

**Critical Interculturality and CALL in ELT: A Necessary Approach in Colombian Contemporary Education**

*Interculturalidad Crítica y CALL en la enseñanza de inglés: Un enfoque necesario en la educación contemporánea en Colombia*

*Interculturalidade Crítica e CALL no ensino de inglês: Uma abordagem necessária na educação contemporânea na Colômbia*

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**Abstract**

The most recent events in contemporary history have accelerated not only the evolution of technology but also multiple fields of knowledge which include models of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). However, Colombian education has resisted the changes of the XXI century due to the generational clash between “digital natives” and “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001). Furthermore, EFL in Colombian public schools has been faithful to Western models that elude local contexts and contribute little to reflection, development of proposals, and students’ agency regarding our society’s day-to-day reality. Such actions, as proposed by Catherine Walsh, fall within the realm of what Critical Interculturality (CI) promotes (Walsh, 2010). Coupled with this, the integration of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to develop this approach has been limited since its usage has mainly been focused on improving linguistic skills. In this article I will present some theoretical foundations and empirical studies that unveil the importance of developing more studies that facilitate the integration of CI and CALL tools in EFL at the public secondary school in Colombia.

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**Keywords:** Critical interculturality; Interculturality; Information and Communication Technology ICT; Computer-Assisted Language Learning CALL; English Language Teaching ELT.

### **Resumen**

Los hechos más recientes en la historia contemporánea han acelerado la evolución no sólo de la tecnología sino también de múltiples campos del conocimiento, entre los cuales se incluyen los modelos de enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera. No obstante, la educación en Colombia ha ofrecido resistencia a los cambios del siglo XXI debido a un choque generacional entre los llamados “nativos digitales” y los “inmigrantes digitales” (Prensky, 2001). Por su parte, la enseñanza de inglés en las escuelas públicas colombianas se ha mantenido fiel a modelos occidentales que eluden los contextos locales y poco aportan a la reflexión, fomento de propuestas y agenciamiento por parte de los estudiantes con relación a lo que nuestra sociedad vive día a día, acciones que buscan promover la Interculturalidad Crítica (IC) en palabras de Catherine Walsh (Walsh, 2010). Sumado a esto, la integración del aprendizaje de lenguas asistido por computador (CALL por su sigla en inglés), con el fin de desarrollar este modelo, ha sido escaso ya que el uso en su gran mayoría se ha limitado al mejoramiento de habilidades lingüísticas únicamente. En este artículo reflexivo, presentaré algunos fundamentos teóricos y algunos estudios empíricos que develan la importancia de desarrollar más estudios que permitan la integración de IC y las herramientas tecnológicas en la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera al nivel de escuela secundaria pública en Colombia.

**Palabras clave:** Interculturalidad crítica; Interculturalidad; Tecnologías de la información y la comunicación; Aprendizaje de idiomas asistido por computador; Enseñanza del idioma inglés.

### **Resumo**

Os eventos mais recentes na história contemporânea aceleraram não apenas a evolução da tecnologia, como também de múltiplos campos do conhecimento, incluídos os modelos de ensino de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira (EFL, na sigla em inglês). Entretanto, a educação na

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Colômbia demonstra resistência às mudanças do século XXI devido ao choque geracional entre “nativos digitais” e “imigrantes digitais” (Prensky, 2001). O ensino de EFL nas escolas públicas colombianas tem sido fiel aos modelos ocidentais que se distanciam dos contextos locais e contribuem de forma limitada à reflexão, ao fomento de propostas e agenciamento por parte dos alunos sobre a realidade social cotidiana, ações que visam promover a Interculturalidade Crítica (CI) nas palavras de Catherine Walsh (Walsh, 2010). Além disso, a integração da Aprendizagem de Línguas Assistida por Computador (CALL, na sigla em inglês) para desenvolver esta abordagem é deficiente, uma vez que seu uso tem se restringido principalmente à melhoria das competências linguísticas. Este artigo de reflexão apresenta alguns fundamentos teóricos e estudos empíricos que revelam a importância de desenvolver mais pesquisas que propiciem a integração das CI e CALL no ensino de EFL nas escolas secundárias públicas da Colômbia.

**Palavras-chave:** Interculturalidade crítica; Interculturalidade; Tecnologias da Informação e Comunicação; Aprendizagem de línguas assistida por computador; Ensino de língua inglesa.

## The Needs of Colombian Contemporary Education

Contemporary times have been marked by a series of historic events that have produced changes and societal advancement. Probably the most prominent of these events in the XX century is the end of the Cold War since it enabled a series of economic, political, and social changes in the world such as the strengthening of the neoliberal-global project, also known as the New World Order (McLaughlin, 2016; Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2014; Restrepo & Rojas, 2010; Zárate Pérez, 2014), along with the acceleration of a technological global interconnectedness known as the information age (McCann, 2003; Trumpbour et al., 2010). This revolution has permeated almost all spheres of society including politics, economy, culture, among others, and reached skyrocketing heights in the XXI century due to the pandemic generated by the SARS-Corona Virus II. From these different scenarios, education is probably the one with the least influence, especially in foreign language teaching as there have not been noteworthy changes between

classic and contemporary schools (Mbodila & Muhandji, 2012; Viáfara, 2011; Zambrano Leal, 2014).

According to Zambrano Leal (2014), one of the few distinctions between classic and contemporary schooling is the change from a *discipline* focus to a *control* focus. Classic school disciplined the body and the mind; it taught body posture, and orderly behavior. Contemporary school adds control to the equation by restraining different forms of violence. However, it continues to promote selection, to deepen inequalities, and to support privilege. This is probably a reason why infrastructure in schools characterized by enclosed rooms and surrounded by walls resemble containment institutions such as madhouses, hospitals, and prisons where the main aim continues to be “control”. Furthermore, Colombian schooling is characterized by social inequalities (Helg, 1987) which are proportional to the violent history of the country.

Concerning the first phenomenon pointed out in this manuscript regarding the development of the information age, it is important to address the inclusion of technology in contemporary Education. For this purpose, *Information and Communication Technology* (ICT) is understood as the recently developed digital or electronic means for delivering information in the form of audio, image, video, and written contents which facilitates communication between individuals (Tomlinson, 2011). Regarding this issue, it could be argued that on the whole, there has not been considerable inclusion of ICT into public schools especially in Latin American countries and other developing countries around the world. This is a direct consequence of the poor financial distribution assigned to public education from the Gross Domestic Product in most of these countries (Chomsky, 2015; Ibagón Martín, 2015). Current educational needs and the dynamics of a globalized world point at the need for the inclusion of ICT in schools. In this panorama and due to the fact that education should prepare for the integration of individuals into society (Zambrano Leal, 2014), it is a necessity to integrate ICT into education.

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A second issue that needs to be discussed regarding contemporary education is a disagreement on the way new generations perceive technology against the actual accessibility they have. In this vein, Prensky (2001) coined the terms *digital natives* and *digital immigrants*. The former term refers to the new generations of students who have a predisposition towards the use of new technologies given the current accessibility to digital devices. The latter term denotes older generations who have been exposed to the new technologies progressively and have had to learn about them in the process. According to Prensky, the earlier access to these technological affordances makes new generations of individuals reason differently than their older counterparts, the digital immigrants. However, conflicting with Prensky's postulates which posit an ideal scenario where new generations of individuals have unrestricted access to digital technology, scholars such as van Dijk and Hacker (2003) and Ayanso et al. (2013) argue that this ideal scenario does not take place globally given the current technological segregation and limitations in terms of ICT accessibility in developing countries, an issue that has been called *the digital divide*. As van Dijk and Hacker present, there is an existent problem in Latin America and developing countries around the world regarding access to technology. The authors point at the necessity of having digital devices and network connection and highlight that the digital divide is just one of the many inequalities related to countries' development and the social gap. Withing the digital divide, the authors mention four successive kinds of access barriers. The first one is *psychological access*, which is the lack of digital experience caused by lack of interest in new technologies and computer fear; the second barrier is *material access*, which is the lack of computer devices or network connections. The third one is *skills access*, which is the absence of digital skills caused by insufficient education or social support. And the fourth barrier is *usage access* related to management opportunities.

Having a computer and network accessibility becomes a "must" in current society, not having any of these deepens inequality between those who are connected and digitally literate and those who cannot have access to digital technologies. However, this is not the only divide in contemporary societies; there are others related to income, employment, education, age, race and

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so forth. Consequently, raising awareness on all of these social issues where difference, inequality, and injustice are commonplace is relevant to elevate students' awareness and empower them to question their realities and value the local social, cultural, ethnic, and natural capital (Walsh, 2010).

On another front, most Latin American governments in an interest to fit into the global economy and make their nations more “competitive” have started to include bilingual policies that favor English over other foreign languages and even native indigenous languages (Granados-Beltrán, 2016; Usma Wilches et al., 2018; Walsh, 2010; Zárate Pérez, 2014). This is also a reality in Colombia where English-Spanish bilingualism prevails in educational policies and teachers in general are to develop “competence” in the language over teaching for societal change, democracy, and social equity (de Mejía, 2006; Granados-Beltran, 2016; Usma Wilches et al., 2018; Viáfara, 2016).

In attention to the above situation, the role of ICT in English language teaching in Colombia should be delineated. Technology in language teaching has a distinctive nomination since teaching languages enhanced by computers is completely different to teaching any other subject. This is why the field of *Computer-Assisted Language Learning* (CALL) (Levy & Hubbard, 2005) has emerged. CALL is a branch of applied linguistics concerned with teaching and learning a language using computer technology. Through time CALL has moved from a behavioral and cognitivist stage to a more sociocultural and ecological perspective.

Within this perspective, what are the chances Colombian contemporary education has to meet real contextual socio-cultural realities and diversity? and what should the role of CALL be in ELT (English Language Teaching) in Colombia? This paper aims at presenting different articles related to the aforementioned issues to draw some conclusions which can help understand and reflect on what has been accomplished and what needs to come next in Colombian contemporary education regarding interculturality, CALL and language education.

## **The Decolonial and Critical Intercultural Movement**

You could hear the roar of small-boat engines full of swimmers, (...) How pleasant it would be to bathe like that, so when the speed was reduced you could jump and swim, and later, they would pick you up once again... They were boats from the government and were lent to the whites.

—Arnoldo Palacios, *Las Estrellas son Negras* (Author's translation)

According to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), after World War II, the field of business developed an interest in intercultural communication, specifically in the United States. Organizations such as the Peace Corps helped strengthen diplomatic relationships with an indirect financial interest. People who participated in such programs had to serve in different countries with a completely different culture from which they came from. Those who were successful at communicating shared some common characteristics, namely, an interest in the countries' local matters, joyfulness, linguistic fluency, and clarity to express their ideas properly. These volunteers were believed to be interculturally competent. As a consequence, the financial world started inquiring into intercultural communication competence as a way to establish more successful international business affairs. Henceforth, models to assess intercultural communication competence were proposed and companies started to hire more "intercultural competent" workers.

The view of intercultural communicative competence was then introduced to language teaching due to the evident relationship between language and culture stated by a fair number of scholars. Nevertheless, the concept still keeps the word "competence" taken from the economic field which prioritizes the skills related to linguistic fluency, interest in the countries' local matters, clarity to express ideas in the foreign language, among others. These skills were important to

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settle business deals but not as much to determine whether a person had or not intercultural attitudes and was or not able to communicate acknowledging critical social issues. As stated by Fals Borda (2003), Grosfoguel (2011), and Mignolo (2011), political, economic, and educational models in Latin America have followed an Eurocentric colonial approach which benefits linguistic hierarchies and disregards local matters, values, costumes, diversity, and social issues. In order to understand interculturality and the growing decolonial perspectives regarding bilingualism (that deify English over other languages), it is necessary to understand the dynamics of language teaching and how it relates to culture. Regarding this issue, several scholars and most English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers are aware of the fact that language is related to culture, thus, cultural matters should be addressed when teaching a language (Byram, 1997; Gómez, 2015; Granados-Beltrán, 2016; Hall, 1959; Rico, 2018; Viáfara Gonzalez & Ariza Ariza, 2015).

However, most cultural topics addressed in EFL classes are focused on the shallow contents of culture, that is, surface culture or big culture such as music, foods, fairs, folklore, etc. (Granados-Beltrán, 2016; Kramsch, 1991; Nuñez-Pardo, 2018; Scarino, 2010; Zylko, 2001). In foreign language teaching, culture should not be understood as a set of contents that teachers can organize and teach on a regular basis (Christensen, 1994, as cited in Byram, 1997) since this view legitimizes *inner circle countries* (countries where English has been traditionally the official and mother tongue) as the only reference for learning and teaching English (Mckay, 2018; Phillipson, 2009; Rashidi & Meihami, 2016). This view positions native speakers in a dominant position and nurtures stereotyping, cultural superiority and even weave coloniality by conjoining a “superior and powerful culture” with the foreign language, which in the case of Colombia and most countries around the world is English (Varón, 2014; see also de Mejía, 2006; Granados-Beltrán, 2016; Usma Wilches et al., 2018; Viáfara, 2016).



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To understand this issue, the distinction between “colonialism” and “coloniality” along with their entanglement with the international market, economy and globalization need to be clarified. Colonialism and coloniality are best defined by Restrepo and Rojas (2010) as:

Colonialism refers to the process and the apparatus of political and military dominance deployed to guarantee work and wealth exploitation of the colonies to benefit the colonizer. (...) Coloniality is a historic phenomenon more complex that extends to our times and refers to a pattern of power that operates through the naturalization of land, racial, cultural and epistemic hierarchies, allowing the propagation of relations of power. (p. 15, author’s translation)

According to these authors the proper term to use today is “coloniality” since it is a more intricate phenomenon that deploys control and domination over all the spheres of society and that affects current times while “colonialism” is a term that refers to crude and more primitive forms of domination utilized in the past by classical conquerors. In accordance, coloniality consists of more aspects related namely to economy, globalization and ubiquitous power that has been earnestly hidden behind facades such as marketing and advertising, and tourism, translation services, technology, economy language to “facilitate” work and business, academic language, even performance arts such as “hip hop” music, and the thrust for using authentic materials in language teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2008; see also de Mejía, 2006; Heller, 2010; Varón, 2014). All of these are subtle forms of coloniality that idolize the colonial culture or as stated by Zárata Pérez (2014), a coloniality of power that leads to a sense of inferiority in knowing, being, and owning.

Herein, Latin America has been experiencing a reflective awakening in the last years. Scholars in the field of applied linguistics and its branches such as anthropology, sociology, education and so forth, are following a critical sociocultural path towards decoloniality, social justice and interculturality. This transformation is framed within an epistemological decolonial movement

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and includes what some scholars call the epistemic turn, border thinking, epistemologies of the south or critical interculturality (CI) (Álvarez Valencia & Ramírez, 2021; Granados-Beltrán, 2016; Mignolo, 2011; Restrepo & Rojas, 2010; de Sousa Santos, 2009; Walsh, 2010).

The commonality between these terminologies is their recognition of local cultures and the exposure of the global hegemonic power of English and its culture. But from all the perspectives, this manuscript focuses on CI as it does not perceive language apart from culture but both language and culture are perceived as dynamic entities, opposite to the traditional view which professed language and culture as codes and contents that could be taught separately. Cultural contents have been strongly criticized by scholars for only focusing on the shallow matters of culture ignoring deep issues concerning ideologies, cosmogonies, beliefs, social realities, political matters, and even nonverbal communication. Interculturality entails *decentering* from one's own cultural boundaries allowing the understanding of *otherness* instead of rejecting what is perceived as different (Álvarez Valencia, 2014; Byram, 1997; Peña Dix et al., 2019).

Christensen (1994) as cited in Byram (1997) proposes a theory of communication and interaction that fits this intercultural approach. The author proposes an approach that prepares the learner to deal with diverse intercultural situations not only drawing on the target culture but on different cultures (e.g., Latin American countries, India, Jamaica, Philippines, Japan, etc.), including local regional differences. I advocate for this perspective, coupled with a view from the South as stated by authors such as Fals Borda (2003), de Sousa Santos (2009), Walsh (2010), and Zárata Pérez (2014) where interculturality should be conceived from the local cosmovisions and knowledges of communities that question and problematize local realities. Such perspective is known as Critical Interculturality.

To have a clearer understanding on what exactly is Critical Interculturality, I must amplify its definition having as reference the view of Catherine Walsh. CI is a project built from oppressed and marginalized people who have historically been positioned at the bottom of a societal

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hierarchy. In this sense, CI aims at transforming institutional and social structures of power and build better conditions of being, knowing and living. For this transformation to occur, individuals should take action to change inequality, unjust relations and develop democracy (Walsh, 2010).

Our society has been exposed to different forms of coloniality that undermine the local. The cultural production of the so-called minority communities has been devalued, since they are not produced by the *white* which is not only a racial term but a geopolitical category establishing a hierarchy between colonized countries and colonial powers (Mignolo, 2011).

## **Culture and technology**

Information and Communication Technologies allow individuals to connect remotely by using an almost limitless stock of resources ranging from written to visual and oral forms of communication. On the whole, diverse forms of interaction in social networks, wikis, online video games, and virtual communities are commonplace on the internet nowadays (Warschauer, 2009). Consequently, it is important to understand the multimodal diversity present in intercultural communication. From a semiotic perspective, communication as stated by Kress (2012) is one complex process in which culture is involved as well as a myriad of semiotic resources shared by members of a community. For Kress, the repository of resources that compose culture is crafted in social interaction. In order for communication to take place, there needs to be a minimum of shared meanings, shared experiences, physical interaction or visual engagement. According to the author, this complex process is exemplified by different examples of interactions between members of different disciplines, in which their shared experiences and knowledge create a community in which awareness of semiotic resources facilitates understanding and communication. In a different scenario, if a member of a discipline interacts with a member of a different discipline using their own repertoires, communication would be scarce since the semiotic resources are not properly shared. In this regard, Álvarez Valencia (2021) argues that an important challenge ELT faces is its *verbo-centric orientation*, a tendency to reduce communication to the linguistic dimension. Thus, the author suggests multimodality as a valuable path, placing concepts of meaning making and communication at the center of ELT

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instead of the sole and traditional linguistic approach. Álvarez Valencia (2019) adds that communication entails much more than simple linguistic codes, but contextual multimodal meanings aided by movement, gestures and other kinesthetic repertoires that have semantic content.

The significant richness in semiotic modes present in ICT facilitates teaching of languages in translocal spaces, understood as the possibility of teaching and learning languages anywhere. Coupled with the view of technology as a multimodal tool for teaching foreign languages, another important aspect pointed out by Álvarez Valencia (2021) and Menezes de Souza (2006) is the critical perspective in order to address topics from the target culture in a country with completely different conditions. The dimension of *critical interculturality* is explored below.

## **Where is Colombia regarding critical interculturality through CALL in ELT?**

Colombian scholarship has explored the use of information and communication technologies and its advantages for teaching English as a foreign language, ranging from the use of wikis and virtual learning environments to social networking (Álvarez Valencia, 2015; Bedoya González et al., 2018; Cote, 2015; Herrera, 2017; Pineda, 2014; Pineda & Tamayo, 2016), however, the studies that explore explicitly how CALL is used for teaching English with a CI approach is limited. Below I discuss some of the studies that explore CALL issues in Colombia.

Cuasialpud Canchala's (2010) study at Universidad Nacional de Colombia sheds light on indigenous students' preferences for traditional, in-person classes over virtual ones. The findings reveal several reasons for this preference, including discomfort with virtual modalities, the requirement of prior technological and language knowledge, challenges with asynchronous communication and the digital divide stemming from limited internet access and technological

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resources. The study underscores the importance of digital literacy and the need for bridging educational disparities to create equitable learning environments.

Correspondingly, essential suggestions are provided by Viáfara (2011) regarding the impact that new technologies have had in education and more precisely in language education. The article is a retrospective analysis of a vast amount of research carried out in the decade previous to the publication of the article. The study addresses the main issues that arise when intersecting technology and language teacher education. The analysis was carried out at the international level and although it was focused on teacher education, its conclusions and implications help in founding further research at the local level since it provides initial hypotheses for exploring similar contexts. In this vein, one of the findings is related to the dichotomy between prospective teachers and in-service teachers' recognition of technology, its advantages, and the actual lack of formation in technological matters both at the initial education and during their professional practice. Another important finding concerns the problems generated from the pedagogical mismatches between teachers' intentions regarding technological inclusion in their classes and the actual practices that take place. These mismatches may infer a broader mismatch at the curricular level that prevents teachers from innovating. Leaving the responsibility of integrating technology to the willingness and the teacher's own initiative is another problem also stated by authors such as Galvis (2012).

Regarding tele-tandem experiences, Viáfara presents how albeit teachers' role has been reduced to that of an organizer of sociocultural interactions, several students advocate for the presence of teachers in online education. Another important result from the analysis relates to teachers' autonomy development, which demands reflecting, planning, and designing activities for inclusion of new technologies in foreign language teaching. E-portfolios, e-journals, project work and self-directed reflection strategies are suggested for autonomy and collaborative online teaching work. Regarding the relevance of conducting research that involves the critical aspect of language teaching and interculturality through the use of ICT, the author states that "diversifying

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the focus of inquiry to cover critical aspects which have not been studied enough becomes a priority. For example, teachers' language learning and intercultural development were the focus of a reduced number of studies" (Viáfara, 2011, p. 224). As pointed out by the author, a reduced number of studies focused on the intersection of these three variables namely, ELT, CI and ICT.

Galvis (2012) presents a review of different studies conducted about teacher's beliefs regarding the use of technology and the effects of these beliefs on their practices. A theoretical review addressing the construct of beliefs in teaching English integrating technology is also provided in this study. A commonality between the studies shows that in most cases teachers' beliefs are directly mirrored in the implementation of technology in their classes. A noteworthy finding showed that some computer-literate teachers disregarded technology use in their classes not because they did not know how to use it but because they believed technology's usefulness for teaching was limited. Another finding suggests that the implementation of technology may be related to aspects such as age and type of students; however, a study carried out in a Taiwanese school shows experienced teachers were more likely to use technology than their inexperienced younger counterparts. This finding suggests a stronger relationship between beliefs and implementation of technology, rather than an age variable. Galvis also evidenced the need to integrate technology in teacher education programs. Although most studies analyzed in this research were carried out at the international level, the Colombian studies analyzed, besides, generally agreeing with findings of other studies, also suggest the limitations regarding budget and time investment for proper technology inclusion. Galvis (2012) states that, "It appears that institutions have appointed teachers responsible for technology inclusion on their own budget and their own time" (p. 108). This situation is another reality present in Colombia, especially at the public high school level where many teachers should find their own means if they want to integrate technology in their teaching practices.

Studies by Rátiva et al. (2012) and Ardila et al. (2012) showcase the impactful integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in English Language Teaching (ELT).

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Rátiva et al.'s research focuses on utilizing web activities to enhance reading skills among students, resulting in heightened engagement and autonomy. By incorporating dynamic online resources, students experienced interactive learning environments that catered to diverse learning styles, ultimately improving their comprehension and retention of English language content.

On the other hand, Ardila et al.'s (2012) study delves into the use of ICT in an English laboratory setting to foster autonomous learning and communicative competence. Through multimedia resources and interactive tools, students were empowered to take charge of their learning process, set goals, and monitor progress independently. This integration of technology not only enhanced students' language acquisition but also equipped them with effective communication skills, highlighting the transformative potential of ICT in promoting learner autonomy and language proficiency in ELT contexts.

Integrating web tools into language teaching is widely seen as beneficial by both students and teachers, offering practical and motivating reading experiences. However, some students still prefer printed materials due to their tactile advantages like notetaking and time management. Recognizing that individuals learn differently, I find value in both approaches.

While CALL resources are diverse and offer multimodal content, the preference for printed materials remains for some learners. This study underscores the importance of catering to students' needs and contexts in language teaching. Yet, it also highlights the need for strengthening research to address Critical Interculturality (CI) themes, such as local issues and social inequalities, to foster a more holistic and effective approach to language education that goes beyond linguistic competence.

The study conducted by Herrera (2017) at a public university in Colombia shows the impact of implementing a virtual learning environment (VLE) for teaching EFL. Contrary to the previous study in which indigenous students were the participants (Cuasialpud Canchala, 2010), the

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findings of this study unveil a general positive view of digital methodologies for learning languages. Participants indicated that all the teachers should include these methodologies in their teaching practices. A second notetaking finding is that students realized that being part of a “digital age” does not necessarily imply the absence of challenges when using different types of educational technology. Most participants' conceptions about the use of VLE which were confusing changed positively after getting acquainted with it. It is also important to mention that although a great preference was shown for the use of CALL resources, some participants still preferred using traditional textbooks despite the influence of modern technologies. A great limitation found for carrying out teaching practices aided by ICT is the lack of technological resources in educational institutions which may be preventing students from developing the necessary skills for receiving guidance and instruction through this means. This study also shows the reality Colombian public education faces regarding technological resources and reinforces the need to integrate CALL and CI in ELT in our country.

In the study carried out by Guzmán Gámez and Moreno Cuellar (2019) technology was implemented in a public secondary school located in a rural area. In particular, the digital story creation software called *Plotagon* was used for developing writing skills in EFL. As defined by the authors, Plotagon is “an educational app that allows students to create instant animated videos” (p.143) with customized characters, scenes, dialogs etc. The findings evidence significant progress in students' written production. Students created stories in which they reflected their own realities, namely, environmental issues at school, and social problems such as bullying and poor economic conditions of their municipality. The use of this particular ICT tool motivated students and engaged them to write and learn while enjoying the software. Vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and punctuation were also enhanced through this digital tool. Among the limitations of the study was the lack of digital access for some students due to the poor condition of their computers. To cope with this issue, some computers were borrowed from the school. As a summary, this study contributes to understanding the reality faced at public schools in Colombia and the lengths to which teachers often need to go if they want CALL in their classes.



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Although the focus of this study was to evaluate the impact of Plotagon as a technological tool to improve writing, students addressed their particular local issues and included them in their digital stories which is a sign of critical awareness of their own context. I believe CALL tools like the one used in the study are a good strategy to foster CI. Although this study aims at developing linguistic skills, namely writing, interculturality was indirectly elicited. Once more, there is a clear need to conduct research on the issue of CI and ELT articulating CALL tools in order to cater for students' needs and digital practices.

Additional to the previous studies, there are studies at the school level about communicative competence rather than CI explicitly. Some studies have placed more importance on the role of technological tools while others focused more on students' learning processes and needs (Roncancio Cardoza, 2014). One of the goals of these studies has been to improve English proficiency by targeting language skills such as speaking and listening (Romaña Correa, 2015), grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling (Guzmán Gámez & Moreno Cuellar, 2019), and reading (Rátiva et al., 2012). Another goal has been to explore beliefs and attitudes regarding the use of ICT in ELT (Cardona et al., 2014; Cuasialpud Canchala, 2010). Interculturality and most specifically CI have not been explored in-depth in most CALL studies in ELT, in which the concept has been addressed directly or the focus has been culture such as Clavijo Olarte et al.'s (2008) study which drew on a contrastive approach to target differences in aspects of culture such as festivals, places, celebrations, music, and the like.

## **Conclusion**

This is an unprecedented period in history where technology has become an essential part of our lives more than ever in mankind. Particularly, concerning the centrality of technology in developing a vaccine for the SARS-Corona Virus II that has provoked multifarious changes in the world. Survival and welfare during pandemic times have pushed humanity to change habits and social relations. Social distance, a practice rarely seen in countries like Colombia, has become a must in order to keep people safe and healthy. Remote work and learning seem a

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rational choice to prevent exposure and contagion. Information and communication technologies have acquired a higher importance in people's lives, since it is through them that people have been able to keep up with their learning at universities, working from home and being updated with the latest news around the world. It has also unveiled different social inequalities and realities such as the digital divide and other unjust issues regarding income, employment, education, age, race, among other matters. These realities are not oblivious in our Colombian context. Consequently, there is a genuine need for generosity, solidarity, and empathy with those around us, those in need. But achieving such endeavor requires steady steps that start with awareness and agency. As teachers and researchers, we should lead towards this change by conducting research on critical matters. Correspondingly, we not only contribute to decolonial scholarship but offer tools to our students, who should be aware of their capabilities and the change they can make once they believe in themselves. Technology integration is also fundamental to reach this goal, thus both teachers and students should be educated about digital literacies. In this vein, a new conception of education that goes beyond conservative traditions as it has been conceived for centuries is necessary (Zambrano Leal, 2014).

As evidenced in the studies cited in this paper, Colombian public schooling has a long way to go in terms of CI development. A paradigm shift is needed in order to transcend western teaching models and start creating practices which embrace the local, foster debate, empower students to question social realities, and allow them to propose solutions against real contextual issues that are not part of traditional EFL practices. Technology is not only a marker of inequality it also gives voice to the silenced; it is a tool for learning new things, getting informed, applying to an internship or to a job, questioning injustice, among many other things. However, for this meaningful change to take place, digital literacies need to be developed, and it should start with teachers. Issues such as the digital divide, social and psychological effects of the use of technology, consumerism, as well as the dangers that accompany social networking and the use of the web, are part of the necessary approach to teach using technology (Amini, 2015; Chen, 2019; Golden, 2017). This specific issue is also relevant but not limited to students who are

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constantly exposed to all kinds of contents and information on the web, therefore a correct guidance in this regard is needed in Colombian education.

It is important to note that there is a growing consciousness in Latin America and Colombian scholarship regarding decoloniality and critical pedagogies. However, after analyzing the findings in the studies found in relation to CI for ELT through CALL, the empirical research is scant, especially at the public-school level where none of the articles addressed this intersection. Similarly, it is important to mention that there has been a great advance regarding research on the use of different technological aids as instruments for teaching English. These studies have mainly focused on developing linguistic skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking with some noticeable features of culture. Nevertheless, it is equally important to raise awareness on local critical issues that advocate students' agency through critical interculturality.

In accordance with decolonial scholarship, I believe that promotion and development of this critical approach to ELT needs more empirical studies that contribute to the implementation of CI as well as the diagnosis of CALL in EFL in order to improve and propose better teaching practices that correspond to our Colombian social realities. I believe that to achieve such endeavor requires commitment of schoolteachers, coordination with school principals and the guidance of higher education institutions by means of professional development workshops and empirical research. We need to remind ourselves that meaningful changes start with coordinated actions. The current needs of our society implore sensible actions much more than theorizing about what is needed while observing how things continue to be the same. This endeavor has to be assumed by both the higher education community and the public-school community.

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