the lived realities of the communities they ostensibly serve. In the Colombian case, for example, ethnoeducation is grounded in the constitutional recognition

of Indigenous peoples; however, it has not succeeded in consolidating an autonomous pedagogical model or an effective policy of redistribution. Such experiences suggest that interculturality has been appropriated primarily by states and international organizations rather than by communities themselves, thereby reproducing a vertical logic that contradicts its participatory foundations.

Predictably, this critique extends directly to the practices and understandings of many professionals in the field of language education. In numerous school and university settings, interculturality is frequently invoked as a slogan, while its practical application is reduced to the translation of isolated terms, the celebration of commemorative dates, or the superficial inclusion of local topics in the curriculum, often reinforcing a “Big C” (Gómez-Rodríguez, 2015) conception of culture. Within this framework, diversity becomes folklorized, and community-based knowledge is instrumentalized to satisfy institutional indicators or project requirements. Indigenous, peasant, and Afro-descendant subjects are symbolically acknowledged, yet they remain largely excluded from meaningful participation in decisions concerning educational systems that directly affect their territories and ways of life. Consequently, interculturality is enacted for others rather than with them, functioning as an add-on rather than as a systemic transformation of education.

From this standpoint, the central challenge of intercultural education in the twenty-first century extends beyond the design of more inclusive curricula. It requires the dismantling of the epistemological boundaries that determine which forms of knowledge are legitimized and which are marginalized. In practical terms, this entails fostering less hierarchical and more horizontal relationships in which all stakeholders, including governments, institutions, and communities, can engage in genuine dialogue, as suggested by Correa and Usma (2013). As Muñoz (2002) underscores, this task is inherently ethical and political, involving a shift from an “interculturality from above” (Walsh, 2005) toward an “interculturality from below,” grounded in community participation, co-construction of knowledge, and linguistic justice.

Notably, recent developments across Latin America indicate that this shift toward community-driven forms of interculturality is no longer merely theoretical. In Mexico, for instance, governmental initiatives such as the establishment of the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (INLI) under the Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas, and the accreditation of regional bodies like the Instituto Poblano de los Pueblos Indígenas (IPPI), reflect institutional commitments to linguistic equity and cultural recognition. Likewise, city-level agencies such as the Secretaría de Pueblos y Barrios Originarios y Comunidades Indígenas Residentes in Mexico City (SEPI) pursue intercultural services and community consultation programs that expand Indigenous visibility and rights in urban settings. Proposals to constitutionally enshrine equal legal status for Indigenous languages further signal these trends from above. It is the ways in

which Indigenous groups appropriate and mobilize these frameworks, alongside grassroots efforts by communities like the Comcaac to advance local rights and cultural continuity, that signal the emergence of an ‘interculturality from below.’

A particularly salient development is that, alongside the efforts of institutions such as INLI and SEPI to preserve and revitalize Indigenous languages in Mexico, the Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (INPI) has begun providing linguistic mediation services in hospitals and other public institutions, thereby promoting more equitable linguistic practices in state service provision. To date, there appear to be no comparable initiatives in Colombia, despite the country's similarly rich linguistic diversity rooted in its Indigenous heritage. This contrast, however, should not be interpreted as stagnation in the Colombian case; rather, it reflects a distinct pathway through which interculturality is currently unfolding. While forms of “interculturality from above” (Muñoz, 2002) continue to shape the Mexican context, interculturality is also increasingly emerging from below, as Indigenous peoples assume greater control over practices and decisions that directly affect their communities.

In Colombia, this bottom-up trajectory of interculturality, conceived as interculturality from and for communities, appears to be acquiring a more structural and territorial dimension. Recently, the Colombian government formally recognized the country's first eight entidades territoriales indígenas, a milestone without historical precedent. This recognition is expected to enable Indigenous territorial entities to exercise greater autonomy over social, cultural, linguistic, and investment-related matters. Additionally, recent legal instruments such as Decree 1345 of 2023, Decree 1098 of 2025, and Decree 481 of 2025 signal a growing and sustained institutional commitment to the rights and intercultural governance of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, Black, and Romani populations. Although these measures may still be interpreted as manifestations of interculturalidad desde arriba (Muñoz, 2002), they nonetheless create new opportunities for communities to advance the more participatory and transformative forms of interculturality discussed earlier.

These developments inevitably call for a reassessment of how education is conceived and enacted in the Colombian context. At this juncture, cosmopolitanism, as articulated by Banks (2011), becomes particularly relevant, as it offers a framework for educating citizens capable of navigating local identities while engaging ethically with broader global realities.

To conclude this section, it is important to emphasize that interculturality cannot be reduced to the promotion of respect, tolerance, or peaceful coexistence among cultural groups, nor to the superficial and celebratory inclusion of Indigenous or Afro-descendant perspectives. In the contemporary twenty-first-century context, interculturality must be understood, as Muñoz (2002) argues, not merely as a mechanism for managing difference, but as a transformative

project aimed at reshaping the structures and dynamics that produce inequality. With this premise established, the discussion now turns to the following section, which addresses:

Interculturality: An utopia?

Despite sustained theoretical contributions to cultural studies and, more specifically, to intercultural education, scholars such as Hidalgo (2005) and Zárate Pérez (2014) adopt a markedly critical stance. Both argue that, notwithstanding its acknowledged potential, interculturality still faces a long and uncertain path before fulfilling its central objective: the construction of more equitable societies. From their perspective, interculturality remains a “desirable but unrealistic utopia” and a political project still under development. Zárate Pérez (2014) contends that intercultural discourse is frequently employed as a form of “discursive makeup” by dominant groups, facilitating the less confrontational and systematic assimilation of minority cultures into Western institutional frameworks. Similarly, Hidalgo (2005) observes that progress toward equity is obstructed by persistent ethnocentrism, described as a “step toward intolerance”, as well as by an uncritical form of relativism that immobilizes cultures within a logic of “static respect,” thereby inhibiting the critical interrogation of inequality required for social justice. Consequently, both authors argue that advancing toward a genuinely intercultural society demands sustained critical reflection on practices that reproduce the “coloniality of knowledge” and the “coloniality of being,” which together constitute a matrix of power that continues to marginalize those who do not conform to the dominant status quo.

Comparable concerns are articulated by Coulby (2006), who acknowledges that intercultural education holds the potential to orient societies toward fairer and more inclusive practices. However, he identifies one of its most significant limitations in its narrow scope of implementation. Interculturality has largely been confined to the social sciences and language education, fields traditionally associated with human interaction and cultural negotiation. While this focus is understandable, it has inadvertently relegated interculturality to a peripheral position rather than establishing it as a foundational educational principle. Other areas of knowledge have either failed to integrate intercultural perspectives or have dismissed them altogether, operating under the assumption that cultural considerations fall outside their disciplinary boundaries. This compartmentalization significantly undermines the transformative capacity of intercultural education, as scientific, technical, economic, and administrative domains also play a decisive role in shaping social relations and power structures. As long as interculturality remains sectorized and selectively applied, it will continue, as Coulby (2006) warns, to function primarily as an aspirational discourse rather than as a structural force capable of producing substantive social change. As he explicitly states, interculturality is not “appropriate to one phase of education only,” but rather constitutes a central theme that should inform teaching and learning across all subject areas (Coulby, 2006, p. 246).

Building on this discussion, Coulby (2006) further argues that intercultural education emerged as an attempt to approach the study of culture in classrooms from an empowering rather than normative or parochial perspective. Importantly, he extends the debate by revisiting the distinctions among multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, and interculturality. While earlier sections have outlined their general differences, Coulby offers a particularly revealing contrast between multiculturalism and interculturality. In his view, multiculturalism, often reflected in educational practices grounded in a single dominant cultural framework, such as those commonly found in English language teaching textbooks, can be understood as conceptually opposed to monoculturalism. Interculturality, by contrast, functions differently: it does not appear to have “an opposite, no enemy” (Coulby, 2006, p. 255). In other words, although multiculturalism and interculturality are frequently used interchangeably in academic and educational contexts, they embody fundamentally distinct orientations toward culture, power, and social relations. The following table presents additional features that, from Coulby’s (2006) perspective, further differentiate multiculturalism from interculturality.

Table 3.

Distinctions between multiculturalism and interculturality. This table extends the comparison presented in Table 2 by incorporating additional analytical dimensions, based on Coulby’s (2006) view, offering, thus, a broader of the differences between multiculturalism and interculturality.

Feature	Multiculturalism	Interculturality
Terminological History	The dominant term prior to the swift terminological shift that occurred over twenty years ago (around 1980).	This term marks a terminological shift that was accepted unquestionably and seemed to offer a fresh start in educational discourse.
Aspirations / Primary Goal	Its purpose was primarily to show that there is more than one culture.	The aspiration is realistically for an education able to negotiate between cultures.
Critique and Weakness	It was attacked for not sufficiently and directly addressing issues of racism. It was criticized for offering only a tokenistic understanding of non-dominant knowledge and degrading cultural difference to the study of superficial elements like “samosas, saris and steel bands.”	One fundamental theoretical weakness is the assumption of an unrealistic normative inclusiveness. Retrospectively, it is questioned whether the lexical shift served to disguise the historical realities of cultural interaction, such as conquest, slave trades, imperialism, and genocide.
Geographical Influence	Theory and practice had previously been dominant and self-contained, primarily emanating from the USA and the UK.	The shift offered a new beginning less influenced by the previously dominant theory and practice from the USA and the UK.
Scope and Focus in Education	Had a clear opposite: monoculturalism.	It appears to have no opposite, no enemy. It is considered a major theme that needs to inform the teaching and learning of all subjects (e.g., medicine, civics, mathematics, language teaching). It is vital at all phases of education (university, kindergarten).

Source: Designed by the author

As shown, Coulby's (2006) analysis of the distinctions between multiculturalism and interculturality is particularly valuable because it moves beyond purely epistemological considerations to examine their respective critiques, limitations, geographical orientations, and educational reach. Rather than confining the discussion to abstract theory, Coulby situates both concepts within broader sociohistorical and educational frameworks. His most significant contribution lies in advancing interculturality as a cross-curricular principle rather than as a concern restricted to language education. From this standpoint, the inclusion of history, oral traditions, and other context-bound forms of knowledge becomes a strategic requirement for fostering sustained and meaningful intercultural understanding. In operational terms, Coulby (2006) outlines three concrete ways in which such practices can be implemented in educational settings.

Table 4.

Examples by Coulby (2006) of complex intercultural situations and strategies suggested for enhancing interculturality.

Case	Summary of complex intercultural context(s)	Suggested strategies for interculturality
First case (Finland)	The compulsory teaching of Swedish (the first foreign language) in Finland is an intercultural policy that recognizes the presence and primacy of Swedish speakers (e.g., in the Åland Islands). However, it neglects other groups, such as the Saami speakers in the north and the languages/cultures of more recent immigrant groups like Russian migrant workers in Helsinki, questioning the true inclusiveness of the policy.	Educators should ideally devote classroom time to explore the complex history of interaction (including colonialism, warfare, and gulags) and the rich artistic culture of these groups rather than providing tokenistic, that is, superficial, representations
Second case (Albanian in Athens)	Analyzing Albanian language teaching in Athens requires understanding a complex context: the term 'Albanian' in Greece can refer to Greek-born individuals from Epirus, economic migrants from Albania/Kosovo/Macedonia, or political migrants from those states. They may be Islamic or Greek Orthodox, and their presence is rooted in a complex history, including resistance to Ottoman conquest. The context of Athens is inseparable from its Balkan location and Ottoman legacy, illustrating that interculturalism demands a deep, non-simplistic audit of historical and regional complexities.	Researchers and teachers must perform a "complex audit" of the starting point, identifying the specific historical, religious, and political reasons for a group's presence to ensure the curriculum is part of the resistance to nationalist hegemony.
Third case (Xin Jiang in China)	Understanding education in the Xin Jiang province requires a non-simplistic audit of its status as a frontier land where Chinese domination has been intermittent over millennia, only consolidating in the mid-nineteenth century. The region's indigenous Islamic and Turkic-speaking identity is currently under pressure from state-encouraged mass immigration of Han Chinese, particularly in urban areas where they now outnumber local populations. To comprehend the educational needs of this area, one must acknowledge that they are inseparable from global economic interests, such as oil and gas reserves, and the strategic military competition between China, Russia, and the United States. This case demonstrates that intercultural education cannot be depoliticized, as it is fundamentally shaped by the wider forces of globalization and the control of hydrocarbons	The curriculum should ideally draw on a broad political, economic, and historical literature resources to link local educational needs to wider global forces like the "war on terror" and the strategic control of hydrocarbons.

Source: *Designed by the author*

Regarding these cases, Coulby (2006) argues that educators must move beyond what Palaologou and Dietz (2012) describe as "normative exhortation" and the mere identification of "good practice," and instead fundamentally reconceptualize their educational roles. Through the use of concrete examples, such as those discussed above, that allow for the examination not only of present conditions but also of the sociopolitical and historical forces that have shaped

them (including conquest, slavery, and globalization), educators can transcend a tokenistic treatment of culture. Crucially, Coulby emphasizes that intercultural education is not concerned with “daily life and routines,” which he critically labels the “samosas, saris and steel bands” approach, but with the sustained capacity to promote negotiation between cultures. Rather than foregrounding abstract notions of “openness” or mere “practical proficiency,” this perspective recognizes language as a site of power and education as an inherently partisan practice embedded in historical conflicts. In doing so, interculturality is repositioned as a central, cross-cutting principle informing all areas of knowledge, from medicine to history, rather than as an isolated and depoliticized instructional add-on.

Research on Interculturality in Colombia: Persistent Challenges in 21st-Century ELT Teacher Education

Recent years have witnessed a sustained expansion of research on interculturality in education and communication (Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020; Dervin & Simpson, 2021; Flórez-Montaña et al., 2022). At the international level, this growing body of scholarship has sought to advance understandings of intercultural discourse and communication (Monaghan, 2014), intercultural capital (Pöllman, 2014), intercultural communication (Jackson, 2016; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2014), cultural pluralism, cross-cultural dialogue, and their intersections with identity and critical studies (Chen, 2014; Giorgis, 2017), as synthesized by Castañeda-Trujillo et al. (2023, p. 27). This trajectory confirms that interculturality has evolved beyond a discrete thematic concern and now constitutes an expansive research agenda that remains under active construction. Within this broader international landscape, the Colombian academic community has also demonstrated a growing and sustained interest in the field.

A review of national scholarly production reveals that Colombian research on interculturality in language education has largely developed along a diagnostic trajectory. Over the past decade, the dominant research focus has centered on examining how teacher educators and pre-service teachers conceptualize culture and its role in language learning. As identified by Ramírez-Espinosa (2023), studies on perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes account for approximately 37.5% of recent scholarship, making this the most prominent research category. Findings from this line of inquiry (e.g., Quintana, 2012; Faustino-Ruiz & Patiño-Rojas, 2021) consistently point to a structural tension: while educators acknowledge the importance of culture, their definitions often remain superficial, static, and restricted to visible cultural markers such as traditional (cliche) celebrations, food, and folklore.

Alongside perception-based studies, a second body of research has documented pedagogical experiences aimed at fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC), frequently through multicultural literature and classroom-based interventions (Gómez-Rodríguez, 2014). A third line of inquiry has positioned pre-service teachers as intercultural agents, examining how they enact

intercultural competence through community engagement, mobility programs, or study-abroad experiences. Earlier foundational studies also contributed by analyzing cultural representations in teaching materials, with researchers such as Basabe (2006) and Bonilla (2008) demonstrating how textbooks function as “culture bearers” that often project idealized “Anglo-American utopias” while reinforcing stereotypes of both dominant and minority groups.

Despite the diversification of research foci, several persistent constraints have limited the consolidation of a cohesive intercultural educational model. One of the most salient challenges is the predominance of a transmissionist approach, whereby culture is treated as factual content to be delivered rather than as a set of skills, dispositions, and critical capacities to be developed (Sercu, 2005). This tendency is closely associated with what Rojas-Barreto (2018) describes as a “linguistic eclipse,” in which intercultural dimensions are systematically subordinated to linguistic proficiency due to curricular pressure, standardized outcomes, and textbook-driven instruction. As a result, many pre-service teachers conceptualize culture through what Esteban (2021) terms the “salad dressing” analogy: an optional, decorative addition used to alter the tone of a lesson rather than an integral component of language learning.

Structural and institutional factors further exacerbate these limitations. Intercultural initiatives in higher education are frequently the result of isolated efforts by individual professors rather than coordinated curricular strategies. University programs remain largely organized around rigid, subject-based structures that Ramírez-Espinosa (2025) characterizes as “colonized,” limiting interdisciplinarity and positioning interculturality as an ancillary or “add-on” component. This fragmentation is compounded by gaps in professional development, as many educators report insufficient training to teach or assess intercultural competence and therefore rely on personal intuition or anecdotal experience (Álvarez-Valencia, 2014; Rojas-Barreto, 2018).

A final and particularly critical concern relates to hegemonic cultural hierarchies and identity formation. Several studies warn that, in the absence of a sustained critical turn, intercultural education risks reinforcing perceptions of Anglophone cultures as superior, thereby undermining learners’ own cultural identities (Granados-Beltrán, 2016; Rico-Troncoso, 2021). Under such conditions, interculturality functions merely as a rhetorical “touch-up speech,” masking power asymmetries and social inequalities rather than exposing and interrogating them. Addressing this risk requires a democratic, bottom-up orientation in which local diversity is treated as a curricular resource rather than as an invisible or problematic deviation.

To provide a better synthesis of these trends, the following table summarizes the dominant research categories, recurring conceptual issues, and structural

challenges identified in Colombian scholarship on interculturality in language education, highlighting key sources and their main contributions.

Table 5.

Research trends in Colombian interculturality studies in language education

Key Concept/Situation	Source Citations	Relevant Information from the Sources
Dominant Research Categories	Ramírez-Espinosa (2023)	Identifies four main interests: Perceptions (37.5%), Pedagogical experiences (25%), Pre-service teachers as agents (20.8%), and Theory-based reflections (16.7%).
Textbook Stereotypes	Basabe (2006); Bonilla (2008)	Textbooks act as "culture bearers" that often project an "Anglo-American utopia" and spread stereotypes of minority and dominant groups.
"Salad Dressing" Analogy	Esteban (2021) in Ramírez-Espinosa (2023)	Culture is perceived as an optional "dressing" used to change the mood or "taste" of a class, separate from the "meal" of linguistic content.
Linguistic Eclipse	Rojas-Barreto (2019)	There is a documented relegation of intercultural skills in favor of linguistic proficiency due to syllabus pressure and time constraints.
Curricular Fragmentation	Ramírez-Espinosa (2025)	The subject-based organization of higher education is viewed as a "colonized organization" that restricts flexibility and interdisciplinarity.
Teacher Training Gaps	Rojas-Barreto (2019); Álvarez-Valencia (2014)	Educators report being unsatisfied with their undergraduate training and note that professional development often ignores the cultural component.
Transmission vs. Transformative	Sercu (2005) in Rojas-Barreto (2019)	Teaching is often limited to "transmitting" cultural knowledge (facts) instead of fostering the acquisition of intercultural skills and attitudes.
Need for Critical Turn	Granados-Beltrán (2016); Rico-Troncoso (2021)	Warns against using interculturality as a rhetorical "touch-up speech" to conceal power issues; advocates for uncovering longstanding inequalities.

Source: *Designed by the author*

This analysis indicates that Colombian scholarship on interculturality in language education has reached a high level of diagnostic sophistication, yet it has not fully crystallized into a transformative pedagogical paradigm. Although existing research has effectively mapped perceptions, documented pedagogical experiences, and critically examined cultural representations, it simultaneously exposes persistent structural, curricular, and epistemological constraints that curtail interculturality's educational impact. The continued dominance of transmissionist models, the systematic prioritization of linguistic outcomes over intercultural competencies, and the fragmentation of curricula reveal a pronounced disjunction between progressive academic discourse and institutional practice. As a result, interculturality often remains an ancillary or symbolic component rather than operating as a guiding principle of teacher education. The strategic challenge ahead lies not in producing further rhetorical

commitments to diversity, but in restructuring teacher education programs to embed interculturality transversally, strengthen educators' analytical and methodological capacities, and position power relations, historical processes, and local knowledges at the core of pedagogical practice. Only through such structural and epistemic realignment can interculturality move beyond diagnosis and function as a sustained mechanism for equity, critical engagement, and social transformation within Colombian education systems.

Final remarks

As the analysis presented suggests, interculturality in education has registered sustained and verifiable progress over recent years, particularly within language teacher preparation. By moving beyond reductive associations between culture and national identity, contemporary approaches increasingly promote more grounded, critical, and reflexive understandings of cultural diversity. In the Colombian context, this shift signals a gradual transition from symbolic, discourse-driven acknowledgments of culture toward perspectives that aspire to generate structural and epistemic change. Nevertheless, despite these advances, interculturality has yet to be fully consolidated as a foundational principle within national language teacher education programs.

A first strategic priority concerns the systematic integration of critical language policy analysis and curricular restructuring within teacher education. Intercultural components must move beyond peripheral inclusion and instead enable prospective teachers to interrogate the interdependence of language, culture, power, and society. When embedded consistently and programmatically, such measures can generate a cumulative or "waterfall" effect, whereby educators trained under an intercultural paradigm reproduce and adapt these principles throughout their professional trajectories.

A second priority lies in reorienting intercultural education toward sustained engagement with local sociocultural realities. In the Colombian case, this entails moving beyond an exclusive focus on international or abstract diversity to include in-depth analysis of national dynamics such as forced displacement, linguistic marginalization, territorial inequality, and historical exclusion. Long-term, situated engagement with communities allows pre-service teachers to develop analytically robust understandings of intercultural contexts and mitigates the risk of reducing interculturality to superficial classroom practices. As Coulby (2006) argues, intercultural education must extend beyond the formal classroom and adopt a community-centered pedagogical logic that reflects the sociopolitical realities of postcolonial societies.

A third and decisive line of action concerns the operationalization of interculturality in ELT practice, moving it from declarative intent to routine professional use. For ELT professionals, this implies embedding intercultural analysis into core instructional decisions, not peripheral activities. Concretely, syllabus design can require that each language objective be paired with an explicit sociocultural problema, for example, analyzing how English is used to frame migration, labor, or development in Colombian and international media, rather than limiting culture to holiday celebrations or tourist narratives. In assessment, teachers can replace purely linguistic rubrics with dual-criteria tasks, where students are evaluated both on communicative accuracy and on their ability to identify power relations, silenced voices, or ideological positioning in texts. At the classroom level, case-based instruction offers a low-risk, high-impact strategy: pre-service teachers may examine authentic ELT materials that portray “neutral” global English contexts and contrast them with local testimonies from Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, or displaced communities, assessing whose knowledge is legitimized and whose is omitted. Similarly, supervised community-linked projects, such as collaborating with local schools or NGOs to document linguistic practices in specific regions, allow future teachers to treat interculturality as an analytical tool grounded in evidence, not as a moral slogan. From a managerial standpoint, these practices are scalable, measurable, and compatible with existing curricular structures, provided institutions set clear expectations and accountability mechanisms. When interculturality is handled this way, it ceases to be an aspirational add-on and becomes a functional competence: one that enables ELT professionals to read contexts critically, justify pedagogical choices, and operate responsibly within unequal sociolinguistic environments.

At the policy level, while recent governmental initiatives signal increased institutional attention to interculturality, further empirical research is required to determine whether such measures consolidate substantive intercultural orientations or merely reproduce established discourses under a renewed label, as cautioned by Muñoz (2002). Systematic evaluations of the concrete effects of policies such as Decree 1345 of 2023, Decree 1098 of 2025, and Decree 481 of 2025 remain a necessary priority. Moreover, although language education has functioned as a key entry point for intercultural research, sustained articulation with anthropology and sociology is essential to strengthen analytical depth and prevent conceptual fragmentation.

Equally critical is the need to recalibrate how interculturality is framed within academic discourse. When articulated primarily through normative appeals to openness, respect, or tolerance, interculturality risks being perceived as ideologically diffuse or pedagogically imprecise. Reframing interculturality as an analytical capacity, namely, the ability to explain, critique, and contextualize cultural relations, anchors it more firmly within scholarly and educational practice. Under this orientation, learners are not expected to adopt predefined

attitudes, but to demonstrate analytical rigor, identify power asymmetries, and substantiate interpretations with evidence.

Finally, conceiving interculturality as an ongoing process rather than a final achievement allows education systems to move beyond unrealistic expectations of full inclusion or total equity. From this perspective, intercultural education is less concerned with resolving historical injustices than with ensuring that such injustices are neither erased nor reproduced through pedagogical practice. Approached in these terms, interculturality ceases to function as an aspirational abstraction and instead operates as a pragmatic framework for navigating complexity, inequality, and difference within education systems shaped by enduring structural asymmetries.

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