

Chapter I

Exploring interculturality as a process of inner transformation in the EFL classroom

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Introduction

The concept of interculturality has been discussed in the educational field across all areas of knowledge. Specifically in language teaching, this idea of promoting intercultural competences among students has gained more popularity, overall, in a country like Colombia, where classrooms comprised a variety of cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. Traditionally, interculturality has been addressed from the intercultural competence, in which more than just linguistic ability, it requires knowledge of one's own and also of the others' culture as a set of competencies to be taught (Byram, 1997; Byram & Risager, 1999), and also as a pedagogical tool to enhance communicative performance.

However, a previous systematic review of literature focused on visions of interculturality in ELT in Colombia (Tiria Sotelo & Prieto Wilches, 2025), revealed three main perspectives: (1) interculturality as a pedagogical tool that requires explicit operationalization, (2) interculturality as a mental process that is developed through inner transformation, and (3) interculturality as a present condition in classrooms, established in the backgrounds and knowledges of all students. The review revealed an increasing body of literature that recognizes a more complex perspective of interculturality as an internal and transformative process that involves identity negotiation, critical reflection, and openness toward others.

Current dynamics in education prompt teachers to foster in their students the development of not only linguistic abilities but also intercultural competences that allow them to interact in the real world and to be able to listen to what the others have to say about themselves, their histories, their worldviews and their way of living together. This emphasis is observed in syllabi, graduate profiles, institutional mission, learning objectives, among others. However, when it comes to teaching intercultural competence, the class cannot be limited to

the outside perspective; it is essential to encourage the understanding and recognition of own context and own ways of thinking. This initial process becomes the foundation of meaningful awareness of cultures and coexistence, and therefore the basis of this study.

This study aims to explore this vision of interculturality as a mental process, which conceptualizes interculturality not merely as something to be taught or observed, but as a process of transformation that entails a dynamic and personal development in which learners critically engage with their own cultural assumptions, develop empathy, and embrace alternative worldviews.

For this reason, the study follows an action research approach (Mertler, 2024) aiming at creating reflective spaces within the English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) classroom. These spaces will be used to observe, question, and document how the students engage with intercultural experiences and texts, and how this engagement might reflect processes of internal change. Rather than focusing on teaching culture as a static object, this research study aims at analyzing how students understand interculturality through several activities of reflection, dialogue, and critical engagement with real-life situations and activities.

Based on the above, the research question that guides this study is: How can the implementation of reflective and dialogical practices in the EFL classroom enhance the understanding of interculturality as a process of inner transformation?

Objectives

General Objective

To enhance the understanding of interculturality as a process of inner transformation in EFL through reflective and dialogical practices in the classroom.

Specific Objectives

- To design and implement reflective and dialogical activities focused on interculturality as inner transformation in the EFL classroom.
- To analyze the way students understand and express themselves about interculturality when being immersed in those dialogical activities.
- To examine the role of language learning activities implemented in fostering inner transformation and intercultural awareness.

Theoretical Framework

Interculturality is often seen as the interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds. In English Language Teaching (ELT), it has usually been connected to the idea of preparing students to communicate across cultures. One of the most popular authors is Michael Byram (1997) with his concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). This author argues that for language learners it is not only necessary to understand language structures, but also to develop attitudes of curiosity, knowledge about other cultures, and the skills to interpret and reflect on cultural differences present in learning materials. Additionally, Byram includes critical cultural awareness in education, which means being able to evaluate cultures, including one's own, in thoughtful and respectful ways. Byram described a model that would define the competent intercultural speaker, dividing it into some qualities or *savoirs*- knowledges. These *savoirs* were conceptualized as: a) *Savoir*: knowledge of self, others, and also social interactions. b) *Savoir être*: denoting openness and respect for other perspectives; c) *Savoir comprendre*: interpreting and connecting cultural meanings; d) *Savoir apprendre/faire*: exploring and engaging with new cultures; e) *Savoir s'engager*: critical awareness and active social participation (Byram, as cited in Hoff, 2020).

In this regard, interculturality is interested in promoting mutual respect towards the variety of cultures with an acceptance of differences.

However, in more recent years, this vision has been questioned and highly debated among Latin American scholars. Authors such as Walsh (2009) or Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) have redefined the idea of interculturality from a critical and decolonial lens through *critical interculturality*. In this advancement of the concept, the focus is not on a harmonious coexistence, but on the struggle against epistemic injustices. For Walsh, interculturality should not be only learning from others, from their traditions and their ways of living. It is also transforming how we understand ourselves and the others, especially by recognizing other ways of existing, for example indigenous communities, afro-descendant, and local knowledge systems that are often excluded from traditional education.

In the same way, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) in his concept of *ecology of knowledges* talks about how important it is to value different ways of knowing the world. In a class of English as a foreign language, this would mean creating spaces for sharing and reflecting on students' own cultural experiences that can offer a more diversified content and learning experiences, rather than simply teaching facts about English-speaking countries. There is a critique of dominant attitudes towards knowledge in which critical interculturality "denies the rational character of all forms of knowledge that are not based on their epistemological principles and on their methodological rules" (De Sousa Santos, 2010, p. 21). This quick review of the evolution of interculturality leads this research study to consider interculturality as something that is not only learnt, but also experienced, transformed, and constantly evolving

Interculturality as a Process of Inner Transformation

Now, if interculturality is understood as a process of inner transformation, then its focus needs to be changed from external exchanges of cultural information, where students are constantly exposed to content and learning materials that represent culture as only present in the outside, to deeper personal information and experiences that can be explored inside the classroom. It would mean that the promotion of intercultural

activities provided mainly by teachers is not only about learning facts or customs of other cultures as it is already stated above, but about questioning one's own beliefs, values, and identities that account more for the pillars of critical interculturality (Tubino, 2004, 2005; Walsh, 2005, 2012). It is clear that including activities in which students are encouraged to share and reflect about their own backgrounds, opinions and feelings might bring moments of discomfort or rejection, but at the same time it is a good chance for reflection and growth where learners can redefine the way they see themselves and others in the world. The classroom, therefore, becomes a space not only for communication but for personal reconfiguration and ethical development, being the latter a current need in curricular adjustments in the context where this study took place.

This vision of inner transformation is strongly connected to poststructuralism because meaning is not fixed but fluid, and it is co-constructed by contributing factors such as language and contexts. This dynamic conceptualization of interculturality assumes that there are no fixed boundaries between individuals or cultures (Walsh, 2005). For this study, an understanding of the intercultural as an inner transformation entails a conception of meaning as neither stable nor predictable. It means that students would not become interculturally competent by just consuming information; instead, many strategies come into action for achieving this goal. As it is stated by Norton (2014), "Poststructuralists such as Gunther Kress explore in persuasive terms how meanings become destabilized in the context of different social occasions" (p. 68). In this destabilization, students are able to open the possibility of getting new understandings and subjectivities, and as teachers, we can encourage them to question their preconceptions, reflect on their assumptions, or simply develop flexibility to form new intercultural perspectives.

Although the work of Norton emphasizes on identity, his analysis on poststructuralist theory provides a good comparison with intercultural learning contexts where the goal is not simply to acquire knowledge of other cultures, but to promote a resignification of the concept by

promoting alternative modes of knowing (Fandiño-Parra, 2021). Taking into account all of the above, conceiving interculturality as a process may help students become more ethical, self-aware, and reflective; unveiling another vision of the interactions that occur inside a classroom; as stated by Ortiz et al. (2022) in their study where their participants were able to have a greater awareness of intercultural relations that took place in the daily interaction between teachers and students. In English language learning contexts, this vision prompts educators to design learning experiences that invite students not just to speak another language, but to use it as a tool to participate in conversations that embrace empathy through the lens of the other. As it is stated by (Ortiz et al., 2022), for contributing to interculturality as a social project, it is necessary to start with the diversity of identities, languages and knowledge.

Method

This study adopted an action research design based on a constructivist paradigm to explore how interculturality develops as an inner transformative process in English language learning. The study follows the constructivist paradigm, considering its notion of knowledge being co-constructed through interaction, experience, and reflection; in addition to the creation of meaning by individuals being situated and not generalized (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2018). This epistemology is highly connected to the purpose of the study, as both students and teachers engage in the research process to understand interculturality through the dialogical and reflective activities proposed.

Action research was chosen because of its systematic, iterative stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting and because it enables teachers to study their own classrooms, practices, pedagogies, and evaluations with the objective to improve them (Mertler, 2024). The cyclical nature of action research is suitable for exploring this inner transformation by allowing a continuous analysis and examination of behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of learners before activities presented along the intervention.

Data collection instruments integrated students' artifacts, field notes, and focus groups. Students' artifacts were used as a valuable source of information because they were the physical traces that students left behind after interacting with information (Bernard, 2000). This type of data served as an accurate representation of discourses, attitudes, and beliefs of participants by representing the natural interpretations of interculturality after implementing the activities. Besides, those artifacts were used to aim at the personal construction of understanding concerning interculturality, following the conceptualization of it as an inner transformation.

Focus groups were used "to collect in-depth qualitative information about the group's ideas, perceptions, attitudes, or experiences on the defined topic" (Marelli, 2008, p. 39). In this study, focus groups served as a way to get closer to the perceptions of the students about interculturality in their contributions and presentations before the others. In this data collection instrument, as pointed by Phillips (1997) there is an additional goal of group members' simulation and thinking building. It means that when sharing new ideas, all the voices are heard, and new insights may arise from contributions that other students might not have considered.

The last instrument used was field notes. These were a valuable tool for this study as they enabled detailed observations of classroom interactions, students' expressions and reactions to be captured, which would otherwise have been forgotten or overlooked. Field notes are not simply a record of events but an interpretive act by letting the researcher document descriptive and analytic information in real time (Emerson et al., 2011) and this was essential to explore this process of inner transformation.

The participants in this study were 28 students enrolled on an English V as a foreign language at a public university. The group was mixed conformed by 18 women and ten men who belonged to different academic programs from the university, including systems engineering,

mining engineering, public accounting, finance and international trade, business management, electronic engineering, and geological engineering.

The following chart presents the organization of the whole instructional design process, which is divided into eight steps based on an action research design (Mertler, 2024), and outlines the purpose of this study.

Table 1. Steps followed in the action research study

Title			
Exploring interculturality as a process of inner transformation in ELT			
Objective			
To explore how interculturality can be understood as a process of inner transformation in ELT through reflective and dialogical practices in the classroom			
Initial exploration and problem identification	Literature review on interculturality in Colombia	Identification of interculturality as a mental process	Identification of gaps and needs. (Academic reforms, curricular adjustment, and curricular design)
	Formulation of research question: How do students experience interculturality as an inner transformation process when immersed in reflective and dialogical practices in the ELT classroom?		
Planning of a Two-Tier Action Loop	Based on the purpose of the study, dialogical and reflective activities were designed (see Table 2) for prompting self-reflection on personal and cultural recognition, dialogue around intercultural reflections, and transformation of assumptions		Data collection instruments were established to validate information for further analysis (students' artifacts, field notes, and focus groups)
Implementation of Tier 1 self-recognition	- Introduction of activities related to self- recognition and students' life trajectories. - Facilitation of structured dialogical and reflective sessions for mutual listening and sharing.		
Observation and data collection	- Documentation of interactions through established data collection instruments.		
Preliminary analysis and reflection	- Preliminary analysis of attitudes towards the implementation of Tier 1. - Determining which activities worked better and promoted deeper participation. - Adjustments to Tier 2 from step 2 in this chart.		

Re-planning and implementation of Tier 2- integration	Reflections from the previous step informed adjustments to Tier 2, which was then implemented. Some activities were modified to improve dialogue, and data collection continued using established instruments.
Final reflection	Use of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).
Reporting	Writing and sharing results.

Design of Pedagogical Intervention

The pedagogical intervention was designed as a two-tier action loop, where some interrelated activities were proposed moving from self-recognition (Tier 1) to integration (Tier 2). The first tier aimed at fostering personal awareness of background, lived experiences, and influencing factors in the formation of the self; while the second tier used this initial recognition to understand and engage with the diversified perspectives present in the classroom. Each activity incorporated reflective and dialogical components in order to support intercultural inner transformation. The following table presents the organization of the activities in the two-tier model.

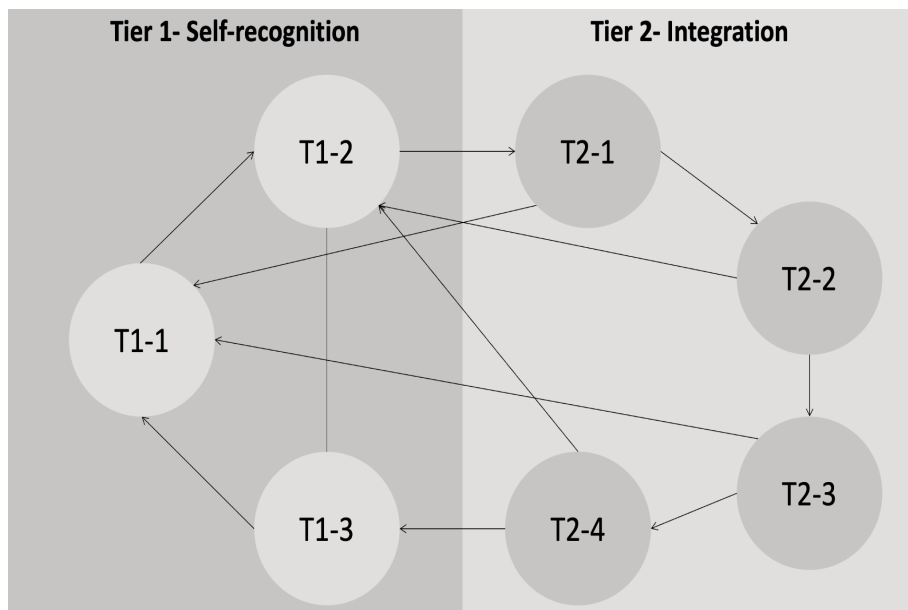
Table 2. Two-tier Action Loop for pedagogical design

Tier 1- Self-Recognition		
Label	Name of activity	Description
T1-1	i-Mapping	Purpose: Encourage students to explore and represent their personal history, acknowledging the factors, experiences, and influences that have shaped who they are today. Development: As part of adapting the course syllabus established in step: <i>Planning of a two-tier action loop</i> , as described above, in which students created a map representing who they were and what had brought

Label	Name of activity	Description
T1-1	i-Mapping	them to that point during class in the second week of the semester (two in-person class hours). Due to time constraints, students were given time in the next class to complete their i-Maps illustrating the personal traits, cultural influences, lived experiences, and values that had contributed to their current selves. They then participated in a Circle of Voices activity, in which each student shared their i-Mapping insights with their group.
T1-2	Handprints of experience	Purpose: Facilitate recognition of significant life events that had shaped personal perspectives and decision making. Development: After discussing some theories of positionality and analyzing various examples, in week 4 of the semester students traced the outline of their hand and used each finger to represent a significant moment in their life and explain how it had shaped their worldview. For the next activity, they wrote a short text describing each event.
T1-3	Comparative narratives	Purpose: Promote empathy and personal connection by sharing lived experiences and inviting partners to reflect on alternative responses to similar situations Development: Immediately after T1-2, students were organized into groups and asked to select one of the moments from their 'Handprints of Experience' activity to present as a short narrative to their peers over the next two hours of class. Then, classmates responded by aligning with their own experiences or contradicting them. The next 4 weeks of classes were developed according to the adaptation of syllabus, with topics related to culture from within, positionality and identity.
Tier 2- Integration		
T2-1	Adulthood inside-out	Purpose: Examine and compare conceptions of adulthood within personal, familial, and contextual frameworks, fostering awareness of diversity and potential tensions among them. Development: In week 10, students first reflected on their own definition of adulthood and how it aligned with or diverged from that of their families. They also read about different cultural perspectives on adulthood, discussing similarities, differences, tensions, and points of convergence. This activity took two 2-hour sessions.

Label	Name of activity	Description
T2-2	Ideas on gender roles	Purpose: Explore and analyze personal and familial conceptions of gender roles, connecting them to former experiences and partners' conceptions. Development: In week 11, students reflect individually on their own views of gender roles and those of their family, making explicit references to events from their <i>Handprints of Experience</i> where gender expectations played a role. They then engage in small-group dialogue comparing these perspectives with cultural depictions from selected readings or media, discussing the impact of such roles on personal and social life.
T2-3	Role-reversal dialogue	Purpose: Promote empathy and flexibility by considering how others might act on one's place, based on differing personalities, backgrounds and values. Development: Weeks 12 and 13 were dedicated to autonomous learning and group presentations. Students received a case study based on preliminary analysis in Tier 1. In pairs or small groups, peers discussed how they would have approached the situation, taking into account their own personality, cultural background, and life experiences, and share in a Circle of Voices.
T2-4	Writing to the future self	Purpose: Promote reflection on inner transformation as a result of all the interventions by envisioning personal growth and decision-making in the future. Development: In their final task of week 15, students wrote a coherent text addressed to their future self, five years from now. They were prompted to consider the ways in which their current selves have been influenced by factors that are still changing and will continue to do so.

This integration of dialogical and reflective activities, designed as a Two-Tier Action Loop, can be visualized in the following figure, in which there is an illustration of the connection from Tier 1 to Tier 2 that allowed the insights from each activity to reflect about the others subsequently. The arrows indicate the sequential flow and the cross-references within the cycle.

Figure 1. Connection of activities in the Two-Tier Action Loop

Source: Own creation from Table 2.

Findings and Discussion

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) in order to organize and structure in an efficient way all the information obtained from data collection instruments. Through this approach, it was possible to systematically identify, analyze, and establish patterns as significant codes inside the data. Additionally, this approach offers methodological flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to integrate qualitative results into the instruments that were interrelated, thereby getting an accurate interpretation of data. This interpretation revealed similarities, contradictions, and trends in the students' contributions in every single activity. The reporting of findings is presented as follows:

Trends and Tensions of Interculturality as Inner Transformation

The preliminary data analysis conducted at the end of Tier 1 generated some initial findings that were corroborated by the stage of final

reflections and synthesis in the data analysis. The first overarching theme to be analyzed is the interplay found between the trends and tensions in how the students engaged with interculturality as a process of inner transformation. Across the whole implementation of the pedagogical design, students shared personal narratives and were also confronted with others' perspectives. The trends identified illustrated moments in which students demonstrated curiosity, connection, and willingness to participate, while the tensions represent some challenges not only in the classroom, but also in the process of rethinking and challenging their own perspectives that may have been taken as natural.

Connection of Lived Experiences with Current Conceptions

One of the most prominent trends in the data was the clear recognition that past moments human beings encountered in their lives shape the adoption and reproduction of ideals generally taken as accurate. It was observed in many of the students' contributions in which they initially had to map themselves in T1-1 reflecting on the particularities that had brought them until the moment they were, specifically a classroom in a public university studying a major they had chosen. The general insights included in this first subtheme can be summarized in two topics: context and idealization.

Context entails stances in which students expressed how aspects such as the geographical location where they came from, their economic background, or familial size had influenced their processes of decision-making and their worldviews. For example, as part of students' artifacts (T1-1 #7, #12, and #14) in which students drew about their backgrounds, it was possible to observe that many of them came from different cities and expressed how valuable their hometowns were by using adjectives as 'calm', 'friendly people', 'beautiful', 'peaceful'. Those drawings showed that some students were interested in pursuing a career that would allow them to feel a sense of belonging and, secondly, enable them to return to their places of origin and work there. Aspects such as living in the countryside, growing up next to a volcano, having their entire

family in Sogamoso, or finishing school in the same city appeared to be important for determining the future and deciding on a career. As it is stated in the following excerpt:

"Well, as I wrote here, I grew up playing video games and developed an interest in computers when I was about 7 or 8... I ended up playing video games and dreaming about making my own, and you see, now I want to finish my career and become a software engineer" (T1-3, focus groups).

Growing up in a specific context and being familiar with its situations, forms of entertainment, nature, or spaces planted a seed in students' minds to be present at that moment. Context, in this sense, was an essential factor among the particularities that led individuals to recount a story that could be told and understood. During dialogical tasks, students frequently shared episodes that positioned the place of origin as a supportive tool for their arguments. Expressions such as: "ah, but it is because you are from here, in my town no...", "that's weird in Yopal," or "I will invite you there to see it," represent a diversification of background that comes into play in the language classroom and therefore becomes a chance for intercultural growth.

Idealization was present in the data as another influencing factor that students displayed in their contributions when reflecting upon their decisions and the plurality of their thoughts. This idealization includes the role of family, friends, professors, inherited conceptions, and social learnt values that surround individuals and are held in high regard. Expressions such as "I chose this career thanks to a school teacher," "I grew up seeing my family always excelling in what they did, always inspired by them," "my brother and my sister are engineers so I decided to be systems engineer," or "my brother was the one who suggested that I studied business management", offer a clear vision that recognizing the self also involves acknowledging the role others have played in shaping it.

Throughout activities implemented in Tier 1, students were able to recall and reconstruct personal narratives to recognize that their own particularities shaped their current perspectives. This aspect offered a

way to change implicit backgrounds into an explicit tool for enhancing communication and the recognition of diversity within the classroom. This initial insight aligned well with Tier 2, where students contrasted their personal and familial conceptions with those from other cultural contexts. Once they had recognized how different each student was, and the reasons behind those differences, their arguments became more elaborated as they used of their own and others' backgrounds to support their views. For example, one student expressed the idea that adulthood might be different for his partners because they were studying in the same city. In contrast, for her, everything was different due to moving to another city and developed a sense of independence.

Overall, the construction of conceptions through lived experience emerged as a dynamic and useful tool for the class of language and for the initial discovery of the intercultural being and recognizing the diversity of perspectives grounded on individuals' backgrounds.

Openness to Navigate the Self and the Others

Another way in which students experienced interculturality as a process of inner transformation in the language classroom was through an observed attitude of openness to share and to listen to the stories of their peers. Byram (1997) had already stated that curiosity, being part of *savoir être*, was essential to be able to see the world from different perspectives, moreover this curiosity takes place because of the nature of daily interactions in a classroom (Ortiz et al., 2021). In this case, students portrayed an attitude of willingness to listen, to share, and engage in the personal narratives of others. Initially, there was reluctance to participate in the sessions, and contributions were brief and general. This may have been due to shyness, given that the class comprises a variety of career backgrounds. Another challenging factor, common in language courses, was the limited knowledge of the foreign language by some students. However, data collection instruments evidenced a bigger number of participations following the prompts provided, lessons had to be more flexible for translation and the use of technological tools to express ideas. After gaining confidence and

no longer worrying about grammar mistakes, students began offering richer personal accounts and responses to peers' stories, manifested through more questions, laughter, and relatability.

This openness is not understood as a limitation in acquiring information about cultures; rather, it involves an inclination to explore areas of understanding, contrast, comparison and mutual transformation. The following excerpt is an intervention by a student giving her point of view regarding activity on gender roles:

"- After explaining the question in Spanish, the student stated - ... yes, teacher, it is interesting to see the way her family is organized, but I don't know, for me it's weird because my family is different. Of course, I respect it, but I wouldn't know how to do that all the time... - everyone laughs -" (T2-2, focus groups).

In discussions that promoted daily life topics, such as gender roles that individuals have attributed and socially accepted, students manifested feelings of agreement and also discomfort regarding other points of view. However, by observing their attitudes, most of them did not show an immediate acceptance or rejection but a desire to stay in the conversation.

Negotiation of Attachment to Beliefs

A tension that arose in the data displayed stances where students encountered ambiguity between the worldviews they had constructed up to that point in their lives and the reinterpretation of these worldviews in light of new perspectives. An example of this is the following excerpt:

"I was born in Sogamoso on 15 April 2003. Growing up, I was inspired by my family's constant excellence in all that they did. I graduated with two technical degrees but was not admitted to university. I therefore decided to study technology in systems analysis. However, the unexpected happened and the following month, I was admitted on a systems engineering course. I was now studying two subjects simultaneously. Despite the fear, I persevered, but my family said I wouldn't be able to. I finished my technology degree, completed my

placements and advanced in systems engineering, and that's how I got here." (T2-3, students' artifacts #17).

The previous excerpt presents a combination of the first trend described in this analysis called idealization being contrasted with an experience in which the student had to detach prior conceptions he had naturalized in his mind because of an admiration to influencing structures, in his case, his family. This phenomenon was present in various occasions in the data where students expressed "I had not seen it in that way," "it can be true," "it is interesting to think about that" or "I had to change my mind." This negotiation of attachment to prior beliefs is one relevant sign that interculturality starts from within. When students can challenge their assumed certainties, they are pushed into a moment in which the coherence of their established worldviews is measured against other ways of seeing the world.

This tension is considered not only in terms of changing positions, but also when there is a reluctance to detach from them. This situation was particularly observed in discussions revolving around religion or gender roles. This demonstrates that transformation is not manifested by agreement with all the perspectives present in the classroom, but through individuals finding a balance between old and new beliefs formed via experience, instead of uncritically adopt or reject external perspectives. This understanding represents interculturality as a dynamic process with no fixed delimitations in which it is necessary to establish positive and equitable exchanges with the others (Walsh, 2005).

The Language Classroom Becoming a Space of Mutual Recognition

Classrooms are powerful spaces where several learning methods come into action. Language, being an integral part of every field of life, has the ability to be adapted in countless ways to serve many purposes. In this case, the integration of language and intercultural discussions, focused on unveiling the inner diversity of the class, offered a valuable opportunity to recognize the diversity of students' thoughts, affiliations, and beliefs (Ortiz et al., 2021), while developing language skills and

fostering other relevant values such as empathy, reflection, and cultural awareness. In this study, students' writings initially expressed feelings of confusion and frustration for not understanding the purpose of the course and being unable to cope with activities that primarily required speaking skills.

It means that preconceptions about a language classroom are brought by teachers and students; it was observed that coming to class for students was an exercise of pronouncing perfectly, following the teacher, and constructing well-structured sentences. Students expressed that the first thing that came to their minds when thinking of English language was grammar, difficulties for interacting with native speakers, frustrations in pronunciation, or the lack of skills for learning known as 'negado'. These reactions are understood as well from past experiences with language and also the influence that idealization plays in the formation of values, as discussed in these findings. In that sense, negotiation of attachment comes into action again not only in terms of culture but also in language by shifting the focus of traditional expectations with the inclusion of personal experiences and cultural perspectives by using the language.

The English language has been shown to facilitate discussions in the classroom and in other university courses where topics such as social realities, community issues or sense of belonging are taught. A student stated: "Ah yeah, we studied that in humanistic sociology, but it is easier in Spanish" [translated by the author]. In this statement, the student recognizes the familiarity with questions related to the self in other courses but also notes how challenging it is to express his ideas in another language. A summary of the activity in T2-3, where students had to present their insights about their reactions to case studies and the way they felt in the activity, stated:

"We concluded that you should place yourself in the others' shoes because you never know what the person is going through, and in our group we had a lot of opinions but not a single solution (...) so we felt the activity was a little difficult because vocabulary was not easy, and we did not know the words but we could 'hacernos entender' [make ourselves understood]" (T2-3, students' artifacts # 19)

"In this activity we learnt that we would behave differently according to our personalities, so we had to give a lot of explanations for the others to understand the opinions (...) regarding the way we felt developing the activity in English, we learnt new vocabulary and although we struggled, we finally did it" (T2-3, students' artifacts #21).

In the statements, the students reflected two relevant insights: a process of reflection for understanding perspectives and the construction of learning as a group. They expressed that using the foreign language might not always be an easy process, but they finally succeeded in the task. Language emerged both as a vehicle for intercultural interaction and as a learning challenge. Ultimately, integrating language learning with intercultural interactions arising from within the classroom not only provides linguistic skill development but also expand students' perspectives and reinforces the notion that language is intrinsically linked to human experience, highlighting the close connection between the recognition of identities and the construction of egalitarian relationships (Walsh, 2005), all of this facilitated by a classroom that values the teacher-students and students-students mutual recognition.

The findings described here corroborated the idea that curiosity is important for raising intercultural awareness in language classroom (Byram, 1997), even more so when interculturality is approached from within the students' own cultural and personal frameworks as a process of inner transformation. Several factors come into play in a classroom; the contexts that interact, the idealization that even teachers themselves promote through their activities and discourse, the tensions that might arise when individuals are confronted with their own perspectives in light of others', and the emotional, cognitive, and very individual sociocultural processes that shape the way in which students make sense of diversity.

Conclusions

The results from the present study demonstrated that the implementation of dialogical and reflective activities in an ELT classroom enhances the understanding of interculturality as a process of inner transformation by encouraging and unveiling the dynamics inherent to classroom interaction. Starting with the recognition of the self, activities that make use of language for students to reflect on who they are, their backgrounds, formation of beliefs and influence of their contexts demonstrate that acknowledging the own identity is fundamental to recognizing that of others, as stated by Walsh (2025). It is an initial step to nourish the openness and curiosity of students to discover other ways of knowing, understanding, and seeing the world.

By valuing the stories that each student could tell, they were able to observe themselves in relation to their own sense of belonging, which was rooted in social expectations, contexts, community and family affiliations. Promoting students to be immersed in pedagogical encounters where they can confront their own perspectives with those of others leads to moments of mutual understanding but also tensions among students and their inner selves when some assumptions bring uncertainty and discomfort. However, those tensions that might arise evidence the complex yet rich intercultural development and the relevance of identities from teachers and students in such development (Díaz et al., 2019; Dimas, 2016).

The negotiation of attachment to beliefs in this study arose as a pivotal sign of inner transformation because it made clear the fact that thoughts evolve and change. While some students demonstrated willingness to reinterpret and adapt their points of view, others reaffirmed their prior positions. The role of teachers is still highly relevant for proposing pedagogies that give relevance to other knowledges, in this case, the knowledge of students. There is an implicit interculturality in the

classroom conformed by students' backgrounds, particularities, and ways of thinking. The teachers' power lies in their ability to bring that interculturality to the surface and use it as a tool that promotes communication, empathy, and learning. Languages also play a relevant role, as stated by García and García (2014), they become an element of mediation between the worlds of people who dialogue to construct and determine their realities. In that way, a learning space such an ELT classroom serves as a scenario for reflection and dialogue for understanding interculturality as a process of inner transformation and not merely an introduction of external information.

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