Envisioning Pre-service English teacher education in Colombia as political action

Visualizando la formación inicial de los profesores de inglés como acción política

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Visualizando a formação inicial dos professores de inglês como ação política

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Abstract: This reflective article explores the need to revise the education of pre-service English teachers to place critical and political dimensions as central components in the education of future teachers. The author presents a brief critical overview of some key historical events in Colombia that have taken place mainly during the last sixty years. Two national educational proposals that aim to promote peaceful human relations and knowledge of the country's historically violent past (Cátedra para la Paz and Estándares de Competencias Ciudadanas) are also described. Two complementary approaches to English teacher education are discussed as possible alternatives to enacting teacher education from a political and critical stance (Teacher Education for Social Justice and Critical Teacher Education). Finally, three trends in English teaching and research in Colombia are described as a way to illustrate some of the ways in which different scholars have enacted English teaching as part of a political and critical endeavor. The author concludes that in order to contribute to a more just, equitable, and peaceful country, pre-service English teacher programs must prepare prospective teachers committed to a process of social, cultural, and political transformation of the local realities of Colombia.

Keywords: Pre-service teacher education; Critical teacher education; Political teacher education; English teaching.

Resumen: Este artículo reflexivo discute la necesidad de revisar la educación de los futuros maestros de inglés para ubicar las dimensiones críticas y políticas como componentes centrales de la formación. La autora presenta una breve mirada crítica sobre algunos hechos históricos clave de Colombia, que han tenido lugar principalmente durante los últimos sesenta años. También describe dos propuestas educativas nacionales que tienen como objetivo promover las relaciones humanas pacíficas y el conocimiento del pasado histórico del país (Cátedra para la Paz y Estándares de Competencias Ciudadanas). Además, discute dos enfoques complementarios para la formación inicial de profesores de inglés como posibles alternativas que plantean la formación docente desde

una postura política y crítica (Educación docente para la justicia social y Formación docente crítica). Finalmente, describe tres tendencias en la enseñanza e investigación del inglés en Colombia a manera de ilustración sobre las formas en que diferentes académicos han representado la enseñanza del inglés como parte de un esfuerzo por posicionar la enseñanza de la lengua desde un enfoque político y crítico. La autora concluye que para contribuir a la construcción de un país más justo, equitativo y pacífico, los programas de formación inicial de profesores deben preparar futuros docentes comprometidos con el proceso de transformación social, cultural y política de las realidades locales del país.

Palabras clave: Formación inicial de profesores; Formación de profesores crítica; Formación política de profesores; Enseñanza del inglés.

Resumo: Este artigo reflexivo discute a necessidade de revisar a educação dos futuros professores de inglês para situar as dimensões críticas e políticas como componentes centrais da formação. A autora apresenta um breve olhar crítico sobre alguns fatos históricos chave da Colômbia que ocorreram principalmente durante os últimos sessenta anos. Também descreve duas propostas educativas nacionais que têm como objetivo promover as relações humanas pacíficas e o conhecimento do passado histórico do país (*Cátedra para la Paz* e *Estándares de Competencias Ciudadanas*). Além disso, discute dois enfoques complementários para a formação inicial de professores de inglês como possíveis alternativas que concebem a formação docente sob uma postura política e crítica (Educação docente para a justiça social e Formação docente crítica). Finalmente, descreve três tendências no ensino e pesquisa do inglês na Colômbia como ilustração sobre as formas nas quais diferentes pesquisadores representam o ensino do inglês como parte de um esforço para posicionar o ensino da língua a partir de um enfoque político e crítico. A autora conclui que, para contribuir à construção de um país mais justo, equitativo e pacífico, os programas de formação inicial de professores devem preparar futuros docentes comprometidos com o processo de transformação social, cultural e política das realidades locais do país.

Palavras-chave: Formação inicial de professores; Formação crítica de professores; Formação política de professores; Ensino de inglês.

Introduction

Education, both in general and teacher education specifically, is inherently political. Knowledge about education is influenced by power dynamics and is never neutral, apolitical, or unbiased. All forms of knowledge carry the imprint of power (Cochran-Smith, 2001). Politics in classrooms are intertwined with the micro-politics of everyday life, encompassing the choices and decisions made by teachers. It involves acknowledging small triumphs and defeats, winners and losers, as well as addressing issues such as homophobia and its victims. Furthermore, it involves valuing, recognizing, and learning from or disregarding someone else's language. It encompasses taking action to save the planet and creating opportunities for social change that can improve the everyday lives of students and those around them. However, Giroux and McLaren (1986) argue that traditional teacher education often portrays classroom life as an isolated world, detached from external realities, and fails to acknowledge its social construction, historical context, and perpetuation of institutionalized relationships of class, gender, and race. Language teaching is not exempt from this critique. It is often seen as an apolitical endeavor, distanced from the social, cultural, and historical realities of learners and teachers, as well as their problems, motivations, aspirations, and needs (Levine, 2020).
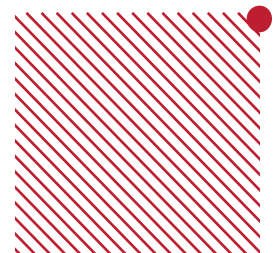
Within the Colombian context, several scholars have noted that teacher education programs have traditionally focused on narrow, instrumental, and apolitical visions of language, language learning, and teaching. They have primarily emphasized traditional technical aspects of language teaching (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016; Cárdenas *et al.*, 2010; Cárdenas Ramos, 2009; Sierra Piedrahita, 2016). This approach contrasts with the present globalized world, which is characterized by shifting social, economic, historical, and cultural landscapes, as well as recent mobility patterns that challenge the role

and status of English (Álvarez Valencia *et al.*, 2016; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). In such a globalized landscape, speakers of any language can employ it to advocate for social justice, recognition, and freedom or, conversely, to perpetuate alienation, prejudice, and discrimination (Pessoa & de Urzêda Freitas, 2012). In this context, pre-service teacher education programs emerge as ideal platforms for discussing and reflecting on alternative approaches to English teaching from critical and political perspectives.

This chapter argues for the necessity of reevaluating the education of pre-service English teachers to prioritize critical and political dimensions within teacher education programs. Firstly, it provides a brief overview of violence in Colombia and highlights the most recent peace agreement signed with one of the country's oldest armed groups, emphasizing the role of education in this context. Subsequently, it explores two complementary approaches to English teacher education that address the needs of the country: teacher education from a social justice perspective and its connection to the critical perspective. Finally, it presents three trends in English language teaching and research that have been implemented in the Colombian context, illustrating alternative approaches to English teaching from a political standpoint. The chapter concludes that critical teacher education empowers teachers to view language teaching as a political endeavor and encourages them to take action accordingly.

A Glimpse of Violence in Colombia

Colombia has historically ranked among the most violent countries in the world, with various parties exercising direct violence. Illegal forces such as guerrilla groups, paramilitary groups, and military forces. The different groups have used direct violence in all its combined devastating expressions: kidnapping, massacres, selective killing, forced killing, forced recruitment, violence against women, antipersonnel mining, terrorist attacks, threatening, and extortion, among others (Roldán Vargas & Nayrobis Giraldo, 2013). This direct violence is exacerbated by social-structural violence (indirect violence), which encompasses indirect harm caused by inadequate housing, limited education and employment opportunities, extreme poverty, marginalization, unfair land distribution, and unequal access to justice and public services (Guerra-Sua, 2019). Cultural violence, in the form of beliefs and narratives that justify violence, such as discrimination or misogyny, further aggravates the situation.

Most rural regions of Colombia have borne the brunt of the armed conflict, with its inhabitants being the primary victims. According to the findings of the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition (2022):

> Colombian peasantry was the main victim of the internal armed conflict. During the war, peasant farmers were forced off their land, tortured, murdered, kidnapped, extorted, forcibly recruited, made invisible, sexually abused, marginalized, and criminalized. All armed actors contributed to this tragedy, and some of the wounds generated by this war are still open (p. 28).

In addition to direct violence, rural territories have experienced structural violence and a lack of state presence, creating conditions for illicit crops, corruption, and other forms of violence (Rettberg, 2020). Compared to urban areas, rural communities have systematically and historically faced inferior living conditions, healthcare, and education (Gáfaro *et al.*, 2012). The limited state control and weak institutions in these regions increase the influence of illegal armed actors, effectively turning them into de facto states.

In November 2016, after approximately sixty years of conflict, the Colombian government signed a significant peace agreement with one of the oldest leftist armed groups in the continent, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). The agreement, titled "Final Agreement for Ending the Armed Conflict and Building Stable and Lasting Peace in Colombia," aimed to address rural reform, illicit crops, political participation of minority groups, and transitional justice, among other objectives. Education played a vital role in the peace agreement, contributing to the transformation of the conflict in the country (Smith, 2014). According to Gómez Soler (2017), education can contribute in three ways: first, by educating people about potential new arrangements for political representation and justice to reduce confrontation between different groups; second, by implementing policies to provide special support to students remaining in conflict areas; and third, by providing guidance and support to younger generations to instill hope for a better future.

Within the framework of negotiations between the national government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), the "Chair of Peace" (Cátedra para la paz) was established. It was created by the Colombian Congress through Law 1732 of 2014, with its Regulatory Decree No. 1038 of 2015. The purpose of this initiative is to promote a culture of peace by involving educational institutions throughout the country. Consequently, all educational institutions in Colombia, including universities, are required to include "Cátedra para la Paz" in their curriculum. However, the National Ministry of Education has not provided clear guidelines for structuring the curriculum. In schools, the course is often disconnected from other subjects such as social studies, history, and literature. This approach fails to address the

socio-historical causes of conflict, violence, and inequities (Pineda & Meier, 2020). On the other hand, many universities have delegated the responsibility of designing and implementing the "Cátedra para la paz" to humanities faculties, which have organized panels of discussion and peace talks (Gómez-Suárez, 2017). As a result, the "Cátedra para la paz" has become merely another class for students or an academic event that fails to approach conflict from critical, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary perspectives. Consequently, most Colombian students are historically and emotionally disconnected from the tragedies caused by the endemic violence in the country (Gómez-Suárez, 2017).

The National Ministry of Education (MEN) of Colombia has also developed and implemented the Estándares Básicos de Competencias Ciudadanas (MEN, 2004) as a means to contribute to the reduction of violence. This program focuses on two main areas: firstly, reducing individual aggressive behavior by teaching students to self-regulate their behavior and emotions and promoting peaceful relationships; and secondly, fostering mutual understanding among students by encouraging them to consider the feelings and perspectives of others. In essence, the program aims to reduce direct violence primarily by equipping students with self-regulation and peacemaking skills and fostering positive dispositions (Pineda & Meier, 2020). The authors support the initiative as it can help reduce conflict among students in educational settings. However, they point out that the program fails to address the history of injustice, structural and cultural violence, which are the primary causes of the conflict. The absence of these important topics hinders students' learning of democratic citizenship and agency, leading to high levels of civic and political disengagement (Guerra-Sua, 2019).

Based on the brief historical overview presented above, Colombian education needs to be critically examined and recognized as part of the multifaceted social, political, and cultural contexts in which teaching and learning occur. Therefore, a concerted effort must be made at all educational levels if Colombia aims to pave a peaceful path for future generations. Undoubtedly, the country requires teachers who are committed to contributing to a process of social, cultural, and political transformation. Education must embrace the urgent call "to undertake the commitment of a far-reaching change in the cultural elements that led us to the inability to recognize the Other as human beings of equal dignity" (Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition, 2022, p. 54). The question arises as to whether initial teacher education programs are preparing teachers to teach in such complex contexts characterized by unequal distribution of symbolic and material resources, direct and structural violence, racial and ethnic discrimination, and more (Álvarez-Valencia & Ramírez, 2021).

Granados-Beltrán (2016) and Ramos-Holguín (2021) advocate for English teacher education that recognizes and validates the voices of marginalized groups, takes into account the particularities of local realities and subjectivities, and envisions prospective teachers as agents of change in the present world. As English is the first international language, it should serve as a tool to expand students' semiotic repertoires, empowering them to challenge perspectives that undermine the plurality and diversity of people from various backgrounds. Furthermore, it can be utilized to shed light on the numerous issues and inequities experienced by individuals who endeavor to learn the language (Siqueira, 2017).

This chapter provides a brief discussion of two complementary perspectives, Social Justice Teacher Education and Critical Teacher Education, which offer valuable principles for approaching teacher education from a political standpoint. Both approaches propose frameworks for language teacher education that are socially, culturally, historically, and politically situated. They can both contribute to the education of future English teachers who can actively address the diverse needs and challenges faced by the country.

Two Approaches to English teacher education from political perspectives

Despite all the forces that seek to maintain unjust and unequal societies and educational systems, there are scholars, teacher educators, and teacher education programs that continue to work against the grain to prepare teachers who recognize, name, and combat inequity in schools and society through education (Spalding, 2013). This approach to language teacher education has come to be known as Teacher Education for Social Justice (TESJ, hereafter). This approach contends that teacher education for social justice is a coherent and intellectual approach to the preparation of teachers. It acknowledges the social and political contexts in which teaching, learning, and schooling have been historically located (Cochran-Smith, 2010). As an asset-based approach, TESJ appreciates and recognizes the multiple linguistic and cultural identities and biographies of individuals, schools, and communities (Spalding, 2013). This approach fosters respect for all individuals and social groups, seeks teaching practices that aim at the transformation of society, and provides equal access to educational resources (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Nieto, 2013). Teaching and teacher education for social justice are fundamental to the learning and life chances of all teachers and pupils who are current and future participants in diverse democratic nations and who can both imagine and work toward a more just society.

TESJ positions teachers as intellectuals and knowledge-generators who co-construct knowledge and curriculum with all educational actors. Any effort to educate future teachers for social change has to surpass the provision of essential skills for teaching the language, managing classrooms, or constructing well-crafted lessons. Teacher educators are required to broaden their roles and commit themselves to helping students evaluate their own discourses and create counter-discourses to challenge visions that undermine the plurality and diversity that unite people from different cultural backgrounds (Siqueira, 2017). Given the pervasive diversity in the world, education has to cater to the need to discover what unites human beings, with a focus on commonalities and bonds, in an attempt to be as much at ease as possible with each other's languages, cultures, and individualities (Porto, 2010).

A social justice perspective in education helps pre-service teachers understand that education is immersed in a broader political, historical, cultural, and economic system influenced by multiple interests and relations of power. This presupposes that teacher education programs have to grant rich learning opportunities that help pre-service teachers scrutinize the social, historical, economic, and political trends that inform the country and surrounding communities (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). At the same time, teacher education programs have to offer future English teachers theoretical and pedagogical tools that help them produce their context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge and spark diverse ideas to design curricula that have local relevance (Kumaravadivelu, 2011).

Similarly, Colombian scholars highlight the need to prepare teachers from a social justice approach so that they can understand the political purposes of education (Sierra Piedrahita, 2016), identify and understand the sources of oppression under which local and global communities and schools operate, imagine possibilities for self-transformation, self-empowerment, communal action, and social change (Carvajal Medina, 2020), and contribute to the reduction of poverty and inequalities and the termination of war (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016).

This kind of English teacher education requires a horizontal dialogue in which the peripheral knowledge produced by local ELT scholars is recognized and included in order to foster appropriate situated models for teacher education and educational change (González Moncada, 2007). González Moncada questioned English teacher education models coming from the United Kingdom which served economic and political purposes of certain English teaching policies of the country. In the same way, González Moncada (2007) called on Colombian scholars to recognize and disseminate local knowledge. Therefore, teacher education programs need to build spaces where subjectivities, voices,

and the plurality of local subaltern knowledge are unveiled, recognized, and made visible. In this vein, English teacher education programs definitely need to promote intellectual activism and high levels of sensitivity toward social issues in language education (Quintero-Polo, 2019). In other words, criticality has to be at the heart of English teacher education, as proposed by Hawkins and Norton (2009).

Rooted in the principles of critical pedagogy, Hawkins and Norton (2009) define critical teacher education as an approach that contributes to shaping a social world in which all people, regardless of language, ethnicity, color, or class, have equal voices, access, and possibilities. The authors conceptualize language as "the tool through which representations and meanings are constructed and negotiated, and a primary means through which ideologies are transmitted" (p. 33). Language is regarded as one of the most powerful means that individuals possess to (re)create the world. Thus, English teacher education programs have to guide future English teachers to question and deconstruct the meanings and messages that have been conveyed and normalized (Hawkins & Norton, 2009). This approach to language pedagogy leads teachers to question their own system of beliefs and knowledge, especially those derived from mainstream theories and pedagogies for language teaching and learning.

A critical approach to language teacher education reconceptualizes language, culture, learning, and teaching. Language teaching does not exclusively focus on pushing learners to learn about the culture of the target language; instead, it strives to achieve global cultural consciousness. In this context, "criticality has emerged as an integral force that affects every aspect of language… critical theories are concerned with the awareness-raising processes in destabilizing learners' assumptions about the target culture as well as their own cultural schemata" (Dasli & Díaz, 2017, p. 11). This is in line with Kumaravadivelu (2011), who affirms that "developing global cultural consciousness promotes not just cultural literacy but also cultural liberty, paving the way for an individual's genuine cultural growth" (p. 9).

Some scholars and English teacher educators have approached critical language teaching from an intercultural citizenship perspective (Byram, 2008, 2013, 2014; Porto *et al.*, 2017). Language teaching and learning from this perspective combines the purposes of intercultural communicative competence, citizenship education, and critical pedagogy. Byram and Wagner (2018), as well as Porto (2010, 2019), define critical intercultural citizenship as an approach that inspires language learners to employ the foreign language to analyze the world around them, make critical judgments, and act upon it. Intercultural citizenship education conceives of language teaching and learning as an alternative to contribute

to educational processes, the development of individuals, and the improvement of the planet that all human beings inhabit.

Critical intercultural citizenship nurtures criticality, supported by a theory and practice of education for citizenship, which leads to action in the world (Porto & Byram, 2015; Porto, 2013). At the same time, intercultural citizenship can contribute to the promotion of greater social justice and a deeper understanding of otherness. Critical citizenship education merges the purposes and methods of foreign language education with those of citizenship. Language teachers draw on citizenship education, enriching it with attention to intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 2008).

Guilherme (2002), in line with critical language and teacher education, proposes the inclusion of broader educational framewors such as Human Rights Education and Education for Democratic Citizenship, as well as an interdisciplinary approach that integrates cultural studies, intercultural communication, and critical pedagogy. These broad frameworks provide prospective teachers with a comprehensive understanding of education and its connection to other social projects. Thus, teacher educators and teachers will likely be supportive of pluralist democracy and human rights, promote the recognition and value of cultural diversity, and be conscious of their responsibilities to the planet and all those who live on it (p. 207).

In the Colombian context, there are different English teachers and English teacher educators who have been teaching the foreign language based on critical and political frameworks. They represent valuable exemplary teaching and research practices that can inform teachers and English teacher education programs. In the following sections, three trends in English language teaching that have been implemented are described.

Approaching English teaching from critical and political perspectives: Three proposals

Several Colombian scholars in ELT with a critical and political vision of education, from different yet complementary perspectives, have envisioned English teaching as a way to contribute to critical peacebuilding, raising awareness of the value of local communities and knowledge, and producing locally relevant teaching materials.

Consistent with the tenets of social justice education, Ortega (2019a, 2019b, 2019c) proposes connecting social justice education and peace education in English language teaching. He believes that the present time is favorable for

teachers and researchers to explore the possibilities of designing projects that combine the principles and aims of the two fields. Guided by the principles of critical pedagogy and social justice education, he firmly believes that "EFL instruction has the potential power to focus not only on constructing grammatically correct sentences, but on building peace and striving for a just society in post-accord Colombia" (Ortega, 2019a, p. 64). He embarked on a collaborative classroom project with an English teacher in a public school located in the South of Bogotá. The participants were students who had been exposed to violence and social injustice in and outside school as part of their everyday life (Ortega, 2019b). Students were engaged in meaningful, realistic, and useful pedagogical activities in the EFL class aimed at helping them develop their ability to reason and handle their emotions in a positive, non-violent manner. The author highlights that the project encouraged students to change their violent behaviors in the classroom and school. Moreover, they became aware of social injustices in their communities and were motivated to promote peace initiatives in the school.

The author emphasizes the importance of translating students' lived experiences into the EFL curricula as a way to enhance their social engagement in English language learning while equipping them with the necessary skills to critically evaluate global and local issues of injustice (Ortega, 2021). Ortega encourages English teachers to design classroom projects and activities that engage students with the historical conflicts of our country and the different structural forms of discrimination present in our society (Ortega, 2021).

In the same vein, Aldana Gutiérrez *et al.,* (2020) conducted a descriptive interpretive study focused on interpreting memory artifacts of students who were victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. The researchers' central purpose was to teach English with a focus on education for peace and memory as a way to contribute to the recovery and possible reparation of students as victims of the war. The participants were Emberá indigenous students studying at a public school in Bogotá. All participants were displaced victims of the Colombian armed conflict. By posing questions, constructing memory artifacts, and providing spaces for dialogue, the participants were able to reconstruct violent and traumatic memories of their lives during the armed conflict. It also offered a space for the participants to share their stories as displaced children living in marginalized places in the city and schools.

The combination of ELT and peace education represents a significant contribution to rebuilding countries like Colombia, which have a long history of structural and direct violence (Guerra-Sua, 2019; Roldán Vargas & Nayrobis

Giraldo, 2013). Through this approach, classrooms can also become spaces for creating opportunities for young citizens to learn how to challenge social injustices, rebuild social relations, and reshape cultural narratives that contribute to eradicating violence in Colombia (Pineda & Meier, 2020)

In a somewhat similar vein, based on the concept of community-based pedagogies (CBP), other scholars encourage the recognition, appreciation, valuation, questioning, and problematization of communities, making them the subject of official curricula (Clavijo & Ramírez, 2019). Various action research projects have been conducted in urban and rural contexts at different educational levels. For example, high school students explored oral cultural traditions, becoming researchers and chroniclers of elders' accounts to reconstruct the untold history of their town (Flórez González, 2018). Similarly, a school teacher developed a project in which students could explore social and cultural issues in their neighborhoods and create multimodal texts in English (Nieto Gómez, 2018). Fifth-grade school children critically investigated their school to explore food, ingredients, and the people involved in its production and transportation (Gómez Gutiérrez, 2018). An interdisciplinary group of teachers in a public school in Bogotá carried out an action research project aimed at guiding primary and high school students to inquire into the resources of their community and the environmental problems identified in the area (Gómez Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2019).

Other projects have been developed in initial teacher education programs (Bolaños *et al.*, 2018; Lastra *et al.,* 2018). These projects have helped pre-service teachers understand, reflect on, design, and implement pedagogical projects framed within the same perspective. They have also assisted pre-service English teachers in viewing English teaching as a highly situated and context-sensitive endeavor. Through the design and implementation of these projects, pre-service teachers have identified valuable opportunities to include communities as vital parts of the curriculum. Additionally, they have identified strategies to use and value students' linguistic and semiotic repertoires to facilitate meaning-making in the EFL classroom.

Based on the voices represented in the research reports and pedagogical reflections described above, CBP increases awareness, respect, and value of local communities, their knowledge, practices, and cultures. Moreover, CBP strengthens relationships and feelings of coexistence among community members, develops empathy among students and communities across differences, incorporates community assets and issues as integral parts of the curriculum, engages pre-service teachers, school students, and community members in critical action and reflection to transform their situated realities, promotes

professional learning autonomy and creativity, creates opportunities for the co-construction of knowledge, and fosters the natural use of different linguistic and semiotic repertoires to facilitate communication.

Finally, research studies on English textbooks have shed light on the need to analyze the type of textbooks used to teach English. One common way to disseminate discourses, ideologies, beliefs, and social and cultural practices is through teaching materials, particularly textbooks. Through textbooks, authors can also silence, marginalize, and invisibilize conflicts, injustices, social processes, cultures, and minority groups. Núñez-Pardo's (2018, 2020) research findings have revealed that mainstream English textbooks perpetuate racism, sexism, cultural misrepresentations, and other hidden agendas. These studies have emphasized the importance of uncovering the relationships between language, power, and ideology through the analysis of the content included in textbooks. The author also emphasized the urgent need to design in-house EFL textbooks that emerge from and address the complex and multifaceted local needs and realities of the country.

In an analysis of six textbooks used in teacher education programs in Colombia, Soto-Molina and Méndez (2020) identified a displacement of Colombian and Latin American culture and contexts. Instead, cultures associated with inner-circle English-speaking countries (USA, Canada, Australia, and England) were given precedence and presented as superior. Similarly, Fernández-Agüero and Chancay-Cedeño's (2017) study revealed that teacher-educators did not include cultures different from those presented in English textbooks. The cultural content addressed in textbooks showed an overwhelming influence of US culture studied from a Western monolithic perspective.

The research findings on English textbooks reaffirm the need to critically examine their content and identify whose cultures, identities, knowledge, and ideologies are included or excluded. From a critical perspective in ELT, the content of English textbooks should prompt students to critically reflect on the multiple human and social conflicts in the country. They should also encourage students to examine their lived experiences within their own communities and the wider world.

Conclusions

This article aimed to discuss the need for English teacher education programs that prioritize critical and political dimensions as central components in the education of future teachers. To achieve this, a brief critical overview of Colombia's history was provided, with a special emphasis on violence, along with educational proposals that seek to address the historical past and initiatives that envision a peaceful country. Two approaches to English teacher education were also described as potential alternatives to promote teacher education from a political and critical standpoint. Lastly, three trends in English teaching and research in Colombia were presented to illustrate how different scholars have embraced English teaching as a political and critical journey.

The discussion of the various aspects described above underscores the notion that education and teachers play a crucial role in building a more just country. In this context, English teachers must be critical actors because their words and actions in the classrooms can have a significant impact on student's lives inside and outside of classrooms (Nieto, 2006). Teachers can approach language teaching in a way that challenges the normalized structures and categories that perpetuate inequality (Quintero-Polo & Bonilla-Medina, 2022). Many students in Colombian classrooms and around the world reflect the profound structural inequalities that are increasingly apparent. Therefore, English language teaching serves as an additional tool to help students construct intersubjective meanings (Granados-Beltrán, 2018), interpret themselves and others, and transform the world they live in (Pessoa & de Urzêda Freitas, 2012).

The present discussion underscores the urgent need to carefully and critically reevaluate some of our current pre-service English teacher education programs to ensure that they equip prospective teachers with the dispositions, skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to engage in English teaching from situated political perspectives. Teacher education should enable teachers to develop a historical understanding of the causes behind "how social relations came to be the way they are" (Pennycook, 2001, p. 6). Additionally, teacher education should assist pre-service teachers to craft a repertoire of language-teaching practices that contribute to reducing inequalities and injustices in school systems and societies (Zeichner, 2011).

To accomplish these goals, teacher educators need to create diverse learning and teaching opportunities that encourage pre-service teachers to view themselves as agents capable of participating in struggles for justice in their local and global contexts. This involves a noticeable shift in teachers' evolving conceptual

understanding and, more importantly, the emergence of transformed classroom practices informed by teachers' new insights (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). Furthermore, teacher education programs should move away from simply replicating prepackaged imported models, theories, and approaches to English teaching and English teacher education. The ELT field should be reshaped by the new local and peripheral knowledge constructed by Colombian scholars and teachers (González, 2007) from a critical and political perspective. In order to address the challenges faced in English teacher education, we need to strive for a set of coordinated mechanisms for dialogue that value community and seek collectiveness, plurality, and locality (Borelli Pereira, *et al.*, 2020).

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