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Artículo de investigación científica y tecnológica

Unveiling criteria for EFL textbooks through a critical interculturality lens: A proposal for Colombian state-funded schools

Develando criterios para libros de enseñanza del inglés desde una perspectiva de interculturalidad crítica: una propuesta para los colegios públicos colombianos

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the need to unveil criteria for evaluating, selecting, and using English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks from a critical interculturality perspective, focusing on the *sentipensares* from students and teachers in Colombian state-funded schools. The literature revealed different tensions in the relationship between Critical Interculturality and EFL textbooks. Using a qualitative approach, this ongoing documentary research intends to analyze data from in-depth interviews, focus groups, and a Critical Multimodal Thematic Analysis (CMTA) of the *English Please! series*. The preliminary sense-making of this research include insights into how teachers and students perceive cultural representation in EFL textbooks and the identification of tensions between local realities and Eurocentric content. It is anticipated that their *sentipensares* will offer valuable input for understanding and evaluating textbook use. Finally, these findings are expected to support more inclusive, decolonial teaching practices and to lead to the development of critical interculturality criteria for the evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks.

Keywords: critical interculturality; decoloniality; EFL textbooks; textbook analysis; sentipensares.

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora la necesidad de develar criterios para la evaluación, selección y uso de libros de texto de inglés como lengua extranjera desde una perspectiva de interculturalidad crítica, enfocándose en los *sentipensares* de docentes y estudiantes en colegios públicos colombianos. La literatura reveló diversas tensiones en la relación entre la Interculturalidad Crítica y los libros de texto para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera. Mediante un enfoque cualitativo, esta investigación documental en progreso pretende analizar datos provenientes de entrevistas a profundidad, grupos focales y un Análisis Temático Multimodal Crítico (ATMC) de la serie *¡English Please!* Se espera que las anticipaciones de sentido de esta investigación ofrezcan comprensiones sobre cómo docentes y estudiantes perciben la representación cultural en los libros de texto, así como la identificación de tensiones entre las realidades locales y los contenidos eurocéntricos. Se anticipa que sus *sentipensares* aporten insumos valiosos para comprender y evaluar el uso de estos materiales. Finalmente, se prevé que estos hallazgos contribuyan al fortalecimiento de prácticas de enseñanza más inclusivas, decoloniales y a la formulación de criterios de interculturalidad crítica para la evaluación, selección, y uso de libros de texto para la enseñanza del inglés.

Palabras clave: interculturalidad crítica; decolonialidad; libros de texto de inglés; análisis de libros de texto; sentipensares.

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INTRODUCTION

The current research proposal emerges from my personal experience as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher-educator, pre-service teacher at *Universidad de la Amazonía*, and learner across different educational levels. The teaching of EFL plays a pivotal role in fostering intercultural communication and understanding in an increasingly globalized world. However, in many contexts, particularly in Latin America, EFL instruction is heavily influenced by materials that reflect Eurocentric perspectives, often at the expense of local cultures and knowledge systems (Álvarez Valencia, 2014; Núñez-Pardo, 2020a). This issue is especially evident in Colombia, where EFL textbooks tend to prioritize Western norms and cultural narratives over the rich diversity of Colombian cultural contexts (Gómez, 2015). As a result, the integration of local voices and experiences in language teaching materials remains a significant challenge. This article is part of a broader doctoral study that seeks to address this issue by critically analyzing how EFL textbooks can better reflect and respond to the sociocultural realities of EFL learners.

The concept of critical interculturality emerges as a crucial project for challenging the colonial legacies embedded in EFL education (Walsh, 2010, 2013, 2015). Unlike traditional intercultural approaches that focus on fostering understanding between cultures, critical interculturality emphasizes the need to address power imbalances and give voice to underrepresented communities (Castro-Gómez y Grosfoguel, 2007; Walsh, 2009a, 2014; Oviedo-Gómez y Jaramillo-Cárdenas, 2023). This perspective is particularly relevant in Colombia, where the interplay between local and global cultural influences shapes educational practices (Granados-Beltrán, 2016; Álvarez Valencia y Miranda, 2022) yet often marginalizes the cultural heritage and identities of Colombian students.

This study seeks to unveil evaluation, selection, and use criteria for EFL textbooks that reflect the principles of critical interculturality. Specifically, it focuses on revealing criteria that address the needs and perspectives of both students and teachers in state-funded secondary schools in Florencia, Caquetá. By incorporating a critical interculturality lens, the study aims to challenge the dominance of foreign cultural content in EFL textbooks, promoting a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the sociocultural realities of Colombian learners (Núñez-Pardo, 2022). This approach aligns with the call for a decolonial shift in education (Quijano, 1992; Mignolo, 2007; Tlostanova y Mignolo, 2009; Zárate Pérez, 2014; Ortiz-Ocaña, 2017; Fandiño-Parra, 2021) which emphasizes the need to question dominant knowledge systems and integrate the experiences of historically subaltern groups.

Previous research has highlighted several gaps in the evaluation and use of EFL textbooks in Colombia. Studies by Rico (2010, 2012) and Gómez (2015) indicate that despite some progress in incorporating cultural content, many textbooks remain limited in their representation of cultural diversity. Moreover, existing studies often focus on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) without fully addressing the critical aspects of interculturality that challenge hegemonic narratives (Sercu, 2005). By focusing on teachers' and students' *sentipensares*, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how critical interculturality can be applied in the evaluation of EFL textbooks, moving beyond mere cultural representation to actively question power dynamics and promote social transformation. Furthermore, while much of the existing literature on textbook analysis has centered on their use in classroom settings, less attention has been paid to the processes of evaluation and selection, particularly in state-funded educational contexts where these decisions are often top-down and detached from local realities (Núñez-Pardo, 2020b, Oviedo-Gómez, 2024). This lack of critical criteria for evaluating and selecting EFL materials results in textbooks that frequently fail to reflect the sociocultural contexts of learners and teachers, thus reinforcing dominant narratives and limiting pedagogical relevance.

By addressing research questions and the subsequent sub-questions and objectives (see table 1), the study aims to provide practical guidelines for educators, policymakers, and textbook developers who seek to adopt a more critical, inclusive, and culturally responsive approach in EFL teaching. The findings are intended to support the evaluation, selection, and use of textbooks that not only teach the English language but also foster critical thinking and interculturality among learners, contributing to the broader goal of decolonizing education in Colombia.

Table 1. Research questions and objectives.

Title
Critical Interculturality criteria for evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks
Research Question
What evaluation, selection, and use criteria for EFL textbooks are unveiled from students' and teachers' *sentipensares* regarding critical interculturality aspects in the *English, Please! Series*?
General Objective
To unveil evaluation, selection, and use criteria for EFL textbooks from students' and teachers' *sentipensares* regarding critical interculturality aspects in the *English, Please! Series* to subvert ELT hegemony.
Subsidiary Questions & Specific Objectives
Subsidiary Question 1: What are students' and teachers' sentipensares of critical interculturality in the English, Please! Series used at secondary state-funded schools in Florencia, Caquetá from 2016-2024? Specific Objective 1: To examine students' and teachers' sentipensares of critical interculturality in the English, Please! Series used at secondary state-funded schools in Florencia, Caquetá from 2016-2024 to establish their awareness of coloniality in the evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks.
Subsidiary Question 2: What aspects of critical interculturality are uncovered from a Critical Multimodal Thematic Analysis (CMTA) of the English, Please! Series used at secondary state-funded schools in Florencia, Caquetá from 2016-2024? Specific Objective 2: To analyse critical interculturality aspects from a Critical Multimodal Thematic Analysis (CMTA) of the English, Please! Series used at secondary state-funded schools in Florencia, Caquetá from 2016-2024 to determine coloniality discourses in the evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks.
Subsidiary Question 3: What coloniality vestiges are evinced in the English, Please! Series used at secondary state-funded schools in Florencia, Caquetá from 2016-2024? Specific Objective 3: To identify coloniality vestiges in the English, Please! Series used at secondary state funded schools in Florencia, Caquetá from 2016-2024 to recognize decoloniality discourses in the evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks.
Preliminary sense-making
- Disconnect between textbook content and the cultural realities of students and teachers in both urban and rural contexts. -Lack of regional representation, particularly from Caquetá and Amazonian cultures, in the iconography and themes of the textbooks. -Absence of student and teacher participation in the evaluation and selection of materials reinforces feelings of exclusion and disempowerment.

Literature review

Critical interculturality and EFL textbooks

The concept of interculturality has evolved significantly over the past decades, with scholars moving from a focus on intercultural communication to a more critical approach that addresses power relations and social inequalities (Tubino, 2004; Guilherme y Dietz, 2015; Dietz, 2023). Critical interculturality, as defined by Walsh (2009a), involves recognizing the political, social, and ethical dimensions of intercultural interactions. It emphasizes the importance of challenging the dominance of Western cultural norms and advocating for the inclusion of marginalized voices in educational spaces (Castro-Gómez y Grosfoguel, 2007; Tubino, 2005, 2013).

In the context of EFL education, critical interculturality requires a shift away from teaching materials that reinforce stereotypes and hierarchical relationships between cultures. Traditional EFL textbooks often present a narrow view of culture that overlooks local identities (Sercu, 2005; Amerian y Tajabadi, 2020). Studies in the Colombian context reveal that many textbooks continue to emphasize Western norms and values, reinforcing a sense of cultural superiority that conflicts with the diverse backgrounds of Colombian learners (Gómez, 2015; Núñez-Pardo, 2020b). This reinforces what Walsh (2009a) describes as the coloniality of being (Walsh, 2009a, 2009b, 2013), where the cultural representations in textbooks position one way of being as superior to others.

The concept of critical interculturality has emerged as a response to these issues. Critical interculturality emphasizes the need to decolonize education by recognizing and valuing the cultural knowledge of peripheral groups (Castro-Gómez y Grosfoguel, 2007; Quijano, 1992, 2000, 2014). In the context of EFL textbooks, this means considering pedagogical materials that promote an understanding of both the local and the global (Kramsch, 1998), allowing learners to critically reflect on their own identities and the cultural content they encounter.

Sentipensares

While not inherent to the framework of critical interculturality, the integration of *sentipensares*, a term that encapsulates the fusion of thinking and feeling, integrating both reason and emotion, is central to this study, as it allows for a deeper engagement with the lived experiences and reflective dimensions of teachers and students (Fals Borda, 2009; Escobar, 2014; Amador Baquiro, 2021). This concept offers a broader understanding of participants' perspectives by highlighting the holistic nature of their experiences, beliefs, and practices. *Sentipensares* moves beyond the binary separation of mind and body, valuing the emotional, cultural, and cognitive dimensions of human existence.

The notion of *sentipensares* has been significantly discussed by Latin American scholars such as Colombian Orlando Fals Borda, who first introduced the term to describe how communities in the Colombian Caribbean, particularly those living along riverbanks, understood and navigated the world (Fals Borda, 2009). In these communities, knowledge was not merely intellectual or theoretical but deeply rooted in their daily lived experiences (*vivencias*), collective emotions, and cultural practices. Galeano (as cited in Escobar, 2015) expanded on this idea, describing *sentipensares* as the ability to merge mind and body, reason and emotion, in the pursuit of a more authentic understanding of life.

In the context of EFL education in Colombia, exploring teachers' and students' *sentipensares* is particularly crucial when evaluating or analyzing textbooks through a critical interculturality lens. This study highlights

the importance of capturing the emotional and cognitive dimensions of how educators and learners engage with textbooks that often perpetuate Eurocentric perspectives. By integrating *sentipensares* into the research, this study aims to illuminate the complex, embodied experiences of teachers and students, particularly in how they interpret, experience, and challenge the use of EFL textbooks in their local settings. This concept provides a pathway for understanding how global norms in English-language teaching intersect with local cultural realities. Moreover, incorporating *sentipensares* aligns with broader decolonial perspectives that challenge traditional hierarchies of knowledge and representation in education. In doing so, this research offers the opportunity to develop new criteria for evaluating, selecting, and using EFL textbooks that respect and honor the holistic being of teachers and students, balancing mind, body, and heart (Fals Borda, 2009; Escobar, 2014, 2015) in the pursuit of a more inclusive and culturally responsive education.

Related studies

As part of this doctoral research, I have already identified seven key tensions that reflect the complexities and contradictions in the intersection between critical interculturality and EFL textbooks (see Oviedo-Gómez, 2024). The review of 94 documents including national and international journals, dissertations, and book chapters from both the last decade and seminal authors permitted to unveil the following synthesized tensions:

The first tension relates to the predominance of quantitative over qualitative research, which shadows students' and teachers' voices (Ajideh y Panahi, 2016; Cardozo y Lozano, 2020; Granados-Beltrán, 2018a, 2018b; Isnaini *et al.*, 2019; Lebedeva *et al.*, 2021; Núñez-Pardo, 2020b, 2022; Ortiz Rivero, 2022; Rincón, 2019; Rosyidi y Purwati, 2017; Sercu, 2005; Su, 2016; Syairofi *et al.*, 2023; Widodo *et al.*, 2018; Xiang y Yenika-Agbaw, 2021;). Building on this tension, Oviedo-Gómez (2024) points out that much of the research on EFL textbooks has historically focused on quantitative analyses, such as the frequency of cultural references or the number of instances of specific cultural topics. This quantitative emphasis often comes at the expense of understanding the subjective experiences of the teachers and students who use these materials. As a result, the voices of textbook users are often overshadowed, leaving a gap in understanding how cultural content impacts learners' identities and perceptions. This tension suggests a need for more qualitative research approaches that prioritize the lived experiences and perceptions of both teachers and students. This focus aligns with the goal of the study of capturing the perspectives of Colombian teachers and students to develop criteria that reflect their specific needs and realities.

A second tension that emerges from the literature is the coexistence of two contrasting views of culture in EFL education (Oviedo-Gómez, 2024). On one hand, a superficial view reduces culture to visible elements such as food, holidays, and customs; on the other, a deeper perspective acknowledges underlying values, belief systems, and power dynamics. Numerous scholars have emphasized the limitations of the former and the critical need for the latter, particularly within pedagogical materials that seek to foster intercultural understanding (Álvarez Valencia y Bonilla Medina, 2009; Álvarez Guayara, 2019; Amerian y Tajabadi, 2020; Bandura y Sercu, 2005; Gómez, 2015; Hall, 1976; Itkonen *et al.*, 2015; Kramsch, 1998; K. Y. Lee, 2009; Larrea-Espinar y Layne y Lipponen, 2016; Núñez-Pardo, 2018, 2020a; Oviedo-Gómez y Rincón, 2019; Oviedo-Gómez y Jaramillo-Cárdenas, 2023; Raigón-Rodríguez, 2019; Rico, 2010, 2012; Walsh, 2007; Yim, 2003). These studies argue that relying solely on surface-level cultural content not only reinforces stereotypes (D'Amore y Díaz, 2020) but also prevents learners from critically engaging with the social, historical, and political dimensions of intercultural encounters. Addressing this tension requires textbooks that integrate contextualized cultural narratives, encouraging students to critically analyze the power

relations inherent in intercultural interactions.

A third tension identified across the literature relates to the hegemonic cultural representations embedded in many EFL textbooks. These materials frequently privilege the norms, values, and lifestyles of English-speaking countries, implicitly positioning them as superior cultural models to emulate. This trend reflects the broader logic of the coloniality of knowledge, wherein Western epistemologies and worldviews are elevated over those of non-Western societies. Scholars have critically examined this issue, highlighting how such portrayals marginalize local identities and reinforce cultural hierarchies within educational content (Ajideh y Panahi, 2016; Álvarez-Valencia y Le-Gal, 2019; Bernardes *et al.*, 2019; Gómez, 2015; Henao Mejía *et al.*, 2019; Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Lund, 2007; Núñez-Pardo, 2018, 2020b, 2021, 2022; Rincón, 2019; Rosyidi y Purwati, 2017; Sándorová, 2016; Sobkowiak, 2016; Soto-Molina y Méndez, 2020; Tajeddin y Ghaffaryan, 2020; Valencia-Giraldo, 2006). These representations often lead to cultural alienation among students, as they see their own cultural experiences silenced in favor of foreign ideals. As a result, learners can develop a sense of inferiority and detachment from the language-learning process. Based on Oviedo-Gómez (2024), confronting this tension requires the development of materials that genuinely include and validate local cultural perspectives, allowing students to connect language learning with their own identities and sociocultural contexts.

A fourth tension identified in the literature concerns the prevalence of uncritical literacy practices in EFL textbooks. Although many of these materials incorporate reading and writing activities, they frequently prioritize surface-level comprehension and language form over critical engagement with content. As a result, students are seldom encouraged to question cultural assumptions, analyze embedded ideologies, or reflect on the social implications of the texts they read. This lack of critical orientation limits learners' ability to recognize and challenge stereotypes or biased representations of culture (Oviedo-Gómez, 2024). Scholars have emphasized that fostering critical literacy is crucial for helping students interrogate dominant narratives and develop a more reflective and socially conscious stance (Anvedsen, 2012; Arribas Lozano, 2021; Cassany y Luke, 2012; Cassany, 2015; Casstellà, 2010; Chan y Cheuk, 2020; Mora, 2014; Morrell, 2012; Núñez-Pardo, 2018, 2020b, 2021, 2022; Trigos-Carrillo *et al*., 2021; Valencia-Giraldo, 2006; Zhang, 2017, 2018). Addressing this tension requires the inclusion of pedagogical strategies that actively promote critical thinking and position learners as agents capable of questioning and transforming the cultural meanings they encounter in language education.

A fifth and deeply rooted tension identified in the literature is the ongoing prevalence of the coloniality of being in EFL textbooks. This concept refers to the subtle yet persistent ways in which colonial hierarchies, particularly those related to "gender, race, social class, and capacity" (Oviedo-Gómez, 2024, p. 65), are reproduced through the content and imagery of educational materials. Studies have shown that textbooks frequently depict stereotyped roles, racialized representations, and class-based assumptions that reflect and reinforce Eurocentric norms (Walsh, 2009a, 2010; Viaña *et al.*, 2010; Benham y Mozaheb, 2013; Song, 2013; Pereira, 2013; Hall, 2014; J. F. Lee, 2014, 2019; Syarifuddin, 2014; Nofall y Qawar, 2015; Sánchez-Fontalvo *et al.*, 2015; Su, 2016; Castañeda-Peña, 2018; Núñez-Pardo, 2018, 2020a, 2021; Cardozo y Lozano, 2020; Clawson y Kegler, 2000; D'Amore y Díaz, 2020; Canale y Furtado, 2021; Suwarno *et al.*, 2021; Xiang y Yenika-Agbaw, 2021; Ortiz Rivero, 2022; Mikander, 2023). This tension has significant implications for how students see themselves in relation to the global community. If textbooks consistently portray certain identities as more valid or desirable, they contribute to a sense of cultural inferiority among marginalized groups. Addressing this issue requires EFL materials that represent diverse identities in more equitable ways, fostering an environment where students from all backgrounds can see themselves reflected positively in their learning materials.

A sixth tension discussed in the literature centers on the influence of bilingual policy hegemony in EFL textbooks in Colombia. The national push for bilingualism has often resulted in the selection of materials aligned with standardized English language goals, which are typically shaped by international publishing standards rather than local pedagogical needs (Canagarajah, 2005; Sercu, 2005; De Mejía, 2006; Valencia-Giraldo, 2006; González-Moncada, 2007; Usma Wilches, 2009; Correa y Usma Wilches, 2013; Bonilla-Carvajal y Tejada-Sánchez, 2016; Gómez Sara, 2017; Miranda *et al.*, 2018; Miranda y Valencia-Giraldo, 2019; Mora et al., 2019; Li y Xue, 2021; Miranda, 2021; Núñez-Pardo, 2021, 2022; Morales Llano, 2022). This top-down approach to bilingual education reinforces a dependence on foreign pedagogical models, limiting opportunities for teachers to adapt materials to better reflect local realities. As Oviedo-Gómez (2024) argues, the hegemony of bilingual policies often means that the rich cultural and linguistic plurality of Colombia is not adequately reflected in EFL materials. This tension suggests the need for a more context-sensitive approach to EFL textbook development, where local educators are involved in the creation and selection of materials that reflect the plurality of local cultural experiences.

A final tension identified in the literature relates to the controlled evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks, a dynamic that Oviedo-Gómez (2024) directly links to the research gap this study aims to address. In many Colombian schools, the process of selecting EFL materials is largely governed by ministerial policies and publishing house decisions, often without considering the specific cultural and educational needs of local learners. This centralized approach restricts teachers' autonomy and limits the incorporation of materials that align with critical interculturality principles, such as the inclusion of local cultural content and the promotion of critical literacy (Álvarez Valencia, 2016, 2021, 2023; Bautista Moyano, 2019; Byrd, 2001; Cunningsworth, 1995; Granados-Beltrán, 2018a, 2018b; Grant, 1987; Harmer, 2007; Hsiang *et al*., 2022; Isik, 2018; Littlejohn, 2012; Litz, 2000; Masuhara y Tomlinson, 2008; Núñez-Pardo, 2020b, 2021, 2022; Stec, 2021; Syairofi *et al.*, 2023; Ur, 1996). Addressing this issue requires a shift toward more participatory evaluation processes that empower educators to select materials grounded in their own realities and aligned with the goals of critical interculturality.

As a result, this study aims to address this gap by providing criteria for evaluating, selecting, and using EFL textbooks that take into consideration the voices of teachers and students, prioritize cultural relevance, and promote critical engagement with cultural content. This approach emphasizes the need of including local stakeholders in the evaluation and selection process, ensuring that the materials used in classrooms are more closely aligned with the sociocultural realities of local learners.

METHODOLOGY

This doctoral research will employ a qualitative research design framed within the socio-critical paradigm, which emphasizes the role of research in challenging social inequalities and promoting social transformation (Kincheloe y McLaren, 2005, 2012). This approach is particularly suitable for studying critical interculturality, as it allows for a deep exploration of participants' *sentipensares* regarding the use of EFL textbooks in the classroom. The socio-critical paradigm supports the study's focus on revealing hidden power dynamics (Denzin y Lincoln, 2012) in educational materials and advocating for a more equitable approach to language teaching.

This qualitative approach is particularly well-suited to exploring the complex cultural dynamics present in EFL textbooks, as it allows for the analysis of both content and the *sentipensares* of textbook users. The use of the CMTA will provide a comprehensive view of how textbooks represent culture, going beyond simple textual analysis to include visual and contextual elements. By incorporating both teachers' and students'

perceptions, the study will contribute to a more holistic understanding of the cultural impact of EFL materials in Colombian classrooms. Finally, this methodology is aligned with the focus of the study on critical interculturality, as it seeks to reveal the ways in which EFL textbooks may reinforce or challenge existing power structures and cultural hierarchies. The results will provide valuable insights into how EFL materials can be evaluated and selected to better align with the sociocultural realities of local learners.

Participants

This study involves multiple kinds of participants. First, four EFL teachers working in state-funded schools from Florencia, Caquetá, were selected based on the findings of an exploratory survey. These educators, 2 from rural and 2 from urban areas, are currently teaching from 9th to 11th grades and regularly incorporate the *English, Please! series* into their practices. Moreover, the study includes a group of 6 to 7 students from each of the participating schools in four different focus groups. Importantly, the textbooks themselves, *English, Please! Fast Track 1, 2, and 3,* published by Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia (MEN, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c), are also treated as participants in the analysis. Following the perspective of Cohen et al. (2018), participants in educational research may extend beyond individuals to include texts and other resources, particularly when these are central to the research.

Data collection methods

Data is collected through in-depth interviews with EFL teachers and focus groups with the corresponding sample of students from state-funded schools in Florencia, Caquetá. The selection of participants involves purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015), targeting teachers with experience using the *English Please! series* and those willing to engage in reflection on their teaching practices. Focus groups are organized to include a diverse sample of students, representing both urban and rural backgrounds, to capture a wide range of perspectives on how the EFL textbooks might address critical interculturality.

In-depth interviews are conducted to gather rich, narrative data about teachers' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions (Creswell, 2007). These interviews focus on open-ended questions designed to elicit teachers' views on the content of the *English Please! series* and their experiences using these materials in the classroom. Focus groups with students are organized to create a space for students to share their *sentipensares* of how the textbooks reflect their cultural realities and how they relate to the materials presented in class (Tong *et al*., 2007; Cohen *et al*., 2018; Santhosh *et al.*, 2021;). Table 2 presents the methodological route that guides this research.

Table 2. Methodological route.

Moments	Activities	Techniques	Data gathering instruments	Purpose	Expected results
Selecting the participants	Identifying the potential participants for the research.	Exploratory survey	Questionnaire	To select the potential participants for the research.	List of participants
Sensitising	Informing the participants about their role in the research.	Informed consent	Consent letter form	To invite potential participants to become part of the study. To inform the participants about their role in the research.	Consent letter signed

Designing	Designing the in-depth interview for the EFL teachers. Designing the focus group interviews for the EFL students. Design the matrix to analyse the EFL textbook.	In-depth interviews Focus groups CMTA	Guiding questions Guiding questions Matrix for the analysis of the EFL textbooks.	To design the in-depth and the focus group interviews for teachers and students. To design the matrix to analyse the EFL textbook.	Interview protocol with questions. Focus group protocol with questions. Matrix to analyse the EFL textbook.
Implementing	Conducting in-depth and focus group interviews with EFL teachers and students. Registering the information in the matrix for the analysis of the EFL textbook.	In-depth interviews. Focus group interviews CMTA	Guiding questions Matrix for the analysis of the EFL textbook.	To conduct the in-depth and focus group interviews. To register the information in the matrix for the analysis of the EFL textbooks.	Video recording of the in-depth and focus group interviews. Registry of the information in the matrix for the analysis of the EFL textbook.
Analysing	Analysing the information from the in-depth, focus group interviews and the matrix thorough the CMTA.	In-depth interviews Focus group interviews CMTA	Transcriptions of the in-depth and focus group interviews. Matrix for the analysis of the EFL textbook.	To triangulate the information collected from the in-depth, focus group interviews, and the matrix through the CMTA.	Analysis of the CMTA from in-depth, focus group interviews, and the thematic analysis.
Unveiling criteria	Unveiling critical interculturality criteria for evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks.	In-depth interviews Focus group interviews CMTA	Transcriptions of the in-depth and focus group interviews. Matrix for the analysis of the EFL textbook.	To unveil critical interculturality criteria for evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks.	Critical interculturality criteria for evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks.

Data analysis procedures

Data analysis will be conducted using Critical Multimodal Thematic Analysis (CMTA), a method developed and proposed by the author of this study. This approach combines multimodal analysis and thematic analysis to interpret both the textual and visual elements of the *English Please! Fast Track 1, 2,* and *3* provided by Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia (2016a, 2016b, 2016c). This method enables a comprehensive exploration of how cultural messages are embedded in the textbooks and how such representations are perceived by both teachers and students (Álvarez Valencia, 2016). From this perspective, multimodal analysis supports this method by examining how meaning is constructed through the interaction of various communicative modes, such as visuals, layout, iconography, and typography, rather than relying solely on textual content (Álvarez Valencia, 2016, 2021, 2023; Bezemer y Jewitt, 2010; Kress, 2012; Machin, 2016; Stec, 2021;). To guide this process, multimodal frameworks offer procedures for analyzing educational materials with attention to their semiotic resources. Complementing this, thematic analysis allows for the identification of recurrent patterns and concepts that emerge from qualitative data (Maguire y Delahunt, 2017). To that end, these elements will be analyzed in the different units from the *English Please! 1, 2, and 3*. Altogether, the CMTA provides a rigorous and context-sensitive framework to analyze the presence of critical intercultural dimensions in the EFL textbooks used in secondary schools.

The analysis process will involve four moments. First, the transcription of in-depth interviews and focus groups verbatim, ensuring that participants' voices are accurately captured. This is essential for maintaining the integrity of the data and enabling a detailed thematic analysis. Second, coding and thematic analysis (Braun y Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi *et al*., 2013; Maguire y Delahunt, 2017). This process will involve identifying key themes related to critical interculturality, such as the representation of local versus foreign cultures, the presence of cultural stereotypes, and opportunities for critical reflection. Third, the CMTA of textbooks, in which the *English Please! series* will be analyzed using a matrix to explore how intercultural aspects are constructed through the interaction of textual and visual modes.

The analysis will focus on elements such as cultural representations, symbolic imagery, and depictions of intercultural interactions, drawing on multimodal frameworks (Bezemer y Jewitt, 2010; Kress, 2012; Machin, 2016) to interpret how meaning is conveyed beyond mere language. Finally, the findings from the in-depth interviews, focus groups, and textbook analysis will be triangulated. This process will ensure that the identified themes are supported by multiple sources of data (Denzin y Lincoln, 2012), guaranteeing the reliability and the validity of the study.

Ethical considerations

This research adheres to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants. Informed consents are obtained from all the teachers and students involved in the study, with particular attention paid to ensuring that students understand the purpose and voluntary nature of their participation (Mackey y Gass, 2005). Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research process, and pseudonyms and codes (e.g., *TP*=Teacher participant, *SR*=Rural Student, *US*=Urban Student) will be used to protect the identities of participants. Furthermore, member checking will be employed to ensure that the participants' perspectives are accurately represented in the final analysis.

Preliminary sense-making

Preliminary insights drawn from in-depth interviews with teachers and focus groups with students suggest a growing disconnection between the cultural representations embedded in the *English, Please!* textbook series and the lived experiences of its direct users. Both teachers and students, from urban and rural contexts alike, point to a noticeable absence of their own realities in the book. One teacher (TP1) remarked that "los libros carecen de temáticas que correspondan a nuestro contexto", while a student (RS3) echoed this by noting that "los libros contienen muchas culturas que nosotros no conocemos… sería chévere que tratara temas más colombianos, más regionales".

This cultural mismatch extends to the imagery and visual discourse of the books, which frequently feature characters with "pinta de gringo" (TP3) or scenes more reflective of North American life than of rural Colombia. According to another student (RS4), this disconnect produces a barrier: "eso hace que haya como una barrera… nosotros no somos esos, no nos representan esas imágenes". The sense of exclusion intensifies in cases such as the mislabeling of Caquetá as "Vaupés" on a map, which several students interpreted as deliberate. One student (US4) emphatically stated, "me parece una ofensa… una falta de respeto hacia nosotros, los caquetequeños". These testimonies, quoted here in their original Spanish to preserve their expressiveness and contextual meaning, anticipate a critical need for curricular materials that affirm peripheral identities, especially in regions historically relegated by centralized educational models.

A second layer of anticipation emerges around student engagement and the affective experience of using the textbook. While some learners described the book as “chévere” or “entretenido” (US1, RS1), many felt its content lacked relevance and emotional depth. Themes like environmentalism or Colombian cultural icons appeared, but often in a generalized, superficial way that failed to connect with the specificities of rural life or local histories. Teachers noted that although the series was a great support for their teaching practice (TP3), it remained framed by an external and non-local lens, with limited space for contextual adaptation or critical reflection. Moreover, both students and teachers highlighted the lack of opportunities to evaluate or select the materials they are expected to use.

As one student (US2) pointed out, “hasta ahorita siento que es la primera oportunidad que tenemos como de hablar sobre el libro”. In light of these experiences, participants envision future materials that are not only more representative and regionally grounded, but also interactive, multimodal, and accessible, “que pudieran estar de manera virtual… y que se pudiera interactuar más con el libro” (TP4). Together, these initial *sentipensares* anticipate a shift from prescriptive textbook adoption to a more inclusive, participatory, and decolonial approach to EFL material design and implementation.

DISCUSSION

The framework of this research is built on the premise that critical interculturality offers a necessary perspective for evaluating, selecting, and using EFL textbooks in Colombian state-funded schools. By proposing criteria informed by this lens, the study aims to address the longstanding imbalance in the representation of cultures within EFL textbooks, which often prioritize Eurocentric perspectives. Through the exploration of teachers’ and students’ *sentipensares*, their embodied, emotional, and intellectual responses, this research seeks to capture the complex dynamics of how these pedagogical materials are perceived and engaged with. The proposal underscores that addressing the cultural disconnect between foreign textbooks and local contexts is critical for fostering more inclusive language education practices that are relevant to Colombian learners.

A key element in this discussion is the role that textbooks play in shaping cultural identity within the classroom. Current EFL textbooks often offer a limited portrayal of culture, reducing it to surface-level elements such as food, festivals, and customs, which do not encourage students to critically engage with the broader social and political contexts of language learning. This study intends to advance the idea that textbooks must move beyond these superficial representations to address deeper issues such as identity, power, and social justice. By unveiling critical interculturality criteria, the research will explore how EFL textbooks can become sociocultural mediations for critical reflection and transformative learning, encouraging students to question dominant cultural narratives and value their own cultural backgrounds within the global context of English Language Teaching (ELT) education.

Moreover, this proposal positions itself within the larger decolonial project of reshaping educational practices to reflect more equitable and inclusive knowledge systems. The examination of EFL textbook selection processes in Colombian schools will be key in challenging the coloniality of knowledge that persists in current practices. The active involvement of teachers and students in the evaluation process is essential to ensuring that textbooks are not only pedagogically but also culturally relevant. This research will explore how participatory approaches to textbook evaluation can empower educators and learners alike, fostering a greater sense of ownership over the materials used in the classroom. By proposing a shift toward critical interculturality in textbook evaluation, selection, and use, this research seeks to contribute to the transformation of ELT in Colombia into a more inclusive and culturally responsive practice.

CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted the importance of unveiling critical interculturality criteria for evaluating, selecting, and using EFL textbooks in Colombian state-funded schools. The exploration of teachers' and students' *sentipensares*, their lived experiences, emotions, and cognitive reflections, might provide invaluable insights into how EFL materials are perceived and engaged with in the classroom. By incorporating critical interculturality as a lens, this research emphasizes the need to challenge Eurocentric perspectives prevalent in many EFL textbooks and to promote the inclusion of diverse cultural voices that reflect the local realities of Colombian learners. The literature review also shed light on existing tensions in the intersection between critical interculturality and EFL textbooks, calling for materials that better align with decolonial goals, such as fostering cultural diversity and integrating local knowledge systems.

This research contributes to the broader decolonial discourse in education by offering a framework for developing criteria that honor the holistic nature of learners' and educators' experiences, balancing the emotional, cultural, and intellectual aspects of education. Through qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, and CMTA, this study aims to capture the complex ways in which teachers and students navigate the evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks. The further findings of this research might subvert the hegemony of foreign educational models in ELT and foster a more equitable and context-sensitive approach to education. Therefore, unveiling these critical interculturality criteria is not only necessary but urgent to democratize material selection and ensure that textbooks foster meaningful-situated learning experiences.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

The authors declare that during the execution of this work and writing of the article, no personal or unintentional interests, including misconduct or values other than those normally and ethically held in research, have influenced their participation.

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