

## **Critical Perspectives in English Language Teaching, What is Coming?**

*Perspectivas Críticas en la Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés, ¿Qué Viene?*

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### **Abstract**

This reflective article examines the emerging tendencies in critical perspectives within English Language Teaching (ELT). The article begins by providing a brief historical overview of ELT's critical pedagogies and discussing its perspectives in the post-pandemic era. It highlights the need for critical approaches that address power dynamics, social inequalities, and ideological influences. In addition, new trends imply integrating cultural aspects that favor students' identity and culture, and more dynamic bilingual practices to promote inclusive, socially just, multilingual, and transformative language learning environments. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of ongoing reflection, professional development, and collaboration among ELT practitioners to incorporate critical perspectives effectively in the classroom.

*Keywords:* critical perspectives, cultural integration, English Language Teaching (ELT), identity, inclusive language learning, multilingualism, social justice

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## Resumen

Este artículo reflexivo examina las tendencias emergentes en las perspectivas críticas dentro del campo de la Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés (ELT, por sus siglas en inglés). El artículo comienza proporcionando un breve panorama histórico de las pedagogías críticas en ELT y sus perspectivas en la era post pandémica. Se resalta la necesidad de enfoques críticos que abordan las dinámicas de poder, las desigualdades sociales y las influencias ideológicas. Además, nuevas tendencias implican la integración de aspectos culturales que favorecen la identidad y cultura propias de los estudiantes, así como prácticas bilingües más dinámicas con el fin de promover entornos de aprendizaje de idiomas más inclusivos, socialmente justos, multilingües y transformadores. El artículo concluye dando énfasis a la importancia de la reflexión continua, el desarrollo profesional y la colaboración entre los profesionales de ELT para incorporar perspectivas críticas en el aula de manera efectiva.

*Palabras clave:* Perspectivas críticas, integración cultural, la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa, identidad, aprendizaje inclusivo de idiomas, multilingüismo, justicia social

## Introduction

Language teachers should move beyond grammar lessons and culture and make their lessons more relevant to society (Liddicoat, 2020, p.23).

English Language Teaching (ELT) is a dynamic field involving English teaching and learning as an additional language in diverse regions worldwide (Usma et al., 2018). Traditionally, ELT has focused primarily on language learning, vocabulary aspects, grammar instruction, and communicative competence (López Henao & Velasquez Hoyos, 2022). However, over the years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for critical perspectives in ELT to address the inherent power dynamics, social injustices, and inequalities that are often perpetuated through language education; particularly in ELT (Herrera Pineda & Ortiz Ruiz, 2018).

Accordingly, critical perspectives in ELT invite educators and students to challenge the traditional approaches to language teaching and highlight the social, cultural, and political dimensions of language learning (Benesh, 2001). It seeks to explore how language and power intersect and aims to empower students to critically analyze and question dominant ideologies and discourses (Echeverri Sucerquia et al., 2014). Having this in mind, scholars, educators, and practitioners must critically examine the underlying power dynamics, social inequalities, and ideological influences that shape language teaching and learning processes (Fenton-Smith, 2014).

The inclusion of critical perspectives has been a predominant aspect in ELT scenarios. This inclusion has been characterized by the implementation of community-based approaches such as Task-Based Instruction (TBI), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), and Project-Based Learning (Ministry of National Education, 2016). These approaches enable English language

educators to adapt their teaching practices to students' needs and continually evolve in response to shifting educational landscapes, cultural contexts, and emerging pedagogical theories (Sharkey & Clavijo Olate, 2012). Therefore, knowing and reflecting upon new trends in critical perspectives in ELT becomes imperative to propose teaching practices that update and improve the existing ones.

Consequently, this article aims to reflect and delve into emerging tendencies within critical perspectives in ELT, shedding light on emergent approaches, theoretical frameworks, and practical approaches. Through an overview of these new tendencies, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussions and debates surrounding critical pedagogy in ELT. Through a comprehensive review of the current literature, this reflective article intends to provide ELT educators and researchers with valuable insights about the emerging tendencies within critical perspectives. By highlighting these new directions, we hope to inspire further research, foster critical reflection, and ultimately contribute to the enhancement of ELT practices that promote social justice and inclusivity.

## Historical Overview of Critical Pedagogy in ELT

To reflect and understand what Critical Perspectives are, it is paramount to define what Critical Pedagogy (CP) is and to trace its origins according to visionaries and studies on the area, as well as historical phenomena that gave rise to this educational philosophy.

According to Kincheloe (2008), theoreticians have provided myriad definitions of CP. He also states that it is sometimes a term difficult to define in a few words. However, scholars agree that it goes beyond simply meeting content by students and educators. The author explains that CP centers on the teaching and learning contexts. It involves the social, political, and economic school contexts, usually including social phenomena such as marginalization, students' cultural experiences, and even the influence of educators' practices and teaching approaches on learning. Thus, CP places learning in real-life social problems experienced by the stakeholders, so that students are aware of them. This is a view of CP as known today, and it is the result of developed ideas by Paulo Freire (Porfilio & Ford, 2015; Smith & Seal, 2021) in his 1968 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the Frankfurt School, and Henry Giroux (Malott, 2011), among others.

CP originated as an alternative system opposing conservative manners of education. In such a system, instruction was given to reassert that power was entitled to some higher elites. This is supported by Cho (2013) when she implies that the conventional paradigm of education tolerates "discrimination and inequality" (p. 16). Defining CP implies a different approach to teaching, one that debunks the power models of traditional education, where learning was unidirectional, i.e., from teacher to student. The core of such an approach is

embraced by all practitioners who adopt it as an alternative method in response to alternative systems. For instance, Boronski (2021) proposes that CP be a quest for a fairer society.

The implementation of CP has also been explored in the field of ELT. There may seem to be some degree of antagonism between CP philosophy and its role in ELT. This is because, according to López-Gopar (2019), the scarce studies on this construct are found mainly in the dominant cultures that speak English as a mother tongue, without considering other scenarios where the language is taught or spoken. However, the author's work compiles the experiences of ELT educators and pre-service teachers who have opposed social injustice and discrimination, and such opposition is in some way to act and think critically. López-Gopar also implies that implementing CP in ELT in other contexts different from English-speaking countries means redefining the term. This is because non-English speaking countries have other problems and social issues, so CP meanings or preconceptions vary.

In this sense, the term “Global South/s” (Makoni et al., 2022)—referring to regions where injustice, discrimination, and inequality prevail, including also certain ones from the Global North—underscores the necessity of adopting a critical perspective on societal issues (Bonilla Medina & Finardi, 2022; Makoni et al., 2022). Additionally, including this educational philosophy in those settings is pivotal since it will permit their inhabitants a more democratic and just education. In this way, the impact of language lessons will move beyond the classroom and language itself, making it more relevant to society.

Some other earlier studies of CP in ELT have been conducted mainly in adult education (Johnston, 2003). This situation calls for implementing CP in primary and secondary education because younger generations need to develop critical thinking, empathy for others, recognition and appreciation of their culture, and civic citizenship, among other social actions.

### ***Critical Pedagogy in the Post-Pandemic Era***

Academic events such as symposia, research articles, and reports of teaching experiences have lately been questioning pedagogy in the post-pandemic era. This is partly because, during the COVID-19 confinement period, educators and students developed more technological skills; the benefits, especially on teacher-student feedback of those tools, were recognized and valued (Myers & Stratton, 2021). These advantages are also pivotal in ELT and the implementation of CP in this area, especially in rural schools (Liang & Cao, 2022). Nowadays, educators and people have more access to technological devices (Cahyono et al., 2023). Thus, as the authors assert, students and educators can rely on a wider variety of resources after the pandemic, and therefore, their technological literacy is increased.

As stated above, the pandemic era led institutions to use technology to impart lessons, as a result, educators and students learned to use specialized resources in their practices. Hence, Critical Perspectives in ELT in the post-pandemic era imply utilizing these resources. In a case study conducted by Todea et al. (2022), the authors found that educators are more willing to incorporate technology in their lessons after the pandemic. They also conclude that such implementation can draw positive results for educators and students since it benefits those with different learning styles. Some online resources promote cooperative and autonomous learning requiring educators to redefine and reflect on their practices, especially regarding their use of technology (Gruber et al., 2023). All these aspects provide strategies to detach ELT from traditional English language teaching, which is one of the primary goals of critical perspectives.

It is impossible to deny that the COVID-19 pandemic brought some social changes. Countries like Colombia, Cuba, The USA, and Myanmar experienced a social outbreak connected to COVID-19 consequences and social disparities (Infobae, 2021). Education was not strange to this situation, particularly, in the English class, as shown in Bonilla Medina and Quintero Polo's (2022) study. The authors mention that, in the post-pandemic era, critical perspectives in ELT have gained even greater significance. As the world emerges from a global crisis, reevaluating and challenging traditional approaches to language education become crucial.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, critical perspectives have proven essential for changing the realities and consequences that flourished during this period. In the post-pandemic era, educators and students have seen the need to promote a more socially just pedagogy that addresses students' diverse needs and experiences (Park & Yi, 2022). It is not just technology that students need, but a concrete application of political and educational proposals to overcome systemic inequalities that were more evident in the pandemic (Bonilla Medina & Quintero Polo, 2022). Moreover, Teaching English in the post-pandemic era challenges English language educators to reexamine language policies, materials, and assessment practices to ensure that they reflect a more equitable and inclusive approach to language education (O'Boyle & Samanhudi, 2023). Ultimately, ELT critical perspectives in the post-pandemic era play a vital role in transforming language classrooms into spaces that foster empathy, critical consciousness, and social transformation.

## **The Teaching of Cultural Aspects Favoring Students' Identity and Culture**

ELT's new tendencies address the crucial role of teaching cultural aspects that favor students' identities, as this fosters a sense of belonging and empowers diverse communities within educational settings (Dasli, 2012). When educators incorporate students' cultural

backgrounds into the curriculum, they offer students opportunities to explore and appreciate their heritage, traditions, and values (Porfilio & Ford, 2015). Historically, many English language educators have favored Anglo-American teaching methods; this practice has perpetuated discriminatory language practices (Guerrero-Nieto, 2020). Therefore, incorporating students' cultures to foster greater inclusivity in the language classroom is essential today.

In this regard, by implementing critical perspectives in ELT, educators and students recognize the importance of cultural diversity and ensure that students' unique perspectives are valued and celebrated while learning other languages and cultures. When students see themselves and their cultural identities reflected in the learning materials, they feel validated and encouraged to engage actively in their education (García, 2004). Moreover, teaching cultural aspects helps students develop a deeper understanding, respect, and resignification of their culture and the new one. This recent tendency to value students' identity and culture would foster empathy, tolerance, and global citizenship without forgetting students' roots and ancestry. The goal is not to prevent students from learning about foreign cultures but to strike a balance between teaching their culture and exposing them to others.

Following previous ideas, language is not isolated, but part of a culture (Bonilla Medina, 2012). This assertion has become stronger during the last decades. Thus, English language classes must focus on real situations related to students' contexts. Authors such as Arismendi (2022), Torres-Casierra (2021), and Granados-Beltrán (2016) explain the importance of developing critical interculturality in ELT classes. In this sense, ELT's new trends advocate including students' culture and identity to facilitate learning and understanding of other languages like English (López-Gopar, 2019).

ELT scenarios have perpetuated methodological approaches that lead to ideas of power and domination (López-Gopar & Sughrua, 2014). This has affected how English language students perceive their mother tongue; the majority try to reach native-like proficiency to avoid discrimination, exclusion, or segregation just for having an accent (Darder et al., 2024; Holliday, 2016).

That is why critical perspectives on ELT constitute a new standpoint in the reconceptualization of ELT as a more inclusive, ethical, and critical way of seeing the English language without erasing any trace of students' mother language (Helot et al., 2022). According to Norton and Toohey (2004), critical perspectives in language learning focus on "local situations, problems, and issues, and see responsiveness to the particularities [...] [and] resist totalizing discourses about critical teaching, subjects, and strategies for progressive action" (p. 2). In other words, critical perspectives enable English language students and educators to value both cultures, their own and the foreign ones.

By integrating diverse cultural and critical perspectives, educational institutions can create inclusive environments that empower students to re-signify their identities and contribute meaningfully to a multicultural society. Dasli (2012, cited in Liddicoat, 2020) asserts that:

Language learning must serve as an engagement, through language and cultures, in coming to understand linguistically and culturally diverse others. The aim is to come to an understanding for oneself rather than to come to a specific point of view about culturally contextual values, practices, etc. (p. 3)

Expressly, ELT opens the doors to a more multi-perspectival view of languages and cultures (Darder et al., 2024). This idea means that language learning should go beyond simply learning linguistic skills and alternately provide means to actively engage with various cultures and people who do not share the same language and culture (Arismendi, 2022). The primary goal of ELT today is not to adopt a specific approach or methodology that leads to assuming one single cultural perspective or to judge the values and practices of others based on their cultural context (Granados-Beltran, 2022). Instead, the emphasis is on using language as a tool for personal growth and understanding of oneself and others. Through language learning, individuals broaden their horizons, gain insights into diverse perspectives, and construct a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity, encouraging students to develop their understanding rather than conforming to preconceived notions or stereotypes (Dasli, 2012). These notions and stereotypes have been created due to the perpetuation of cascade models that conceive English as a powerful language (Walsh, 2010; Usma et al., 2018; Velásquez-Hoyos & Martínez-Burgos, 2023). With the inclusion of critical perspectives in ELT, English language educators can gradually change these preconceptions.

## The Inclusion of More Dynamic Bilingual Practices

Critical perspectives in ELT offer a wide range of approaches and methodologies that seek to include students' needs and participatory approaches and engage their voices. That is why talking about one methodology that suits students' needs is unusual today in ELT. Instead, the claim is to include more dynamic practices, which combine elements of different approaches and explore the construction and design of context-sensitive methodologies more aligned to students' contexts (González, 2007). Thus, we, as English language educators, propose incorporating features of approaches that advocate for the development of social justice, dialogue, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness. In this line, we suggest exploring and adapting features of Community-Based Approaches such as Task-Based Instruction (TBI), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Project-Based Learning, and translanguaging.

To begin with, TBI, PBL, and Project-Based Learning substantially impact community-based projects within ELT contexts. These pedagogical approaches offer valuable opportunities for students to apply their language skills in authentic, real-world contexts,

promoting meaningful engagement and active learning (Coronado-Rodríguez et al., 2022; Bolaños Saenz et al., 2018; Ministry of National Education, 2016). On the one hand, TBI focuses on task completion, allowing students to develop their language proficiency while actively participating in tasks that simulate real-life situations (Velásquez-Hoyos, 2023). On the other hand, PBL takes it a step further by presenting students with authentic problems or challenges to solve collaboratively, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and language use in a meaningful context (Comber, 2018). Similarly, Project-Based Learning engages students in longer-term projects requiring research, planning, and final product presentation; this approach connects language learning with community-based initiatives (Rojas & Rueda Varon, 2019).

These approaches empower students to take ownership of their learning, develop relevant skills, and impact their communities positively (Bolaños Saenz et al., 2018). By implementing these approaches, in which language students apply their language skills in authentic community contexts, they gain a deeper understanding of cultural nuances and become active contributors to society. Ultimately, TBI, PBL, and Project-Based Learning enhance language development and foster civic engagement, cultural sensitivity, and social responsibility. These aspects align with critical perspectives.

Translanguaging is also a dynamic pedagogical approach that contributes to students' foreign language development, without banning their mother language. Translanguaging in an English language class has emerged as a powerful pedagogical approach that recognizes and values students' diverse linguistic repertoires (Ortega, 2019). It encourages students to draw upon their range of language resources, including their mother languages, to facilitate language learning and meaning-making (García, 2009). Jonsson (2013) points out that students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds are flexible; they often adapt their language choices according to their needs. Therefore, translanguaging breaks down the artificial barriers among languages, allowing students to make connections, transfer knowledge, and bridge gaps between languages and cultures (Arias, 2016). In class, translanguaging encourages students to use their first language as a scaffold for understanding and expressing ideas in English. It promotes language fluidity and empowers students by validating their linguistic identities and honoring their multilingualism. Hence, this approach embraces critical perspectives as educators create inclusive learning environments that foster creativity, critical thinking, and deeper engagement with the English language, acknowledging the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Complementarily, Monroy Ramirez and Bastidas (2023) express that translanguaging acknowledges and values students' diverse cultural backgrounds. It encourages them to share their cultural perspectives, traditions, and unique linguistic features, enticing a deeper appreciation and understanding of multiculturalism within the classroom. Similarly, García



and Wei (2014) conceive learning two languages as a unique linguistic repertoire to create meaning.

Based on these assertions, translanguaging helps students feel comfortable demonstrating their knowledge and understanding in the classroom because they can have no linguistic limitations. As a result, students present a better subject performance as they increase their language skills in both linguistic codes. Accordingly, translanguaging is constituted as an approach that facilitates the implementation of more dynamic practices in ELT as it validates students' culture and linguistic repertoire in their mother tongue.

Finally, we would like to propose other alternatives aligned with the ideas of critical perspectives; those also foster more inclusive and dynamic bilingual practices. Apart from the mentioned approaches, we recommend incorporating ideas from decolonial theory. This theory advocates for including diverse voices and perspectives, challenges the dominance of native-speaker norms, and critiques the mere focus on Western-centric content. For instance, Álvarez Valencia and Valencia (2023) highlight the importance of decolonizing ELT education. These authors propose including Cultural Semiotic Resources (CSR) that validate students' culture and identity. They also advocate for incorporating multimodal and multisensory texts into the classroom. They argue that "embodied meaning-making practices through arts, music, and visuals create a more just and equitable learning environment" (p. 230). Furthermore, they stress the value of integrating performances in language classes, allowing students from various cultural backgrounds to express their identities and cultures through translanguaging elements.

Similarly, Fandiño-Parra (2021) suggests various strategies for this process, such as creating educational materials that address local and sociopolitical contexts, reworking teacher training programs to foster independent knowledge creation, and pursuing research that better serves the needs of local communities. Including decolonial theory and the strategies proposed by previous authors allows educators to transform English language education shifting the focus from a single, external standard to a more inclusive approach.

New trends in critical perspectives in ELT suggest incorporating locally informed teaching (Hauerwas et al., 2021), which balances global English language norms with local contexts and needs. This approach respects local cultures while preparing students for effective communication globally. Additionally, critical perspectives should emphasize contextualized language teaching that involves adapting materials and methods. Such adaptation must fit students' cultural, social, and economic contexts, and make language teaching more relevant and effective (Huang et al., 2014). Critical perspectives and new tendencies in ELT promote anti-bias education recognizing and addressing biases in teaching materials and practices. The main intention is to transform ELT into a more equitable learning environment by questioning stereotypes and fostering critical thinking about prejudice and discrimination.

At last, critical perspectives encourage critical literacy and constant reflection. The former entices students and educators to analyze and question the texts they encounter understanding how language shapes and is shaped by social contexts. Language learning involves more than just grammatical accuracy; it is also about interpreting and critiquing the content and its implications. The latter continuously invites educators to reflect on their practices and their impact on students. If educators are conscious and reflect on their biases, they are more able to make informed and equitable decisions in their teaching practice.

## Critical Perspectives and Multilingualism

It is impossible to talk about critical perspectives without mentioning multilingualism since this approach intends to challenge language power dynamics and offers a more multilingual perspective in the teaching of languages. This is particularly relevant in a country like Colombia, where linguistic diversity is a significant aspect of the social landscape (Duque Salazar et al., 2024). Thus, pre-service and in-service language teachers must receive adequate preparation to navigate the multilingualism and linguistic diversity that the modern world faces today. Therefore, integrating critical perspectives into English language teaching is crucial for supporting multilingualism.

In various geographical areas, including Europe, Japan, North America, and Latin America, some educators continue to use a monoglossic teaching approach that opposes multilingualism. Van Avermaet et al. (2018) state that “most education systems in the world still educate children through one dominant language and continue to hold on to the belief that this is the best way towards social integration” (p. 3). Consequently, this method of instruction through a single dominant language has somehow caused students to detach from their native or heritage languages.

O'Regan (2021) asserts that the dominance of English is evident in international politics, the economy, and higher education. The academic success of educators and researchers relies mainly on their proficiency in the English language. This phenomenon has persisted even when educators have claimed other views more open to including “localized superdiverse translanguaging practices” (p. 182).

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O'Regan (2021) points out that the Global South and Global North are now addressing their language practices. The author also adds that cultural and linguistic diversification in both contexts has inspired universities to move towards multilingualism making it crucial to implement critical perspectives in education.

Another proposal related to critical perspectives and multilingualism is presented in the work of Mary et al. (2021). The authors suggest transcultural mediation to develop a multilingual curriculum that supports students' linguistic diversity, promotes communication

and facilitates conflict resolution. Their approach aims to build inclusive language classrooms that address the needs and rights of culturally diverse groups, ensuring appropriate resources and fair treatment. In other words, to achieve multilingualism, implementing approaches such as critical perspectives and transcultural mediation is essential to foster the proper development of cultural aspects in the language classroom.

## Conclusions

This article is to reflect on new ELT tendencies concerning critical perspectives. The authors reviewed in this reflection paper suggest that critical perspectives be focused on the students' identities and culture. They must also promote dynamic bilingual practices on the part of educators. This approach will contextualize English language teaching as it promotes critical thinking about students' context and situated problems (Arismendi, 2022; Dasli, 2012). Consequently, the impact of class instruction will be reflected in the community.

We also state that there is a need to detach from traditional teaching that sets aside critical thinking skills. Without implying that such an approach is useless, as Bastidas (2022) recognizes, it must be complemented with components that enhance autonomy and problem-solving skills. Bastidas also proposes combining methods; we hereby add that such implementation includes critical components of social justice and power.

Critical perspectives in ELT must go hand in hand with the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), especially in the post-pandemic era. Such technologies had to be implemented as a strategy during instruction in the recent COVID-19 emergency. As a result, the advantages of that implementation were valued by students and educators. According to Todea et al. (2022) and Liang and Cao (2022), several educators worldwide are more willing to incorporate technology in their lessons. Therefore, further studies should be based on a deep reflection on incorporating critical perspectives and ICTs in ELT to encourage the use of the English language beyond schools. However, as mentioned by Bonilla Medina and Quintero Polo (2022), students not only need technology. They also need a concrete application of critical, political, and educational proposals that seek to overcome systemic inequalities more evident during the pandemic. In this sense, we invite educators and researchers to continue exploring critical perspectives in the English class to make students aware of their possibilities when more empowered by their social realities.

As pointed out by Bonilla Medina and Quintero Polo (2022) and Liddicoat (2020), we as English language educators need to constantly rethink our teaching practices not only to teach grammar, vocabulary, and culture lessons but also to make them more relevant to society. That is the main goal of implementing critical perspectives in ELT in which students

get empowered by social problems making them aware of inequalities, social disparities, and cultural diversities.

Finally, this reflection suggests that critical perspectives enable educators to combine a variety of ELT methodologies that suit students' realities. Therefore, there is a need to adapt and design context-sensible methodologies (González, 2007) that take elements of approaches such as TBI, PBL, Project-Based Learning, Translanguaging, decolonial theory, globally informed teaching, and contextualized language teaching. The purpose must underline the role of community-based initiatives that affect students' culture and identity; also, the purpose must make them feel like protagonists of their learning process.

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