

## **Culture-Related Issues in Teacher Education Programs: The Last Decade in Colombia<sup>1</sup>**

### **Temas Relacionados con Cultura en la Formación de Docentes: La Última Década en Colombia**

**Alexánder Ramírez-Espinosa<sup>2</sup>**

Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia

#### **Abstract**

This paper showcases a literature review in 13 Colombian refereed journals, covering the last decade, from 2011 to 2021. Data were collected from the virtual platforms where each journal hosts published issues. A thematic analysis was conducted with the sample of papers. The purpose of the review was twofold. On the one hand, it aimed at establishing the main research concerns of Colombian scholars regarding the place of culture in the context of Foreign Language Teacher Education programs. On the other hand, the review aimed at exploring the implications for curriculum design in Colombia that can be drawn from culture-related literature produced by scholars in the last decade. Results suggest that the treatment of culture-related issues in Foreign Language Teacher Education programs has gained currency, although scholarship in the last decade has mainly focused on a diagnostic stage.

*Keywords:* culture, foreign language teacher education, foreign language teaching, literature review

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<sup>1</sup> This article stems from a larger literature review conducted by the author as part of his Doctoral Dissertation in the Interinstitutional Doctorate Program in Education at Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia.

<sup>2</sup> He is a teacher educator in English and Linguistics at Universidad del Valle. He holds a B.A. in Foreign Languages and an M.A. in Linguistics. He is currently a second-year Ph.D. student of the Interinstitutional Doctoral Program of Education at Universidad del Valle. His research interests include interculturality, curriculum, and queer linguistics.

[alexander.ramirez.e@correounivalle.edu.co](mailto:alexander.ramirez.e@correounivalle.edu.co)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7122-9537>

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## Resumen

Este artículo presenta una revisión de literatura en 13 revistas arbitradas en Colombia, en la que se abarca la última década, desde 2011 hasta 2021. Los datos se recogieron de las plataformas virtuales que cada revista usa para publicar sus números. Se llevó a cabo un análisis temático con la muestra de artículos seleccionados. La revisión de literatura tuvo un doble propósito. Por un lado, se buscó establecer los principales intereses investigativos de los académicos colombianos sobre el lugar de la cultura el contexto de programas de formación de docentes en lenguas extranjeras. Por otro lado, se buscó explorar las implicaciones para el desarrollo curricular en Colombia que se puedan desprender de la literatura producida por los académicos en la última década. Los resultados sugieren que el abordaje de temas relacionados con la cultura en programas de formación de docentes ha ganado popularidad, aunque la literatura en la última década se ha enfocado principalmente en una etapa diagnóstica.

*Palabras clave:* cultura, formación de docentes en lenguas extranjeras, enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, revisión de literatura

## Introduction

The daunting task of including culture and an intercultural approach in the Foreign Language curriculum in Colombia has been present since the 1990s. This inclusion, however, has not been a smooth process, as perceptions and definitions of culture by teachers and other stakeholders have been changing - or perhaps evolving - under the shadow of international scholars. A literature review proposed by Álvarez-Valencia (2014) showcases the treatment of culture-related topics in six Colombian journals, covering a time span that goes from the publication of their first issue until 2011. In his results, Álvarez-Valencia (2014) mentions that even though most of the work on culture has been done by language educators, there was a shortage of studies in the areas of teacher education. In other words, up to 2011, studies about culture and the intercultural approach were conducted by professors and researchers who worked for Foreign Languages Teacher Education (FLTE) programs, yet their studies did not address the contexts of the pre-service FLTE as such. This context, however, constitutes the seedbed on which paradigm changes are sown, so that they bear fruit in future generations. Pre-service teachers have a fundamental role in the achievement of preparing critical intercultural citizens for a globalized world. Therefore, it is worthwhile examining the state of the art of culture-related issues and the intercultural approach in the last decade in Colombia, particularly in the context of FLTE.

Against this background, it is convenient to inquire what has happened regarding research on culture-related issues in the context of FLTE. To this end, it is worth exploring the research interests and publishing trends that have moved researchers in recent years, as well as reflecting on how such interest and trends might shape the way culture is being -or will be- treated in the curriculum of FLTE programs. Thus, the purpose of this article is twofold: on the one hand, it intends to show how culture-related issues have unfolded in

the field of FLTE during the last decade taking as evidence the publications in Colombian journals; and on the other hand, the paper sheds light on the curricular implications that stem from the scholarship developed so far. For such a purpose, I have conducted a new literature review in 13 refereed journals, covering the last decade, from 2011 to 2021. This new literature review included the six journals mentioned by Álvarez-Valencia (2014), and in addition, seven other journals that either did not exist at the time the author conducted his work, or that began to publish works related to culture and foreign languages in later years. The following three questions guided the review:

- Has there been an increase in the number of studies about culture in the context of FLTE programs?
- What are the main research concerns of Colombian scholars regarding culture in FLTE programs?
- What implications for curriculum design in Colombia can be drawn from culture-related literature produced by scholars in the last decade?

This article has been structured as follows: First, the method to conduct the search will be presented, aiming at an overview of the criteria and procedures for selecting journals. Next, a section of the chapter will address the answers to the first two guiding questions posed above, by providing an account of the papers found and by categorizing them according to the topics they develop. The third and main section of this chapter provides an analysis of the implications for FLTE curricula in Colombia, as all the reviewed articles make important calls that, if considered, may constitute the cornerstone for the design of an intercultural curriculum.

## Method

As stated before, this article seeks to establish a clear picture of research on interculturality and culture-related issues, specifically in the context of FLTE programs in Colombia. To this end, the publications of the last ten years in thirteen Colombian journals were reviewed in a time span beginning in 2011 up to 2021. These journals were chosen given their scope of topics related to applied linguistics, foreign languages, education, interculturality, and foreign language teacher education. Also, an important selection criterion was the fact that all journals were refereed by means of a double-blind review process.

### *Papers Selection*

The main criterion for the search of articles was the inclusion of culture in the teaching of foreign languages, specifically in the context of FLTE programs. Works on pre-service teachers, language teacher educators, and the curriculum of these programs were included.

For the selection of articles, the three-step procedure described by Álvarez-Valencia (2014) was applied, as indicated below:

- First, the tables of contents of 13 Colombian referred journals were reviewed. In total, 251 issues were reviewed in search for titles related to culture and the teaching of foreign languages in the context of teacher education programs.
- Then, the abstracts of the selected titles were read to corroborate their relationship with the search criteria and the target context.
- Finally, 24 papers made the final cut. These papers were thoroughly read and analysed following the thematic analysis steps proposed by Braun and Clark (2006).

Table 1 shows the inventory of journal titles, number of issues reviewed per journal, and the articles selected from each one.

**Table 1.** Inventory of Journals, Issues and Papers

#	Journal	Number of Issues Revised	Number of articles Selected
1	Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development	22	4
2	<i>Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura</i>	32	4
3	Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal	20	1
4	HOW	19	3
5	Matices en Lengua Extranjera	9	0
6	Folios	21	3
7	Lenguaje	23	0
8	Educación y Educadores	31	0
9	Signo y Pensamiento	20	4
10	Actualidades Pedagógicas	20	1
11	Enletawa Journal	14	3
12	Gist Education and Research Journal	17	0
13	Shimmering Words	3	1
		<b>Total: 251 issues revised</b>	<b>Total: 24 articles selected</b>

Except for the last three journals in the table, all journals were indexed<sup>3</sup> in the Colombian system at the moment of the review. The uneven number of issues in each journal has to do with individual criteria of periodicity in publication, or loss of continuity in publication in some journals.

## Research on Culture in FLTE Programs: A Snapshot of the Last Decade

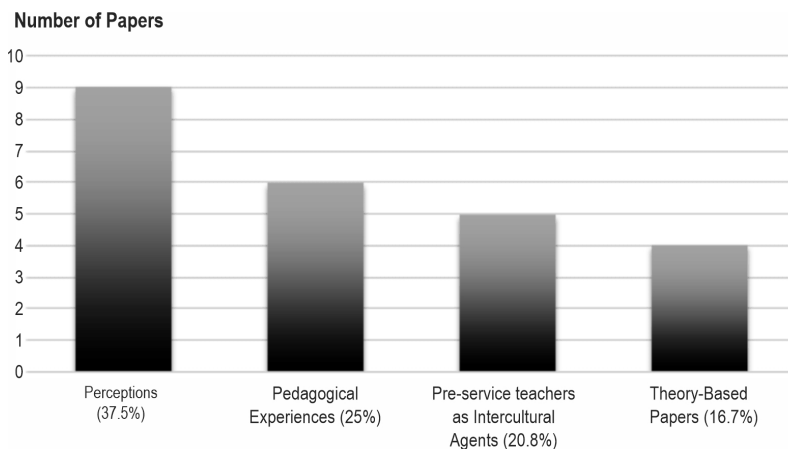
Regarding the first question posed at the beginning of this article, the 24 papers selected show that, over the last ten years, studies of culture in the context of FLTE programs have increased significantly in the Colombian context, which contrasts the findings by Álvarez-Valencia's (2014) review, in which "limited studies were found in the areas of teacher education" (p. 230). Similarly, there has been an increase in the number of Colombian journals serving as venues for academic publications about culture and foreign languages<sup>4</sup>; this is, of course, a positive stimulus for researchers in the field. A closer look at the central themes of the 24 selected papers reveals that research on culture-related topics in the context of teacher education during the last decade in Colombia has zeroed in on four main categories. First, nine out of the 24 selected papers (37.5%) focus on pre-service teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), definitions of culture, and attitudes about the inclusion of culture in foreign language (FL) teaching and learning. Second, six papers (25%) showcase pedagogical experiences fostering ICC or including culture in the FL classroom; similarly, five papers (20.8%) present pedagogical experiences in which pre-service teachers are portrayed as intercultural agents. Finally, four more articles (16.7%) correspond to theory-based papers offering pedagogical reflections on the inclusion of culture in FL teaching. Graph 1 shows the distribution of the 24 selected papers into thematic categories:

### *Colombian Scholars' Main Research Interests around Culture in FLTE*

The second question posed in this paper inquiries about the main research concerns of Colombian scholars regarding culture in FLTE programs. Consequently, Figure 1 provides an answer with the four categories of interests around which Colombian scholars have articulated their research on culture and FLTE. Although the number of articles in each of the categories

<sup>3</sup> In Colombia, indexation corresponds to the process of classification and inclusion in the national system of scientific research and publications. This process is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation, and seeks to recognize, promote, and maintain the high quality of scientific journals in the country.

<sup>4</sup> While Álvarez-Valencia's (2014) review showcases six journals, the present review comprises a total of thirteen Colombian journals.



**Figure 1.** Thematic Categories

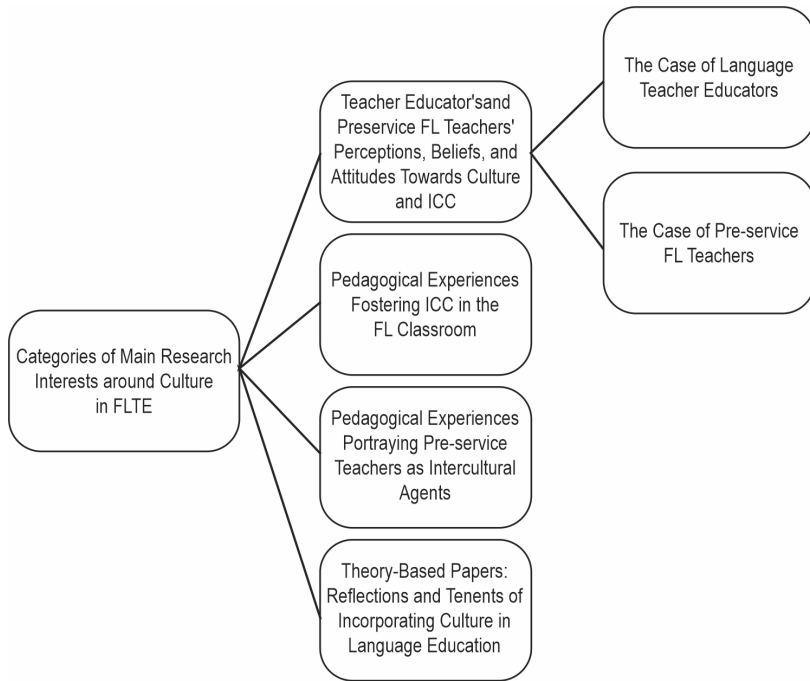
is distributed almost evenly, studies on perceptions are significantly more abundant. In what remains of this section, I delve into describing what these four categories reveal about culture-related research in FLTE programs during the last ten years in Colombia. Figure 2 summarizes the structure of the four categories I intend to develop; then, an explanation of each is provided.

### ***Category 1: Teacher Educators' and Pre-service FL teachers' Perceptions, Beliefs and Attitudes towards Culture and ICC***

Out of the nine papers in this category, four papers revolve around perceptions of language teacher educators (Quintana, 2012; Ramos-Holguín et al., 2019; Benavides-Jiménez & Mora-Acosta, 2019; Faustino-Ruiz & Patiño-Rojas, 2021), three papers focus on perceptions of pre-service FL teachers (Olaya & Gómez-Rodríguez, 2013; Esteban, 2021; Patiño-Rojas et al., 2021), and two papers integrate the perceptions of both language teacher educators and pre-service FL teachers (Murcia & Martínez-Santa, 2018; Moya-Chaves et al., 2018).

#### ***The Case of Language Teacher Educators***

A common theme in the perceptions of language teacher educators is their understanding of the concept of culture as a set of superficial aspects that can be taught as contents: festivities, food, religion, and information about countries, just to name a few. For instance, Quintana (2012) conducted an exploratory study with five teacher educators in charge of a Professional Development Program in Boyacá, Colombia. The author inquired about teachers' definitions of culture and their perceptions of the importance of including culture



**Figure 2.** Colombian Scholars’ Main Research Interests around Culture in FLTE

in foreign language classes. The excerpts from interviews that the author presents in the paper mainly reveal that these five teacher educators are aware of the importance of culture in language teaching, but their definition of culture remains incomplete, paying attention only to superficial aspects and leaving aside deep aspects of culture. On similar grounds, the study by Faustino-Ruiz and Patiño-Rojas (2021) reveals that their participants’ vision of culture oscillates between a conception of high culture (artistic production, literature, and filmography) and a sociological vision of culture that includes the set of beliefs, traditions, and customs of a community. Finally, Benavides-Jiménez and Mora-Acosta (2019) present the perceptions of two groups of bilingual teachers about the concepts of education, bilingualism, and interculturality. One group was composed by indigenous ethno-educators in Puerto Gaitán, Colombia, while participants in the other group were *mestizo* teacher educators from a private university in Bogotá, Colombia. Teacher educators in this study perceive culture as linked to the concept of nation, and they understand interculturality as an instrumentalized process in the FL classroom, while for indigenous ethno-educators it is a way of life that transcends classroom activities.

The previous three studies reinforce the claim by Ramos-Holguín et al. (2019) that the concepts of culture and interculturality in language teaching, and more precisely in the field of FLTE, are still in the making. These authors conducted a documentary analysis of the concept of interculturality in Spain, Chile, México, and Colombia. Their findings reveal that the concept of interculturality in relation to FLTE is still emerging and positioning itself as a research niche in Europe and Latin America. Their analysis yield two strong tendencies in relation to the concept of interculturality. On the one hand, interculturality is seen as a pedagogical process, rather than as a situated social construction. On the other hand, interculturality is seen as a concept related to ethnicity rather than to cultural diversity, which might cloud pre-service teachers' understanding of local cultures and subjectivities (Ramos-Holguín et al., 2019).

### ***The Case of Pre-Service FL Teachers***

Attitudes about the promotion of ICC in the FL classroom are positive in the participants of the previous studies. These teacher educators stress the importance of cultural awareness, the relevance of exposing learners to otherness, and the tight relationship between language and culture in FL teaching; however, there seems to be a disconnection between teacher educators' perceptions and what they actually do in the classroom. For instance, course syllabi lack explicit objectives and content related to the ICC (Faustino-Ruiz & Patiño-Rojas, 2021), their discourse emphasizes culture teaching as a synonym of including stereotypical generalizations in the FL class (Quintana, 2012), or they envision interculturality as an academic topic that deserves to be academically studied, rather than as a form of living and embracing diversity (Benavides-Jiménez & Mora-Acosta, 2019).

Not surprisingly, the perceptions and definitions -sometimes limited- about culture, as well as the positive attitudes towards the inclusion of an intercultural approach in the teaching of languages by the teacher educators, are inherited by the pre-service teachers who are in their process of preparation. First, in terms of perceptions, for instance, Olaya and Gómez-Rodríguez (2013) studied pre-service English teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the way culture and intercultural competence were addressed in their English classes, at three different universities in Bogotá. The authors found that culture is defined by pre-service teachers based on traditional views, as a static phenomenon. Definitions of ICC provided by most part of the population were limited, or even null in some cases, while a small percentage gave general but incomplete definitions. Pre-service teachers seem to be more concerned with communicating effectively in terms of structures and linguistic abilities rather than dealing with cultural differences. This predilection for the linguistic rather than the cultural is also reflected in the study by Patiño-Rojas et al. (2021), in which participants deem ICC as a paramount component of language teaching, yet their initial performances as teachers only focus on linguistic and communicative matters. Although a small percentage in Patiño-Rojas et al.'s study shows an understanding of deep culture issues, the vast majority still hold



onto a static view of the cultural component in the FL classroom. Similarly, while designing lesson plans, participants in the study by Esteban (2021) were found to place more relevance in addressing linguistic skills while cultural aspects were either not present, or merely attached in the form of surface information about other countries. In fact, the author uses the analogy of a salad dressing to explain that pre-service teachers in her study perceive culture as something that can be separated from the usual topics developed in the English language classroom; therefore, culture is approached in isolation as if its implementation were another source to change the mood or the taste of the class, hence the comparison with a meal dressing.

Second, regarding preservice teachers' attitudes towards the cultural component that they have been instructed in, participants in the three studies consider paramount the inclusion of the cultural component in their preparation, although all of them coincide such preparation has not been enough. In Patiño-Rojas et al. (2021), for instance, pre-service teachers assert that the intercultural component in their preparation has changed and reshaped the way they see the world. They say the preparation has opened their eyes to otherness, to the danger of stereotypes, etc., but they ask for a more explicit and steady preparation across the study plan. In the same vein, Patiño-Rojas et al. (2021) claim that there is still a need to integrate teaching strategies that allow students to develop intercultural skills that go beyond declarative knowledge about culture. On a similar token, participants in Olaya and Gómez-Rodríguez (2013) state that they want to become critical and competent to analyse cultural aspects. However, they keep on seeing culture as something useful for their travel plans but not for their comprehensive preparation as future teachers. Finally, Esteban (2021) asserts that her participants hold a positive attitude towards the cultural component of their study plan, yet they feel they have not had enough opportunities to become involved in situations that allow them to develop ICC.

The last two studies in this category are those by Murcia and Martínez-Santa (2018) and Moya-Chaves et al. (2018), which integrate the perceptions of both teacher educators and pre-service teachers. Murcia and Martínez-Santa (2018) analysed the discussions of the editorial board of a students' magazine, composed by pre-service English teachers and teacher educators; the study aimed at diagnosing the development of intercultural awareness of the participants by means of the editorial process they conduct in planning and publishing a magazine. Findings reveal that the constant discussion of cultural issues among participants has consolidated a perception of culture as an ever evolving phenomenon and has helped participants to develop intercultural awareness by means of analysing texts, making editorial decisions, and putting together written material that they want to share with other students in the program. As stated by the authors, findings of this study contrast the ones presented by Olaya and Gómez-Rodríguez (2013), as aspects of deep culture, intercultural awareness, otherness, and the shaping of a negotiated cultural identity are present in the discourse of participants who make part of the editorial process. The differences between these results could be attributed to the different semesters attended by the sample population of each

study, or to the progress made in understanding interculturality during the five years that separate both studies. The importance of the work by Murcia and Martínez-Santa (2018) relies on two aspects: first, the fact that participants use an extracurricular activity to foster intercultural awareness; second, the fact that pre-service teachers and teacher educators engage in academic discussions on culture-related topics in a ‘neutral’ environment where relationships are horizontal.

Finally, the study by Moya-Chaves et al. (2018) focused on understanding the intercultural perspective fostered in three FLTE programs in Bogotá, Colombia. In this study, perceptions of teacher educators coincide with that of pre-service teachers, revealing that the three programs promote an intercultural perspective that could be defined as relational interculturality (Walsh, 2009). Relational interculturality is understood in the cited study as the process through which people from different cultural groups come into contact and have different types of exchanges. These contacts and exchanges, though, might happen under conditions of equality or inequality, reproducing uneven power relationships. Teacher educators from the three programs have identified this as a challenge, which exhorts them to build a perspective of critical interculturality.

The studies on perceptions are important because they contribute to understanding how scholars and prospective language teachers in Colombia have transitioned into an intercultural approach; both pre-service teachers and teacher educators have been found to hold misconceptions of what ICC entails, rooted in erroneous conceptions of culture, and more generally in “deficient mechanisms inherent in the Colombian foreign language curriculum” (Álvarez-Valencia, 2014, p. 9). Similarly, Rojas-Barreto (2019) reports the results of a study with English language professors<sup>5</sup> working at eight public universities in Colombia. The author states that there is a marked concern amongst the population about the need for promoting cultural relativism in students, both to recognize their own identity and accept otherness. However, a high number of these educators understand promotion of intercultural competence merely as content transmission, ignoring the development of skills and attitudes. Most of the teacher educators are not satisfied with the training they have received about intercultural communication, which is one of the reasons why a professional development program would benefit the co-construction of an intercultural orientation at any institution.

### ***Category 2: Pedagogical Experiences Fostering ICC in the FL Classroom***

Six articles make up this category under which initiatives aimed at promoting and developing the ICC in foreign language classes are gathered. Interestingly, out of these six

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<sup>5</sup> In Colombia, the term professor is used for all educators working in higher education, regardless of their titles or academic backgrounds. Therefore, in this case, the term does not refer to an academic rank or distinction.

articles, four correspond to experiences related to the use of literature. For example, Gómez-Rodríguez (2012) conducted a study to identify how English as a foreign language (EFL) learners develop ICC through the study of literary selections; similarly, Gómez-Rodríguez (2013) explores the inclusion of authentic multicultural literary texts in the classroom of advanced EFL preservice teachers; Gómez-Rodríguez (2014) reports an experience with the inclusion of authentic multicultural short stories to foster critical ICC in pre-service teachers; finally, Ramírez-Espinosa et al. (2019) report an experience of creating subsidiary materials to work with literature in an advanced English language course, and propose a reflection on the elements that can be considered for the promotion and development of ICC in pre-service teachers through the exploration of African visions of the world.

The two remaining articles in this category present pedagogical experiences related to the implementation of specific courses. Arismendi-Gómez (2016) reports the impact that a course called *Introduction to Plurilingualism* has had in the pre-service language teachers that have taken it, in Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia. The author asserts that the course has contributed to the development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence in future language teachers, whose discourses evince their openness towards diversity and pluriculturality in relation to multiple linguistic repertoires. In a similar fashion, Ramos-Holguín (2013) reports an experience about the promotion of an intercultural component in a research and pedagogy course. The novelty in this experience lies on the fact that interculturality is usually promoted in language courses, but not in other classes of a FLTE program. Findings in Ramos-Holguín (2013) reveal that the intercultural component in the course had a positive impact on pre-service teachers, who developed intercultural competence “by developing skills to interpret and contextualize cultural practices and by raising awareness of contextual complexities” (p. 206). It should be noted that all the papers in this category correspond to initiatives of a single scholar, usually in a specific course of the teacher education study plan. In other words, it is striking that the promotion of ICC in pre-service teachers is often the product of individual efforts on the part of some teacher educators, and not the joint work of an entire curriculum.

### ***Category 3: Pedagogical Experiences Portraying Pre-Service Teachers as Intercultural Agents***

154

Although the previous category brings together different pedagogical experiences, the five papers under this category are characterized by the role assumed by pre-service teachers in situations in which they must act as intercultural subjects. In other words, in the previous category, pedagogical experiences focus on examining how specific experiences may or may not foster and rise intercultural awareness, while the works gathered in this new category focus on active endeavours whereby pre-service teachers could enact their intercultural competence physically and socially.

As a matter of fact, Huertas (2011) reports an experience with pre-service teachers in which they were involved in interactions with several actors from the sociocultural settings where they would eventually conduct their practicum. By means of the contact with their neighbours and actors from the surrounding settings, pre-service teachers experienced the relationship between sociocultural contexts, knowledge construction, and their role as intercultural mediators. Another example of pre-service language teachers interacting with others in intercultural encounters is the one reported by Loaiza-Villalba and Colorado-López (2014). The authors designed and implemented an academic and intercultural exchange project between pre-service teachers from two different programs in Quindío and Medellín, Colombia. Findings indicate that the exchange produced social and cultural bonds that render the learning process more meaningful for participants in terms of linguistic skills and the enhancement of their intercultural competence. It is worth noting that this experience fosters a vision of culture and interculturality that emphasizes the local, and which favours a fresh and dynamic understanding of what a cultural exchange entails. Similarly, Gómez-Rodríguez (2015) shows how pre-service language teachers in his study enacted their critical intercultural competence by discussing topics of deep culture in class. That enactment of ICC was the product of reflecting on controversial issues raised by the reading of literature and on making connections of those issues with their own life experiences. The genuine reactions by pre-service teachers allow them to negotiate different points of view and to respect diversity and otherness.

The last two papers in this category correspond to the work of Viáfara and Ariza (2015, 2016). Although these two articles report experiences that were not properly under the domain of teacher educators or a particular teacher education program, both papers provide an account of how travelling abroad resulted in linguistic and pedagogical learning and development of the ICC in the participating pre-service teachers. Throughout the two papers, the authors assert that the work and study sojourns that pre-service teachers experienced abroad played an important role in how they acquired intercultural awareness and developed strategies for intercultural communication that, eventually, represented also linguistic and pedagogical gains. One of the salient characteristics of the work by Viáfara and Ariza (2015, 2016) is the fact that the authors insist on the importance of formally connecting travel experiences with the curriculum of FLTE programs.

This category exposes an emerging trend that is worth exploring further: The promotion of ICC in pre-service language teachers by means of an active approach. However, as in the previous category, these works are characterized by either being initiatives of a particular language educator, or by being experiences that pre-service teachers have sought on their own, such as it is the case of the sojourns abroad reported in Viáfara and Ariza (2015; 2016).

#### ***Category 4: Theory-Based Papers: Reflections and Tenets of Incorporating Culture in Language Education***

The four papers in this last category complete the panorama of the research interests and concerns of Colombian scholars regarding culture and its place within the language curriculum. Rico-Troncoso (2018) provides an account of how ICC should be understood and integrated in the different contexts of ELT. The author traces the different stages of ELT in Colombia and provides theoretical tenets as to how communication, language and culture can be understood and interrelated in favour of an intercultural approach. Rico-Troncoso's (2018) work makes a paramount command regarding the inclusion of ICC in the agenda of all FLTE programs. In a similar vein, Díaz's work (2012) revolves around cultural education as the articulating axis of a comprehensive preparation that allows learners to enhance individual and social skills in favour of respect for individualities and pluralities. For Díaz (2012), cultural education is an urgency in a society in which daily conflicts jeopardize singularity, plurality, institutionality, and legality, matters that deserve attention, as well as the preparation of critical subjects around them for the construction of a society respectful of cultural diversity. This visibility of pluralities, and the embrace of subjectivities is also emphasized in Granados-Beltrán's (2016) work. This author reflects on the importance of a pedagogical and epistemological turn in language education in Colombia. In curricular terms, this turn implies that critical interculturality must be the core around which FLTE programs are designed, in order to resist the traces of coloniality in ELT. Similarly, in terms of teacher education, this pedagogical turn implies for pre-service language teachers to be prepared, not only as language experts, but also as subjects who respect and promote respect towards otherness and subjectivity. In a similar vein, Rico-Troncoso (2021) advocates for a critical perspective in the understanding and inclusion of culture in language teaching. This inclusion -argues the author- requires from teachers to broaden their understanding of culture as a complex phenomenon that cannot be simply clipped on to lesson plans. Instead, teachers need to adopt an intercultural approach to foreign language teaching so that they do not "continue to express meaning in a vacuum" (p. 116) but foster the kind of communication that poses cultural challenges and frictions rooted in the individual and social complexities of human beings.

#### **156 *Colombian Scholars' Research over the last Ten Years: Implications for Curriculum Design***

Once the four categories that meet the research interests of Colombian academicians in the last ten years have been exposed, it is necessary to take stock of where we are and where we are going in epistemological and pedagogical terms in Colombia. Looking backwards, it can be seen that the main interest is focused on the study of perceptions and on the documentation of significant experiences around the promotion of ICC; thus, it could be

concluded that the last ten years in Colombia have constituted a mostly diagnostic stage on the inclusion of ICC. There is a good appraisal of what teacher educators and pre-service teachers think (category 1), there is a good balance of replicable successful pedagogical experiences, and proposals have even begun to emerge that place pre-service teachers as intercultural subjects that show cultural agency and enact their competence (categories 2 and 3); but in the same way, a number of scholars, as the abovementioned, raise the alarm for migrating towards a stage of critical interculturality and comprehensive cultural education in FLTE programs (category 4).

With this in mind, this section focuses on collecting the various recommendations, suggestions, and calls for the construction of an intercultural perspective in the curriculum that are scattered throughout the scholarship reviewed in this chapter. Given the apparent polysemy of the term curriculum to refer to either a study plan or a subject plan (Montoya-Vargas, 2013; Kelly, 2004; Stern, 1983), I clarify that, for the purposes of this article, the term curriculum is understood from a comprehensive definition that encompasses the philosophical and ideological assumptions underlying the pedagogical processes, the objectives and contents, as well as the concatenation of forms of instruction and evaluation in a study plan (Stern, 1983; Núñez-París, 2008). In a more concrete perspective, curriculum here encompasses the three levels of planning proposed by Deng (2010): Institutional, programmatic, and classroom level. The remainder of this section correspond to presenting some implications for curriculum design.

### ***The Need for Transversal and Explicit Curricula around Interculturality***

The common denominator in the pedagogical experiences promoted by the ICC and the cultural contents in teacher education correspond to individual initiatives of some teachers. Although the efforts of these teachers are applauded, it is necessary for FLTE programs to build cross-cutting proposals and joint efforts around intercultural education. In this regard, Patiño-Rojas and Faustino-Ruiz (2019) recommend the modification of the study plan and the creation of much more precise descriptors of cultural competence that allow the cultural component to be clearly and schematically visible in the different course syllabi comprised in FLTE programs. While evaluation and assessment remain rather controversial issues in the field of interculturality, my take on this is that a series of descriptors could be the first step into the design of gradual frameworks to foster and assess intercultural competences across curricula. In a similar spirit, Ramos-Holguín et al. (2019) cite the words of García-Medina et al. (2012) to emphasize that “an intercultural curriculum is not a mere anecdotic addition of cultures at the centre, nor shall it be simply limited to mere activities” (p. 30, author’s translation). Cultural contents and the promotion of ICC cannot be thought of as an ancillary element of the curriculum, but as the explicit core and objective of FLTE programs.

Epistemologically speaking, we cannot fall behind in initiating research that combines curriculum design, intercultural perspectives, and collaborative teaching and learning processes. Those studies would start a new post-diagnostic stage, that is, a stage of implementation and active exploration on the promotion of intercultural curricula in the education of future teachers and their impact on future generations.

### ***Continuous Development of Teacher Educators and Pre-service Teachers through Professional Development Programs***

All the reviewed works in Category 1 show that pre-service teachers inherit the conceptions, attitudes, and definitions imparted by their teacher educators. Teacher educators have shown that they consider the inclusion of cultural components in language classes extremely important, and they even use terms related to theoretical postulates that circulate in the bibliography of the field; however, studies on perceptions reveal that there is a lack of clarity and education on cultural theories, intercultural models, and pedagogical perspectives for the approach of culture by teacher educators. This is reflected in the discourse of the pre-service teachers, who also have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of culture in language learning, but in their practices, they place greater emphasis on the teaching of linguistic aspects. In this regard, I consider it important to recognize that positive attitudes on the part of teacher educators and pre-service teachers are fertile ground for proposing continuous preparation and development on cultural issues in FLTE, and I consider Professional Development Programs (PDP) to be the answer.

The great deal of scholarship on beliefs, conceptions, and identities of teachers regarding ICC can be one of the components of PDP. This would allow, on the one hand, an environment in which teachers' voices will be heard and considered, and on the other hand, it would allow for reaching a consensus, negotiating the different perceptions, acknowledging differences and correcting misconceptions. The work by Murcia and Martínez-Santa (2018) provides an interesting insight into how teacher educators and pre-service teachers can work collaboratively for the refining of concepts and the construction of an intercultural perspective.

Next, PDP should cover the theoretical principles of ICC and the ways to foster it across the curriculum and into the course syllabi. This opens room for a frank discussion with other stakeholders such as school principals, pre-service teachers in practicum, and students, which would guarantee that the PDP is rooted in the specificities of every context. In this regard, Ramos-Holguín et al. (2019) assert that, "In the training of future language teachers, the curriculum, in order to promote intercultural spaces, will be required to be negotiated with the participants and, thus, to integrate their communities in said processes" (p. 65, author's



translation) as it would not make much sense in promoting policies for otherness without actually taking *the other* into account (Cruz, 2007).

Finally, PDP should serve to encourage and prepare teachers to design their own materials, and to explore the benefits of emerging technologies in the classroom for the promotion of ICC. The works reviewed in Categories 2 and 3 provide interesting replicable experiences that can constitute the cornerstone for methodological development, for material design, for project planning, and for the institutionalized pedagogical proposals before and after travel experiences by pre-service language teachers. In fact, the literature review of the papers in Category 1 hints that pre-service language teachers might consider the cultural component as paramount for their preparation in the role as language learners, but they neglect that component in their role as teachers. About this, Patiño-Rojas et al. (2021) insist that pre-service teachers need to receive preparation in two fields: first, in the analysis of cultural contents, and second, in the methodological aspects to pedagogically work with those contents in their future careers as language teachers. Pre-service language teachers' predilection over the work of linguistic skills in their initial performance might respond to the lack of methodological preparation in cultural matters. Thus, in order to tackle the lack of methodological preparation, Ramos-Holguín (2013) and Ramos-Holguín et al. (2019) insist on the importance of exploring the concept of ICC, not only in language courses, but also in other components of the curriculum (e.g., pedagogy and research courses), as well as in other education programs outside ELT, "given that the concept of interculturality is transversal to all fields of knowledge" (Ramos-Holguín et al., 2019, p. 65).

### ***Moving Towards Criticality***

An aspect identified in the reviewed articles that represents an implication for curriculum design is the constant call for a critical intercultural perspective. For instance, Ramos-Holguín et al. (2019) states that it is necessary to go past a functional interculturality perspective and beget a critical vision of interculturality by means of an emancipatory curriculum. Similarly, Granados-Beltrán (2016) calls for a decolonial option in curriculum design whereby local, historical, social, political, and educational conditions are considered. According to this author, it is by acknowledging subjectivities that a true intercultural and decolonial perspective can be fostered. Those subjectivities are also an interest shown by Olaya and Gómez-Rodríguez (2013), who claim that curricula have to foster a broad vision of cultures different from the Anglophone or European ones, so that pre-service teachers understand how to "promote an open environment of inclusion and diversity, since they will surely teach learners from different cultural backgrounds in Colombia" (p. 55). Patiño-Rojas et al. (2021) also say that "students need to receive a more solid preparation that allows them to fully develop [ICC] and consolidate a critical intercultural awareness" (p. 137). Finally, Rico-Troncoso (2021) also holds on to the need of a critical stance in intercultural



language teaching. The author warns that “The great challenge for teachers in Colombia and Latin America is not to fall into the trap of using interculturality only as a touch-up speech to promote inclusion or be aware of the existence of differences” (p.117), as the discourse of interculturality is often used rhetorically to conceal power issues and disparities; instead, teachers and programs need to promote intercultural language teaching in a way that it helps students to uncover longstanding inequalities and forms of segregation that are rooted in those differences. Thus, the field of ELT in relation to the inclusion of cultural matters in the curriculum might be seeing a great deal of changes regarding criticality in the near future.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this article three questions were established. The first question inquired whether there had been an increase in the number of studies on culture, specifically in the context of FLTE programs. To this respect, the literature review of the last ten years shows us that the treatment of cultural-related issues in the contexts of FLTE program, has had an interesting increase when compared with the postulates in Álvarez-Valencia (2014). However, the number of papers revised in this study (243 in total) suggests that more work is needed to understand how language teacher education programs in Colombia integrate culture-related issues, research, and knowledge production.

The second question addressed the main research concerns of Colombian scholars regarding culture in FLTE programs. Four categories emerged from the analysis, showing that the scholarship in the last ten years revolves mainly around perceptions and pedagogical experiences, and to a lesser extent around studies that show pre-service teachers as intercultural agents, as well as some studies of theoretical reflection. In general, the four categories that bring together the main interests of the Colombian scholars indicate that the last decade has focused on a diagnostic stage. This brings us to the last questions posed at the beginning of the study, which aimed at drawing some implications for curriculum designed, based on the revised literature. A characteristic that stands out in all the articles reviewed, has to do with the broadly felt need that the inclusion of cultural components in language teaching should transcend the scope of the classroom, and should permeate the entire curriculum in a transversal manner. If an (inter)cultural perspective is expected to be infused in language teaching, then the (inter)cultural components of the curriculum cannot be an ancillary element that may or may not be present in the subjects. Similarly, if an endeavour of this kind is expected to work, curricular and institutional decisions must be made, so that the (inter)cultural approach does not remain up to some teachers. Thus, future studies could focus on the design of curricular proposals in which the integration of cultural elements is infused in a gradient and transversal way, through all the areas and subjects that make up the curriculum of programs, especially those of language teacher education.

Similarly, there is a constant call for professional development around cultural issues and critical perspectives in foreign language teaching, and language teacher education. On the one hand, teacher education programs have the twofold mission of offering pre-service teachers a preparation that gears language teaching, culture, and criticality successfully, as well as empowering them to teach languages (inter)culturally and critically. On the other hand, more work and scholarship is needed depicting team efforts by in-service teachers learning about the integration of culture in language teaching and, hopefully, building collaboratively bottom-up designs that are relevant for their contexts. To sum up, the field deserves to start soon new pedagogical and epistemological proposals for curricular intervention. The call for a critical perspective also appears as an urgency in a country in which inequities and constant conflict shape the interactions of different social groups.

Therefore, it is important that the curricula of all fields of knowledge prepare professionals capable of analysing, respecting, and learning from otherness and diversity based on a vision of social justice that does not perpetuate long-standing uneven power relationships. This does not mean that research on perceptions or classroom experiences that teach us so much about the implementation of the ICC and cultural issues in language classes should cease, but that research should be complemented with a new set of collective, explicit, and transversal curricular proposals.

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