DECOLONIAL NARRATIVES AS A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY PRACTICE IN EFL STUDENTS

NARRATIVAS DECOLONIAIS EM PEDAGOGIA CRÍTICA PARA ESTUDANTES DE INGLÊS COMO LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA

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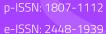E-mail: juan.ariasus@amigo.edu.co

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects upon the construction of narratives presented by students of 10th grade from a public institution in the EFL classroom in Colombia. This study was developed using an Action Research method and a sociocritical paradigm to encourage continuous constructions of decolonial narratives among the students. Furthermore, the exploration of narratives shows various significance from economic, social, and cultural perspectives about the role of the language in their context and the influence on their future that stems from their socio-cultural contexts that see English as the only way to success. Finally, the importance of a critical pedagogy approach to critique the reproduction of colonial narratives to develop a broader understanding of English learning.

Keywords: Colonial Narratives. Decolonial Narratives. Critical Pedagogy; EFL in Colombia

RESUMO

Este artigo reflete sobre a construção de narrativas apresentadas por alunos do 10° ano de uma instituição pública na sala de aula de inglês como língua estrangeira na Colômbia. Este estudo foi desenvolvido utilizando o método de Pesquisa-Ação e um paradigma sociocrítico para incentivar construções contínuas de narrativas decoloniais entre os alunos. Além disso, a exploração das narrativas mostra várias significâncias das perspectivas econômica, social e cultural sobre o papel da língua em seu contexto e a influência em seu futuro que decorre de seus contextos socioculturais que veem o inglês como o único caminho para o sucesso. Por fim, destaca-se a importância de uma abordagem pedagógica crítica para criticar a reprodução de narrativas coloniais a fim de desenvolver |uma compreensão mais ampla da aprendizagem do inglês.

Palavras-chave: Narrativas Coloniais. Narrativas Decoloniais. Pedagogia Crítica. EFL na Colômbia.

1 INTRODUCTION

Through an observation exercise in teachers' practicum process in a public school located in Medellin, it has been possible to evidence aspects such as a lack of criticism in EFL students in their learning process; this lack of criticism leads to the reproduction of dominant discourses that they are sometimes reproduced from their sociocultural contexts. This lack of criticism is evidenced by three main aspects, which are:

The types of colonial narratives regarding English that exist in our EFL students are that we found that students have associated the acquisition and mastery of the English language with purposes that may seem diverse but are ultimately divided into two main aspects. These diverse perceptions and motivations behind English language acquisition encompass a spectrum from pragmatic and aspirational colonial narratives to more critical and balanced decolonial narratives. This topic delves into those intricate narratives that were found during the conduct of this research.

Secondly, we explore decolonial and colonial narratives about English. When analyzing the various perceptions that students have about English, we notice that it is important to recognize and go beyond just knowing those previous perceptions and consider how these perspectives can be promoted and reproduced by the various factors in your daily life, such as your family, friends, and community.

Finally, evaluate the effect of exploring decolonial narratives about English as a critical pedagogical practice. This exploration advocated for a decolonial lens in English language learning, encouraging students to transgress colonial legacies and engage in critical reflection. Thus, by challenging colonial narratives and embracing English language pedagogy as a transformative tool, we explored a more inclusive and equitable approach to language learning can be promoted.

Authors such as Freire (1970), Giroux (1997), Walsh (2007), and McLaren (2020) allude to these factors from theoretical components such as the theory of resistance, critical pedagogy, interculturality, and coloniality. The previous aspects are related to the principles of inclusion and cultural sensitivity in critical pedagogy advocated by Freire (1970) since this theory invited us to embrace critical pedagogy as a guiding philosophy. Education makes freedom a way for people to confront their reality and understand how to change it critically, and consequently, consider it as a means to empower individuals to engage critically with their realities and participate in its transformation. That is why critical pedagogy is not innocent. Still, it is always challenging existing power structures and seeing the pedagogical practices as something that is not neutral but deeply ingrained in cultural, historical, and social contexts.

In contrast, this type of dominant discourse that the students practice also has a way of being counteracted through the contributions of resistance theory by Giroux (1997). Applied to EFL education

in Colombia, this theory focuses on students' perspectives to resist, challenge, or question the dominant structures and practices within their educational contexts without going to the extremes of not being interpreted as acts of rebellion but rather attempts to oppose these structures. Being so closely linked to critical pedagogy, resistance theory is understood as an invitation for students to apply critical thinking, social transformation, and equity.

On the other hand, In the complex interplay of colonial and decolonial narratives, we witness the profound influence on individuals' language learning motivations and choices. Colonial narratives present English as a path to success while contrasting views emphasize the equality of languages. As Walsh (2007) stated, The chains are no longer around our feet; now, they're wrapped around our minds, constraining our thoughts and limiting our freedom in more subtle but powerful and dominant ways.
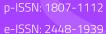
Finally, McLaren (2020) collects all these theories and summarizes them by emphasizing that within the classroom, critical pedagogy requires a mutual interaction between educators and students; it needs a dynamic interaction that involves the process of remodeling, operating, and reconsidering the concept of understanding. To guarantee a critical pedagogy related to the dominant narratives, it must be subject to a struggle and social transformation; this requires some necessary combinations to understand the critical theories, relevant actions in learning practices, the dominant narratives, and finally, bring this to a particular context for greater effectiveness.

Thus, this study aims to empower students by amplifying their voices while providing them with a fresh, critical outlook on learning a second language, specifically English. In essence, we seek to delve into the perspectives of EFL students in Colombia regarding English language acquisition to grasp the intricacies of colonial discourses and address them through the lens of critical pedagogy.

This general framework allowed us to study the data and the evidence provided by our participants and, with the findings, to explore decolonial narratives that foster our students to emancipate themselves through critical pedagogy and, in this way, give a voice to students who are often made invisible in school. Their beliefs, discomforts, and desires are assumed, but we rarely hear them from them.

In this order of ideas, to meet these objectives, this study has a main question: "How does the exploration of decolonial narratives regarding English as a critical pedagogy practice influence students' EFL perception?" We aim to explore these narratives deeply to understand their origin, influence, and effect on the learning of English in the students' sociocultural and educational context.

2 THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

In our research, we have used three elements to provide a more contextualized sense. These elements are EFL education in Colombia: a perpetuation of power; embracing Critical Pedagogy: a quest for emancipation in Colombian Education; and understanding decolonization narratives in EFL education. Each element presents an assumption grounded in contributions from Walsh, McLaren, and Giroux, which will help us better understand the research framework from theoretical perspectives.

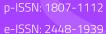## 2.1 EFL EDUCATION IN COLOMBIA: A PERPETUATION OF POWER

The National Program of Bilingualism 2004-2019, Strengthening and Development of a Program of Competencies in Foreign Languages 2010-2014, and, recently, the National English Plan 2015-2025 have guided English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Colombia. However, those policies perpetuate a set of ideological, political, social, and economic structures since they are not neutral and invade the educational system from the critical pedagogy perspective (SHOHAMY, 2006).

Education in Colombia has been constantly reproducing and perpetuating those ideologies of power through the imposition of EFL policies that foster the need for high schools to graduate with a B2 English level according to the Common European Framework of Reference to enhance employability instead of social development. Therefore, the stakeholders of the educational system, with very limited resistance to the policies, reproduce the "criteria for language correctness, oblige people to adopt certain ways of speaking and writing, create definitions about language and especially determine the priority of certain languages in society and how these languages should be used, taught and learned."(SHOHAMY, 2006, p.99)

In the same way, the acquisition of EFL educational policies also represents a prioritization of English as the nation's only and most important repertoire and as the only way to success. According to Gómez Sará (2017), educational institutions acknowledge the diverse range of indigenous languages spoken throughout the nation, which implies that the application of English proficiency holds value in the globalized world. Colombia's EFL policies may exacerbate social inequalities and neglect the nation's rich linguistic heritage by emphasizing a single language.

A more critical educational approach to language education is needed, one that fosters intercultural understanding, promotes multilingualism, and ensures equitable access to quality education for all Colombians, regardless of their socioeconomic background or native tongue.

2.2 EMBRACING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: A QUEST FOR EMANCIPATION IN COLOMBIAN EDUCATION

The concept of critical pedagogy, as articulated by Freire (1970), presents an emancipatory way to challenge traditional methods. It views education as a potent tool for transforming dominant ideas through critical reflection. It is a pedagogy that seeks the emancipation and freedom of those who have been oppressed through recognizing and giving their voice.

Giroux (2010) also extends this perspective by defining pedagogy as a practice for freedom, aiming to emancipate students from passive learning experiences that do not encourage questioning of knowledge imparted in classrooms. Pedagogy should be, then, a tool to help students not to memorize but to interrogate what they are learning.

In the Colombian context, critical pedagogy is absent. This absence is present in English language teaching programs (QUINTERO, 2013), which aim to learn the language without the critical capacity to question where the knowledge taught comes from. This leads to repetition and perpetuation of ideas in students who are not given enough tools to face that reality.
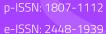
Even so, the outlook is not discouraging. Efforts to integrate critical pedagogy into English language instruction in Colombia have been observed (ROMÁN, 2021). This transformative approach needs a profound reflection on implicit ideologies and the student's role itself. Within the classroom, critical pedagogy requires "a reciprocal exchange between teachers and students—an exchange that engages in the task of reframing, functioning, and reposing the question of understanding itself (…)" (MCLAREN 2001, p. 121).

2.3 UNDERSTANDING DECOLONIZATION NARRATIVES IN EFL EDUCATION

Dominant ideologies influence students' perceptions about English. Traditional English language teaching often reinforces colonial narratives, where Western culture and language are considered superior. This poses a significant problem as it perpetuates prejudices and marginalizes non-Western languages. Consequently, students may internalize these power structures, affecting their perceptions of language proficiency and cultural worth.

Catherine Walsh's work on "*interculturalidad*" (interculturality) in education (WALSH, 2007) offers a powerful framework for challenging this coloniality. She argues that decolonial narratives are "a practice of unlearning the imposed and assumed to reconstruct being" (WALSH, 2013, p. 11). Indeed, decolonial narratives encourage us to move away from a one-sided story about language and culture and embrace a more diverse and equitable perspective instead. We must remember that respecting a language also recognizes a culture since language is a cultural matter (SÁNCHEZ, 1999).

There is a need to fill this gap between colonial narratives in English as a Foreign language education and decolonial approaches in English language teaching. Decolonizing the classroom can empower students to develop their identities and perspectives within their learning processes. This means creating a space where students can explore the richness of their own cultures through the English language, fostering a more reciprocal and respectful exchange.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 DESIGN

This section describes the methodology chosen for our study, highlighting its significance in achieving the research objective. We justify the selection of Action Research as the method and the sociocritical paradigm, population, sample, results, and data analysis.

Action Research emerges as the chosen methodology because it can materialize our research objective. By applying its principles, we aim to actively involve our research subjects, empowering them throughout the process. This approach ensures that exploring decolonial narratives becomes an intrinsic part of our students rather than an externally imposed agenda. Action Research is a method consistent with our research objective by offering the option to intervene, collaborate, know, and build with the target population.

Based on Alvarado and García (2008), Action Research is rooted in social critique with a strong self-reflective nature. It recognizes that interests inherently influence knowledge construction and wants of specific groups. In addition, it seeks to foster rational autonomy and freedom among individuals through their engagement in participatory and socially transformative processes.

Our paradigm is very related to our method. It resonates with our objective and the method itself as well. We have opted for the socio-critical paradigm, which implements the action research method. Alvarado and García (2008) base their ideas on Kemmins and McTaggart (1992), stating that this paradigm emphasizes collective research to improve the rationality and justice of social or educational practices. It is inherently intertwined with action research, encouraging reflection and continuous improvement within social and educational contexts.

Our data collection involved a single visit to the school, divided into two separate sessions. The first session, lasting 30 minutes, was dedicated to administering a questionnaire. Subsequently, a second session, lasting one hour, consisted of carrying out a workshop integrating videos and collaborative activities. To develop the workshop, our sample consisted of 7 students. They were selected after the

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initial questionnaire phase, which included the participation of 35 students from the target population who answered the questionnaire in the first section.

Our analysis level is at the inference level, aiming to discern the potential effects of engaging with decolonial narratives on students' EFL learning outcomes. Through this inference, we seek to show the impact of decolonial narratives as a critical pedagogy practice on student learning experiences within the 10th grade in a public school in Medellín.

3.2 POPULATION AND DESCRIPTION

The population for this research were students from 10th grade at a public institution located in Medellín. The students from 10th grade are characterized by their spontaneity, but at the same time, there is a lack of motivation for the English learning process. Also, there are difficulties at the grammatical and syntactic levels, which implies different strategies to help them develop these skills. Leveling and adaptation strategies must be generated to allow students to perform according to the grade since the majority express having a lower level of acquiring the target language.

This specific grade was chosen because there is a fairly broad cultural diversity, including indigenous, Afro-Colombian, displaced, or low-income communities that have been permeated by violence. This grade can allow us to appreciate different preceding colonial narratives of these ethnic groups. This selection proved to have expansive participants, with more than 35 students. The focal group of 7 students was selected based on their answers to the questionnaire, where we could find different colonial and decolonial perspectives on the importance of English.

To collect information about the institution, we use informed consent, which explains the purpose, procedures, drawbacks, population, duration, potential benefits, privacy, and what to do in case of doubts about this research. The principal of the public institution signed this consent since he is the authority entrusted by the parents to make decisions regarding participation in studies pertaining to community social and human development when they enroll the students in the institution. Additionally, this consent was scrutinized and endorsed by evaluators appointed by the Coordination of the Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages, focusing on English to guarantee that the research adheres to rigorous ethical protocols.

In the same way, we inform that due to the topic's sensitive nature, varied emotional responses can be elicited, and we, as researchers, possess the requisite skills to manage such scenarios adeptly. Furthermore, stringent confidentiality measures guarantee the anonymity of participants, safeguarding their identities and personal information through the use of pseudonyms for identification purposes.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

We select the different data collection techniques based on our research questions and objectives, each aiming to answer one.

The first data collection method we chose is a questionnaire. According to AZOFRA (1999), it consists of a set of questions, usually of various types, prepared carefully, about the facts and aspects that are of interest in an investigation or evaluation and that can be applied in various ways, among which are its administration to groups.

In this sense, the questionnaire is a proper method to do a general scanning of what colonial narratives this group of students already has. Thus it lets us use open questions that, according to Schuman and Presser (1981), are essential to know the context of the subject that answers the questionnaire and to redact the alternatives to offer in the categorized answers, especially when the possible opinions and reactions of the population to the one the questionnaire is going to be applied can not be presupposed in advance.

All the questions designed by the researchers in this instrument aim to answer the first objective, "to identify what kind of colonial and colonial narratives regarding English exist in our EFL students in a public institution of Medellín". All the questions evaluate the theoretical construct we pretend to measure with this objective.

Regarding our second Method for collecting the data, we selected the workshop because It "is a methodological approach with the double objective of intervening in a certain reality and creating knowledge or theories about said action. Therefore, the research results that use this methodology must be both an active intervention in reality and the construction of theory or knowledge through research" (OLIVEIRA, 2015, p. 279).

To answer our second objective, we needed a method that helped us to approach a significantly complex topic such as "decolonial narratives," favoring the active discussion, the ideas exchanged between the participants, and the emergence of new questions among them. Having in mind those elements, we chose the pedagogical journal as the instrument that, according to Fernández and Roldan (2012) perception, it is a system of records used to refer to various situations that occur within the class in which, the emphasis is placed on both the disciplinary and the practical (P. 121).

The pedagogical journal answers the second objective because it lets us capture students' conversations, ideas, and perceptions about decolonial narratives. In addition, it was used appropriately as an instrument for recording and analyzing classroom experiences. The journal content is valid as it

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was designed to allow for detailed and reflective documentation of students' interactions and reflections. Finally, it is based on the relevant literature and is theoretically grounded.

We selected the interview as our third data collection instrument to recognize what was the effect(s) of decolonial narrative exploration regarding English as a critical pedagogy practice and understand in depth those perspectives, experiences, and narratives of the participants by their voices in their own words because the objective of the interview is to be effective in obtaining relevant data and to find out facts, phenomena, or social situations.

The art of the interview in the field of research consists of obtaining valid and reliable answers about what you want to know. According to Hernández and Lucio (2006), interviews imply that a qualified person applies the questionnaire to the participating subjects. The first one asked each subject questions, and the participants wrote down the answers. Open questions match the third objective: to recognize the effect of decolonial narrative exploration regarding English as a critical pedagogy practice in a public institution in Medellín.

We conducted the entire data collection process at the school in two sessions. Firstly, for the questionnaire, we selected a 10th-grade group of 37 students and explained the questionnaire structure to them. It was a sheet with 6 questions about their perceptions of the correct or incorrect way of speaking in English that they could answer according to their thoughts. Students were also told that there were no correct or incorrect answers. We gave them 30 minutes to answer.

Secondly, a focal group of 7 participants was selected based on the answers to the questionnaire; the main aspect taken into account for the selection was that the participant presented a colonial perception of English after the workshop was carried out, in a session in the one we presented the participants some videos of different people speaking in English with a very marked accent of their own countries. Then we start a conversation about the videos with some guiding questions related to their opinions about the "correct" or "incorrect" English, asking them to answer them according to their opinions and perceptions; after that, we ask them to discuss other questions related to that topic in pairs to finally share their conclusions with the rest of the group.

Lastly, an individual interview was conducted for each participant of the focal group, with questions similar to those previously answered in the questionnaire. All the participants were informed that they would be recorded and should answer the questions according to their perceptions and ideas based on the reflection developed during the previous moments.

3.4 DATA TECHNIQUES

These instruments were fundamental to understanding and interpreting the information from our participants' testimonies. This analysis provided valuable insights that could boost the understanding of colonial and decolonial perspectives.

Regarding the first technique, five of the thirty-seven participants expressed colonial perspectives and narratives regarding English learning; these points of view emphasize English as a tool for success and economic progress. Also, we identify participants who advocate for linguistic equality, challenging notions of a singular and correct form of English. This analysis showed us that there are still colonial narratives in the students that permeate their vision and purpose of learning English (FREIRE,1971).

The second technique revealed that the participants have strong perceptions of English that are linked to their environments and origins. Three of the seven participants proved decolonial narratives, considered that people attributed great importance to learning English, and showed an alternative motivation for learning English: just learning it for fun. These testimonies are connected to the idea expressed by Walsh (2013) that involves the process of letting go of imposed beliefs and assumptions in order to reconstruct one's sense of self.

Finally, regarding the third technique, we could show whether the interviewees had any change in perspective in contrast to the questionnaire. This interview showed different effects in the exploration of decolonial narratives, expressing diverse perspectives from points of view that emphasize English as a language that has the same level of relevance and importance as any other Language but highlighting the fact that there is a correct way to structure a language with its standards and pronunciation, but that there are no superior roles in terms of languages.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

For the data analysis, the following table shows the categorization process developed to analyze the information collected from each technique taken from the participants. The main consideration for the development of this analysis is our main objective, which is to analyze how the exploration of decolonial narratives regarding English as a critical pedagogy practice influences EFL students' perception of English.

To answer this general objective 27 emerging open codes allow the classification into axial codes that are presented as Colonial narratives, Decolonial narratives, Language identity, Perceptions when learning English, and Cultural influences. Which ones at the same time, let us identify three main categories Narrative perspectives on learning English, Attitudes toward learning English as a second language, and Cultural factors that influence the perspectives about language.

Table 1. Data analysis process

General objective	Open coding	Axial and/or selective coding	Category	Topic
To analyze how the exploration of decolonial narratives regarding English as a critical pedagogy practice influences EFL students' perceptions about English	Intelligence	Colonial narratives	Narrative Perspectives on Learning English	Students' perceptions regarding English learning.
	Good future			
	Work-life			
	Opportunities			
	Success			
	Job and exploration			
	Entrepreneurship			
	Development			
	Relative importance of English	Decolonial narratives		
	Equal Importance of languages			
	No superiority			

English variations	Language Identity	Attitudes towards learning English as a second language.	Changes in the students' paradigm regarding learning English.
phonological aspects			
Languages utility			
Accent and Identity			
Language standards and pronunciation			
English in real life			
Accent is irrelevant			
English fame			
Cross-cultural communication	Perceptions when learning English		
Barriers to learn			
Overcoming difficulties			
Family encouragement	Cultural influences	Cultural factors that influence the perspectives about language	Sociocultural influences on students' perspectives regarding learning English.
Cultural learning			
Meeting new people			
English hipe			
English trichotomy			

Source: Own source

This triangulation process of the information leads us to the final topics that are directed to the development of the research findings in the student's perception, the changes that can exist in the paradigms, and the sociocultural factors that may influence their perspectives regarding learning English. From these topics, different results have emerged that aim to analyze the effects of decolonial narratives as a critical pedagogy practice and its influence on EFL students' perceptions of English, suggesting the potential of such approaches to promote autonomous reflection on learning and values in the English classroom (UBAQUE-CASALLAS, 2021).

4. FINDINGS

4.1 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING ENGLISH LEARNING

During the questionnaire, students' perceptions about learning English could be observed. Most students agreed that English is a language that provides job and social opportunities and that even knowing another language makes a person smarter. However, others consider learning English a cultural concept; therefore, learning it would be useful because it allows you to get to know English-speaking cultures. In this sense, we find three different aspects: English as a means of career success, English helps you become more intelligent, and English as a means of getting to know cultures.

One of the questions in the questionnaire was, "What comes to your mind when you think about the English language?". Many respondents to this question said that English facilitates a good job and ensures a good future. Ana (participant 7) highlights this perspective when she wrote

> Siempre escucho que debo estudiar inglés para que se facilite conseguir un empleo o tener un buen futuro (QUESTIONAIRE, QUESTION 6, ANA)[1]

For most students, learning English is synonymous with a good job that ensures a good future.

Another participant states that it is beneficial to learn English because knowing another language makes individuals smarter. William (participant 1) wrote that

> El inglés ayuda mucho y saber otros idiomas es bueno lo vuelve más inteligente y el inglés se ve muchas partes, entonces es bueno saberlo (QUESTIONAIRE, QUESTION 6, WILLIAM)[2]

According to the students' statements, learning a different language, in this case English, helps a person achieve a higher level of intelligence than those who only speak one language.

On the other hand, we find a perspective quite different from the previous ones. Antonia (participant 3) considers English to be a cultural concept with educational purposes and can be used to get to know English-speaking cultures. The student states:

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[1] I always hear that I should study English to make it easier to get a job or have a good future (own translation)

[2] English helps a lot and knowing other languages is good, it makes you smarter and English can be seen in many parts, so it is good to know. (own translation)

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> Creo que más que un concepto cultural, es para un fin más educativo y de desarrollo aunque con el inglés aprendemos de las culturas de habla inglesa. (QUESTIONAIRE, QUESTION 4, ANTONIA)[3]

This participant, instead of directing the learning of English towards job and economic purposes, suggests that learning English can have educational purposes and that it opens the possibility of cultural exchanges with communities that speak the same language.

From the diverse perspectives shared by the participants, it's evident that learning English holds various significance for the students. While many view it as a way to achieve success and economic stability, others perceive it as a means to broaden one's social horizons and engage in cultural exchanges. These perceptions reveal that, even though they were in the same group, they may have very different points of view on what English learning is.

4.2 CHANGES IN THE STUDENTS' PARADIGM REGARDING LEARNING ENGLISH

During the workshop, we aimed to help the students explore different narratives about the English language. We found that they were open to exploring different perspectives about English, even the ones that could be different from the perspectives they presented during the workshop. Initially, participants' views on English focused primarily on personal development. However, we found that during and after they explored various narratives, they could change those initial perceptions and go deeper in analyzing the different purposes of a language, in this case, English.

The first perception they started to explore is the accent diversity a language can have, we found that it was something that they had not considered at the beginning, but we found they were so surprised with the different accents English can have and it is evidenced in their answers,

> Yo considero que todos tienen un Inglés válido, al final se pueden comunicar de una buena forma. El tener acentos de diferentes lugares no hace que el Inglés sea más o menos válido. (WORKSHOP, QUESTIONS 1 AND 2, ANTONIA)[4]

Secondly, they start thinking about the English language that have different purposes that are not only centered on being successful

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[3] I think that more than a cultural concept, it is for a more educational and developmental purpose, although with English we learn from English-speaking cultures (own translation)

[4] I consider that everyone has valid English, in the end they can communicate in a good way. Having accents from different places does not make English more or less valid. (own translation).

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> Siempre dicen que el inglés abre las puertas, que es importante, pero también como que lo exageran demasiado, lo priorizan como si te definiera el futuro que aprender inglés te va a dar más opciones que aprender, el inglés te va a hacer alguien más importante, pero así mágicamente como alguien de alto rango y cosas así. Pero también he escuchado que aprender inglés también es bueno, que es divertido (INTERVIEW, QUESTION 6, IGNACIO) [5]

Thirdly, we found that participants were beginning to grasp the fundamental purpose of a language: communication. This emerged as they started recognizing the essence of English, which is being understood by others.

> El inglés con tal de que los habladores nativos te entiendan. (WORKSHOP, QUESTIONS 1 AND 2, IGNACIO).[6]

This highlights the importance of language as a bridge for connecting with others. Through this understanding, participants started to appreciate the true value of language as a tool for facilitating meaningful interactions and building cultural connections.

In conclusion, this workshop effectively broadened the students' understanding of English by encouraging them to explore diverse narratives. Through exposure to different perspectives, they bring different perspectives about the role of a language in communication and cultural connection, recognizing the significance of accent diversity and appreciating the value of English beyond traditional notions of success.
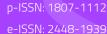
4.3 SOCIOCULTURAL INFLUENCES ON STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES REGARDING LEARNING ENGLISH

During the interview, it became clear that participants' perceptions of learning English were influenced by external factors such as their culture, family, or social environment. Most students' testimonies indicated that their home and academic surroundings were influential in encouraging them to learn English. Conversely, one testimony highlighted the global prevalence of English as a motivating factor for knowing other cultures and communicating with others.

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[5] They always say that English opens doors, that it is important, but they also exaggerate it too much, they prioritize it as if it defined your future, that learning English is going to give you more options to learn, English is going to make you someone more important. , but like that magically like someone of high rank and things like that. But I have also heard that learning English is also good, that it is fun (own translation).

[6] English as long as native speakers understand you. (own translation)

Nelson exemplified this during the interview by stating that motivation to learn English stems from encouragement received at home and school, where the emphasis was on opportunities for better employment and financial rewards. He stated:

> Que [el inglés] puede dar oportunidades, que [el inglés] puede [ayudar a] conseguir un buen empleo, puede [ayudarte a] ganar buen dinero. Eso lo que yo he escuchado en mi casa y aquí (INTERVIEW, QUESTION 6, NELSON).[7]

According to these external influences, learning English improves job prospects and financial stability. Contrastingly, Antonia participant 3 perspective differed, indicating that English, while globally prevalent, should not be overly glorified. She stated

> No, creo que es una lengua que está. Que se le ha dado mucha fama, porque claro, es una lengua que se utiliza mundialmente, en casi todo el mundo para expresarnos entre culturas y entre países (INTERVIEW, QUESTION 2, ANTONIA).

This participant approached the acquisition of English skills through a broader cultural lens, acknowledging its global significance. Unlike other participants, Antonia (participant #3) was influenced by a socio-cultural context that did not emphasize a specific necessity for English proficiency. While Antonia's social context is the same as other participants, her perception of English differed in that it was regarded as an optional pursuit rather than an imperative one.

Considering the students' views and their testimonies on socio-cultural influences, it is evident that their attitude towards learning English is predominantly driven by material benefits such as better employment opportunities or higher salaries since their external socio-cultural influences led them to this. Fewer students advocate learning out of pure self-motivation or interest. These perceptions underscore the influence of family and educational environments on their perspectives.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 COLONIAL NARRATIVES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG 10TH-GRADE STUDENTS

During the questionnaire process, with the answers provided, as observed in the results section, we noticed the colonial tendency to consider English as a means to obtain better employment and a promising

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[7] That [English] can give opportunities, that [English] can [help you] to get a good job, it can [help you] earn good money. That's what I've heard at home and here. (own translation)

future. For most students, English thus facilitates job stability and comforts that they might not have access to if they don't master the language. However, we unexpectedly found other perspectives, such as English as a cultural concept, to better understand the same (English) culture.

Considering the above, we highlight Ana's testimony, which mentions that

> Debo estudiar inglés para que se facilitate conseguir un empleo o tener un buen futuro. (QUESTIONAIRE, QUESTION 6, ANA)[8]

According to the participant, that's what she hears almost always, and that's what she believes. Studying English makes it easier to get a job. In this line of thought, CRYSTAL(2003) examines the role of English in the modern world and presents some ideas that support the perceptions of this student. The author points out that in the job market, English often plays an advantageous role in favor of those who speak it, perpetuating the idea that English is a key to success in obtaining employment. This is a colonial narrative that echoes what Ana expressed.

On the other hand, we find a perspective that differs from Ana's response. Antonia affirms that

> Creo que más que un concepto cultural, es para un fin más educativo y de desarrollo aunque con el inglés aprendemos de las culturas de habla inglesa. (QUESTIONAIRE, QUESTION 5, ANTONIA).[9]

Antonia mentions that English is culture and that, among other purposes, it can help us learn about other English-speaking cultures. The student is not wrong in asserting that English is a cultural concept, as it is a language, and every language has nuances of culture (SÁNCHEZ, 1999). Antonia does not superimpose English as a supreme language, but, like with any other language, she is open to the opportunity to know the language and culture through the same language. In Antonia's ideas, we find tacit respect for another language, as Walsh (2007) mentions: respect for the language and culture.

Based on the insights gleaned from the tenth-grade students' responses, it is evident that several colonial narratives about learning English are prevalent within this group. There is a general belief that English proficiency is essential for better employment opportunities and a promising future, reflecting a colonial mentality in which English is considered a gateway to success. However, contrasting perspectives

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[8] I must study English to make it easier to get a job or have a good future. (own translation)

[9] I think that more than a cultural concept, it is for a more educational and developmental purpose, although with English we learn from English-speaking cultures. (own translation)

also emerged, such as Antonia's point of view, which questions the notion of English solely as a tool for economic advancement and instead emphasizes its educational and cultural importance.

Antonia's perspective contains a different understanding of English, recognizing it not only as a language but also as a medium for intercultural exchange and appreciation. Therefore, while colonial narratives may persist among some students, there is also a growing awareness of the multifaceted role of English, encompassing both its practical benefits and its cultural significance.

5.2 NARRATIVES REGARDING ENGLISH BUILT WITH 10TH-GRADE STUDENTS

In the EFL field in Colombia, examining narratives about the English language holds significant importance, particularly in understanding students' perceptions regarding English and its implications in their daily lives. While exploring the testimonies of Antonia and Ignacio, whose contrasting viewpoints and perspectives concerning the significance attributed to English and its communicative, economic, and socio-cultural implications.

The analysis of the collected testimonies reveals diverse beliefs regarding the validity of English accents and variations. Antonia's stated

> Yo considero que todos tienen un Inglés válido, al final se pueden comunicar de una buena forma. El tener acentos de diferentes lugares no hace que el Inglés sea más o menos válido (WORKSHOP, QUESTION 1, ANTONIA)[10]

It resonates with the principles of inclusion and cultural sensitivity advocated by Paulo Freire in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." Freire emphasizes the necessity of recognizing and valuing linguistic and cultural diversity, advocating for an educational approach that respects and validates the particularities of languages and cultures. Antonia's perspective aligns with Freire's call for an equitable education system that views linguistic diversity as a means of enriching communication and fostering mutual understanding.

In contrast, Ignacio's viewpoint

> Siempre dicen que el inglés abre las puertas, que es importante, pero también como que lo exageran demasiado, lo priorizan como si te definiera el futuro que aprender inglés te va a dar más opciones que aprender, el inglés te va a hacer alguien más importante, pero así mágicamente como alguien de alto rango y cosas así. Pero también he escuchado

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[10] I consider that everyone has valid English, in the end they can communicate in a good way. Having accents from different places does not make English more or less valid (own translation)

que aprender Inglés también es bueno, que es divertido (INTERVIEW, QUESTION 6, IGNACIO) [11]

It advocates for a critical pedagogy that challenges dominant narratives perpetuating existing power structures, as Giroux (2010) encouraged in his study of *"Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy."* Ignacio's perspective underscores the need to interrogate social narratives that overemphasize the instrumental value of EFL in Colombia, encouraging students to adopt a critical stance towards socio-cultural norms and assumptions.

It becomes evident that fostering critical consciousness entails interrogating colonial and power narratives surrounding EFL in Colombia and valuing linguistic and cultural diversity. By incorporating these perspectives, students need to give importance to the narratives that arise in the educational and social environment about English. In this way, from a critical pedagogy, students need to give meaning to English, and with this, they can create narratives in which they give significant value to English. This holistic approach fosters students to construct narratives that reflect the field of Colombia's linguistic and cultural context. Through this process, not only do students enhance their English skills, but they also develop a deeper value of linguistic and cultural diversity. By valuing diversity in language education, it equips students with the tools to navigate a globalized world.

5.3 THE EFFECT OF THE EXPLORATION OF DECOLONIAL NARRATIVES REGARDING ENGLISH AS A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY PRACTICE

After the students explored the decolonial narratives, we found diverse effects because while some are still aligned with the colonial perceptions about English, others switch to decolonial ones. Some others that presented decolonial perceptions now seem to have colonial ones.

As external factors such as culture, family, and social environment affect students' perceptions of learning English, this is evidenced in the testimony of Nelson about the things that have been said in his environment about English.

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[11] They always say that English opens doors, that it is important, but they also exaggerate it too much, they prioritize it as if it defined your future, that learning English is going to give you more options to learn, English is going to make you someone more important. , but like that magically like someone of high rank and things like that. But I have also heard that learning English is also good, that it is fun. (own translation)

> Que [el inglés] puede dar oportunidades, que [el inglés] puede [ayudar a] conseguir un buen empleo, puede [ayudarte a] ganar buen dinero. Eso lo que yo he escuchado en mi casa y aquí (INTERVIEW, QUESTION 6, NELSON)[12]

For most students, English is seen as a necessity due to its association with better employment opportunities and financial rewards. These perceptions are rooted in the influence of family and educational environments; as Guerrero et al. (2022) state, it is important to know where students' voices come from and who can express their problems. Considering the subjects' perspectives, we can say that they are deeply shaped by their socio-cultural contexts, which influence their motivations and attitudes toward the language.

It is at this point that the usage of critical pedagogy makes sense because even when in the majority of the contexts the ideas of a prevalent language are sown, some of the subjects are rooted in other narratives, as Antonia states.

> No, creo que es una lengua que está. Que se le ha dado mucha fama, porque claro, es una lengua que se utiliza mundialmente, en casi todo el mundo para expresarnos entre culturas y entre países. (QUESTIONNAIRE, QUESTION 2, ANTONIA)[13]

This aligns with what Ubaque-Casallas (2021) argues regarding the need to recover English teaching from colonial paradigms rooted in global English teaching.
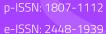
Language policies in Colombia emphasize the dominance of EFL, and it is evidenced in the curriculum, teacher training, and national assessments. According to Gómez Sará (2017), educational institutions acknowledge the diverse range of indigenous languages spoken throughout the nation, which implies that the application of English proficiency holds value in the globalized world. However, Colombia's EFL policies may exacerbate social inequalities and neglect the nation's rich linguistic heritage by emphasizing a single language. This marginalization of other languages and cultures necessitates a critical approach to EFL education.

We found a contradiction in the students' perceptions because even when the students transcended their colonial narratives to decolonial ones in most cases, it was not the same in all the participants. This is shown when Antonia initially presented a decolonial perception, stating,

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[12] That [English] can give opportunities, that [English] can [help you] get a good job, it can [help you] earn good money. That's what I've heard at home and here (own translation)

[13] No, I think it is a language that exists. It has been given a lot of fame, because of course, it is a language that is used worldwide, in almost the entire world to express ourselves between cultures and between countries (own translation)

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> Creo que hay una forma correcta para hablar cada idioma. De manera de que se escriba bien, de que se pronuncie bien. (INTERVIEW, QUESTION 3, ANTONIA)[14]

This only shows what Shohamy (2006) suggests, that language policies can establish criteria for correctness, obliging people to adopt certain ways of speaking and writing.

Exploring decolonial narratives in EFL classrooms has diverse effects on students' perceptions of English learning. While some students completely reframe their views and embrace decolonial ideas, others remain convinced of English as a key to success. This highlights the significant influence of external factors like family and social environment on student perspectives. Teachers can deal with these findings by acknowledging the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds of their students. Understanding their unique viewpoints, educators can tailor their teaching approaches, incorporating critical pedagogy. This allows students to develop a more nuanced understanding of English's role in the world, potentially challenging the dominance of a single language and promoting linguistic and cultural diversity.

5.4 CONSTRUCTION OF DECOLONIAL NARRATIVES REGARDING ENGLISH AS A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY PRACTICE AFFECTS THE PERCEPTION OF EFL STUDENTS IN 10TH GRADE IN A PUBLIC INSTITUTION LOCATED IN MEDELLÍN.

From the previous exploration of subtopics, the aim now is to answer the principal research question. During the exploration of the perception of EFL in the students of 10th grade, the main belief was English proficiency is crucial for better job opportunities and success, this reflects colonial mindsets. Furthermore, some students question these ideas, and there is growing recognition of English's diverse roles, including its practical benefits and cultural significance. By integrating these perspectives, students are invited to analyze the narratives surrounding their educational and social environments critically. Finally, through this approach, students can create their narratives, including their meaning and appreciation of EFL in their socio-cultural context.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In our study examining students' attitudes toward learning English, diverse perceptions emerged regarding EFL's significance and purpose in Colombia. Through a series of questionnaires and workshops, participants' viewpoints evolved, revealing nuanced understandings of English beyond traditional notions.

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[14] I think there is a correct way to speak each language. So that it is written well, that it is pronounced well (own translation)

Initially, students predominantly viewed English as a gateway to professional success and social advancement. Many of them associated English proficiency with securing good jobs and ensuring a stable future. For instance, Ana emphasized the importance of English for employment opportunities and future prospects, echoing a sentiment shared by several participants.

However, as students explored different narratives about English, their perspectives transformed. They understood some aspects, such as the diversity of accents within the language, emphasizing that linguistic variation does not diminish the validity of communication. This was exemplified in the different testimonies, which acknowledged that all English accents are valid forms of communication, challenging the notion of a singular "correct" way of speaking.

Furthermore, students started to explore alternative purposes of learning English beyond economic benefits. Some expressed enjoyment in EFL learning, going against their previous perceptions of English as a burden, highlighting the dual nature of English, and recognizing both its practical importance and its potential for enjoyment and cultural exploration.

The socio-cultural context emerged as a significant influence on students' perspectives. Many of them attributed their motivation to learn English to familiar and social expectations, linking language proficiency directly to improved employment opportunities and financial rewards. This emphasis on material benefits underscored the general impact of external factors on shaping attitudes toward language acquisition.

Notably, exploring decolonial narratives in English language education prompted varied student responses. While some fully embraced decolonial ideas, acknowledging English's global reach without glorifying it excessively, others remained anchored in conventional beliefs about English as a key to success. Antonia's skepticism towards the perceived universality of English exemplifies this divergence, illustrating the influence of linguistic policies and socio-cultural contexts.

These findings simply highlight the dynamic nature of students' perceptions of learning English. They underline the importance of adopting a critical pedagogical approach that recognizes and respects diverse sociocultural backgrounds. By recognizing the diversity of accents, reframing the purposes of language beyond economic benefits, and engaging with decolonial narratives, educators can empower students to develop a broader understanding of English learning.

During the realization of this research, we encountered a major limitation. The main one was time, as data collection and participant interaction were carried out practically one day. Although the interpretation and analysis of the data were done with great care and scrutiny, the data collection itself was relatively fast, which made participants feel somewhat unfamiliar with the activities at the beginning and, thus, a little shy to participate.

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In this regard, we offer two main recommendations to researchers in the field who wish to contribute to this topic. First, data collection should be divided into periods of considerable time so that participants become familiar with the topic and feel fully confident about participating. The study could even be longitudinal to observe if the explored narratives continue over a longer period of time.

Finally, we recommend continuing research on colonial and decolonial narratives and how these affect the learning of English language students. Integrating decolonial narratives into discourses and educational practices from a critical pedagogy standpoint will surely result in a completely different vision of the purposes of learning English.

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