

Navigating English Language Teacher Education in the Colombian Context: Between Foreign Influence and Local Tensions and Transformations

Navegando la Educación de Profesores de Inglés en el Contexto Colombiano: Entre la Influencia Extranjera y las Tensiones y Transformaciones Locales

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Abstract

This article traces the evolution of English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) in Colombia over the past six decades. It critically examines how foreign-established methodologies and policies have shaped it, often ignoring local sociocultural realities. This influence incorporates diverse knowledge systems, practices, and processes of being and becoming. The article highlights how Colombian ELTE educators and student-teachers have mainly adopted and prioritized foreign methodologies over local contexts. Despite increased awareness of the complexities of ELTE in Colombia, there remains a strong need to challenge existing linguistic policies and dominant second-language teaching methods. Additionally, the article discusses the growing impact of a digitally driven educational environment, arguing that while technology provides new learning opportunities, it also intensifies ELT commodification and market-driven pedagogical shifts. By emphasizing the tensions between foreign dominance and emerging local perspectives, this article urges the Colombian ELT community to critically question foreign hegemonic structures and develop a transformative, contextually relevant pedagogy coherent with the sociocultural realities of the Colombian educational landscape.

Keywords: Colombia, contextual practices, ELTE, localized approaches, teacher education

Resumen

Este artículo delinea la evolución de la formación de docentes de inglés en Colombia durante las últimas seis décadas bajo una examinación crítica sobre cómo esta se ha configurado por metodologías foráneas y políticas que no consideran las realidades socioculturales locales. Esta influencia se incorpora en diversos sistemas de conocimiento, prácticas y proceso de ser y llegar a ser. El artículo resalta la manera en que los educadores y los docentes en formación han adoptado y priorizado metodologías de enseñanza foráneas para los contextos locales. A pesar de una creciente conciencia sobre las complejidades surgidas al respecto en Colombia, persiste la necesidad urgente de desafiar las políticas lingüísticas existentes y los enfoques dominantes en la enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras. Adicionalmente, el artículo discute la fuerte influencia de los ambientes digitales y debate sobre cómo estos ofrecen modalidades de aprendizaje que ratifican la comercialización de la enseñanza del inglés y los cambios pedagógicos mercantilistas. Al señalar las tensiones entre el dominio de lo extranjero y las perspectivas locales emergentes, el artículo hace un llamado a la comunidad colombiana de la enseñanza del inglés para que cuestione de manera crítica las estructuras hegemónicas extranjeras y desarrolle una pedagogía transformadora y situada que sea coherente y consistente con las realidades socioculturales del contexto educativo colombiano.

Palabras clave: Colombia, prácticas contextualizadas, formación en ELT, enfoques localizados, formación de maestros

Introduction

The article presents Colombia's English language teacher education (ELTE) path over the past six decades. We navigate the Colombian educational panorama to trace the configuration of the local ELTE. In doing so, we examine how the English language teaching and learning field is inseparably and reciprocally interconnected with teacher/teaching education integrating varied types of knowledge(s) (Castañeda-Londoño, 2019), practices, and ways of being and becoming (Lucero & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2019; Castañeda-Trujillo et al., 2022; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2021). Corresponding literature in Colombia has shown how educators, teachers, and student-teachers⁴ often inadvertently absorb, replicate, and prioritize foreign-established approaches and methodologies over local relevance (Gómez-Sará, 2017; González-Moncada, 2007; Guerrero-Nieto, 2018; Le Gal, 2018; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2020; Truscott de Mejía, 2012). Despite an increasing awareness of ELTE complexities in our local contexts, challenging current linguistic policies and established second language teaching approaches is still needed to develop an educational praxis toward linguistics, pedagogy, and research for social justice (Cruz-Arcila, 2017; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2012, 2020; Sierra-Piedrahita, 2024). Thus, in this article, we alternatively discuss the dominant and pre-established practices entrenched in Colombian ELTE and its digitally driven world to advocate for more situated or localized approaches rooted in contextual communal practices.

The Colombian ELTE community is urged to continue problematizing foreign hegemonic and homogenizing structures embedded in such configurations. This endeavor might inquire about local visions of ELTE within the realities of our sociocultural, political, and educational contexts, teaching, and learning processes, especially those constructed around English (Samacá-Bohórquez, 2018). Thus, the Colombian ELTE community should continue to strive for more transformative situated visions and approaches that extend beyond conventional classroom boundaries and instrumentalized views of language and teaching practices.

The Path of ELTE in Colombia

Over the last 60 years, ELTE in Colombia has been shaped by foreign theories, methods, and approaches primarily derived from North American, British, and Australian (NABA henceforth) scholarship (Le Gal, 2018)⁵. In its early stages, content-based subjects such as linguistic disciplines, interculturality, second language acquisition, multiliteracies, and

⁴ We refer to educators as those teaching in bachelor's or master's programs; teachers as those teaching at the school level or language centers; student-teachers as those studying in undergraduate programs of the field.

⁵ Macías (2010) sees this phenomenon as dominated by an Anglo-centric view. Guerrero-Nieto (2018) and Núñez-Pardo (2022) see it as constructed from a Eurocentric vision. Fandiño-Parra (2021) and Mackenzie (2021) distinguish this phenomenon as epistemologically built from the Global North to the Global South.

discourse analysis, among others, were configured primarily according to NABA's research and views. Equally, the academic spaces for English learning have used teaching and assessment methods, approaches, resources, and didactic material largely informed by NABA's conceptualization of language and supported by established foreign editorial companies in the field. This focus greatly narrows the field to linguistics, technical skills, and expertise, primarily emphasizing language mastery, which is largely driven by language policies that have helped construct and maintain an instrumental vision of the language. As evident in the coming lines, initial language teacher education models and their pedagogical practicums commonly advocate applying such knowledge and didactic materials.

Considering Colombian history, English language teaching was almost uncritically installed into the country's education system. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it had largely been for the Colombian elite using or adapting foreign language teaching methods (Bastidas, 2019). Although progress in its programs and syllabi, planning remained limited to English linguistic aspects (Bastidas, 2017). Throughout the 20th century, English was gradually incorporated into the country's education system due to political and econo-cultural interests (De Mejía, 2009a; González-Moncada, 2020; Stansfield, 1972). Similarly, ELTE grew as a response to those interests (Díaz et al., 2023; Granados, 2015). The emergence of ELTE was mainly constructed by foreign knowledge postulates and scarcely considered the gained local scholarship about pedagogy, its struggles, claims, or advances (Méndez Rivera, 2017; Méndez Rivera et al., 2020).

The consequence is that ELTE seems to have largely remained disconnected from the evolution of local pedagogy in Colombia. ELTE was questionably introduced more distinctly as a separate entity, a "notch," within the education system during the observed six-decade period. According to Jiménez Becerra (2018, 2023), Ríos Beltrán and Echeverry Sánchez (2021), and Wasserman (2021), Colombian pedagogy has historically been characterized by a strong influence from foreign models that has created tensions with the need for local approaches. Colombian pedagogy has struggled with diverse ideas about the centrality of teacher education and the search for local theoretical foundations in socio-critical language education, critical and decolonial pedagogies, critical intercultural education(s), relational and communal pedagogies, critical literacies, place-based education(s), and gender-based education(s), among others. These have contributed to growing awareness of the importance of situated pedagogies, with Colombian teachers and intellectuals as co-constructors of educational thoughts towards social, epistemic, and pedagogical justice, local epistemologies, and transformative praxis, relevant to the national context.

The integration of ELTE into the country's local pedagogies did not occur, although it was and still is a necessity due to the close relationship between languages and contexts. Following Ramos-Holguín and Aguirre-Morales (2014), Herrera-Molina and Portilla-Quintero (2021), and Macías and Hernández-Varona (2022), Colombian varied contextual and linguistic needs

should influence the target languages' educational practices. In reciprocity, those practices should study the target language's use in society to construct dynamic, bottom-up language programs, syllabi, situated strategies, and contextualized materials that respond to those needs. With that premise in mind, local scholarship in the field of pedagogy, collaborating with the Colombian ELTE community, should co-analyze what it means to teach/learn English in Colombia and the world. Together can shed light on the reasons for, the impact of, and the manner teaching, learning, and using English can occur in the sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and political spheres. As a result, there can be mutual contributions to language pedagogical practices, the contemporaneity of language teaching, and the epistemological and ontological understandings of who a 'second'⁶ language teacher and learner can be.

This disconnection between ELTE and local pedagogies might have happened for four reasons. The first is that, as mentioned above, Colombian ELTE's foundations were broadly rooted in NABA's scholarship rather than the gained local scholarship about pedagogy (Clavijo-Olarte, 2007; De Mejía, 2005; Le Gal, 2018; Núñez-Pardo, 2022). For over a century, Global North perspectives⁷ have influenced English language teaching methods and approaches. These dominant perspectives have shaped and promoted standardized views on language, and second language pedagogy has mostly been reduced to "major trends in ELT" (as in Richards & Rodgers, 2005). A common practice in the field is the belief that English should be taught according to such perspectives, often overlooking the social, cultural, and racial dimensions of language learning in Colombian contexts (Bonilla-Medina, 2023).

In alliance with the above-mentioned perspectives, publishing houses and learning platforms such as Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Richmond, Heinle & Heinle, Palgrave MacMillan, Pearson Longman, Prentice Hall, Routledge, The University of Michigan Press, etc., have positioned their (texts) books' authors, generally American and European, as 'experts' in the field. According to Patarroyo (2016), the Colombian Ministry of National Education's (MEN as its acronym in Spanish) didactic material for English language learning has generally been an adaptation or partial reproductions of the sequences, scope, and contents of the resources these publishing houses offer, resulting in a gap between their contents and local contexts. In addition, foundational books for Colombian ELTE have also come from these publishing houses. Several educators in local ELTE undergraduate programs

⁶ Historically, English has been perceived as foreign, despite Colombians' familiarity with it and etymological explanations (Mora, 2022), and its local users have been perceived as non-native (Vélez-Rendón, 2003). Macías (2010) and Mosquera Pérez (2022a) suggest that English should be seen as a lingua franca in Colombia because of its use in the country's dynamics. Critically, Mora (2022) suggests a Colombian English by integrating principles of English as a lingua franca and as an international language gradually.

⁷ Such methodologies as Grammar-Translation, Audiolingualism, Communicative Language Teaching, and Task-based Learning were adopted. Language policies are often aligned with frameworks like the Common European Framework of Reference. Teacher training and materials frequently mirror, or are taken from, these Northern models.

have adopted these (texts) books and articles published in commanding journal content platforms as primary references to teach student-teachers how to be language teachers and how to teach English to learners at different proficiency levels, ages, and contexts.

Congruent with the latter, the second reason is that Colombian language policies have based their mandates on the foundations derived from NABA's scholarship. In the 1990s, regulations started to emerge prolifically, such as the Foreign Language Curricular Guidelines and the English Syllabus in 1999. The National Program of Bilingualism was issued in 2004. Other documents accompanied it, such as the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Ayala Zárate & Álvarez, 2005; Council of Europe, 2001) and the establishment of standardized tests since 2004. Then, the Basic Competence Standards for English as a Foreign Language in 2006, the NTC-5580 in 2007, the Bilingualism Law in 2013, the Quality Guidelines for Teacher Preparation Programs in 2014, the Suggested Curriculum for English and the Basic Learning Rights in 2016, the list of valid standardized tests for language proficiency certification in 2017 and 2021, the emergence of local bilingual programs from 2016 and on, and the regulations for languages undergraduate programs between 2016 and 2022 with new and abolished regulations. No level of the Colombian educational system was exempt from regulations in terms of language teaching, learning, and evaluation/assessment/testing. The result is that not only did all these language policies confuse teachers' understanding of the purposes and performance of ELT in the country (Cardona-Escobar et al., 2023; De Mejía, 2009b; Gómez-Sará, 2017), but they also reaffirmed foundations on language visions, teaching, and evaluation/assessment/testing from NABA's scholarship and capitalist/neoliberalist principles (Guerrero-Nieto, 2009; Mora et al., 2019; Morales-Llano, 2022; Ortega, 2024; Usma-Wilches, 2009a)⁸. None of the aforementioned Colombian language policy documents incorporates principles on situated visions of language, language learning, communication, dialogical interaction, interculturality, and linguistics from local theories, methods, approaches, or sociocultural and political practices and needs. Therefore, the local has been invisibilized, sidelined, neglected, and undervalued.

The third reason is that the Colombian pedagogical community remained almost indifferent to the effects of the insertion of English into the educational system (Acosta-Padrón et al., 2018; Aldana-Gutiérrez, 2021; Maturana-Patarroyo, 2011; Torres-Martínez, 2009). This community perceived English merely as an additional subject brought into the curricular panorama based on established foreign foundations and pre-defined teaching-learning sequences. This community's belief was then perceiving learning a new language involved a mechanical, rote learning process, with reduced societal effect, limited to listening to and uttering linguistically

⁸ Examples of such foundations are the instrumentalization of language learning; standardization and marketization of language teaching and assessment; stratification of languages, teachers, and institutions; and linguistic imperialism.

correct English in interactions⁹. Thus, they were relatively unconcerned about the contributions they could make to ELTE from their gained local scholarship about language pedagogies. As a result, ELTE was nurtured based on NABA's linguistic principles without much contestation in Colombia (Méndez Rivera et al., 2020). In addition, language learning and teaching progress were seen from a deficit perspective, and language evaluation, assessment, and testing became corrective and standardized (Giraldo, 2020).

The fourth reason for ELTE's limited integration into Colombian second-language pedagogy stems from the rise of local community entitlements within the field. This is evident in the valorization of English language speakers, regardless of their sociocultural backgrounds (as in Arias-Cepeda, 2019; De Mejía, 2006) and the increasing prominence of the 'non-native' speaker label (as in Montoya & Correa, 2024). The extended social belief was, and still is, that individuals with this ability to speak English have more professional, academic, and worldwide social competencies and opportunities. They are perceived as being able to travel or 'survive' worldwide without difficulties since English is the 'universal' language of communication; they can get better jobs because they are 'bilingual.'¹⁰ Other forms of entitlement reside at the English speakers' progressive academic level. Several aspects may position them as privileged scholars. For instance, English speakers holding master's or doctoral degrees from Colombia or overseas –even more from English-speaking countries- have been granted authority to carrying out decision-making and academic duties; becoming language teachers, educators, and researchers in recognized private or state-funded schools, universities, or language centers; and having articles and chapters published about English language education locally and globally.

These entitlements may position them all higher in ELTE, allowing them to decide, define, and direct ELTE in the country at different levels of the education system,¹¹ although

⁹ For instance, Arias-Castilla and Angarita-Trujillo (2014) and Cisneros-Estupiñan and Mahecha-Bermudez (2020) explain how the English language has been perceived in the Colombian Education System in terms of levels of language proficiency for competitiveness abandoning the sociocultural and sociolinguistic impact of its incorporation or use.

¹⁰ This reflects a commodified, one-size-fits-all view of English, reinforcing its instrumental value driven by neoliberal dynamics.

¹¹ Although we specifically found no studies on this topic, other authors have mentioned certain characteristics and positioning of ELTE educators. For instance, Martín-Hernández (2013) presents a panorama in which Latin American language teachers develop sound linguistic and didactic skills valuable for their educator roles. In the same line of thought, Cely-Betancourt (2020) talks about bilingual/communicative competencies, theoretical foundations, models, and challenges in which language teachers/educators are progressively educated to teach English and future teachers. González-Moncada (2021) critically connects teachers' continuing learning to the language education policies of the country. Fandiño-Parra (2017) highlights the properties, visions, models, knowledge types, and empowerment that (English) language teachers/educators should have throughout their professional development. Thus, English language scholars likely isolated ELTE from Colombian pedagogy. This paradoxically positions them as low-status 'experts' excluded from policymaking and foreign educational corporations in their own country.

still with limited participation in the construction of national language policies. Although our point is not to dismantle or diminish such accomplishments, we advocate for a more sensible, sensitive, and empathetic exercise of those positions, while we believe, those professionals with wisdom and positioning should contribute to the ongoing development of Colombian ELTE, by recognizing the need for deeper roots in the country's diverse contexts, and for a more situated or localized language teaching and assessment (Cárdenas et al., 2010; Torres-Rocha, 2019). The dominant belief cannot continue equating speaking English with professional 'success', creating a sense of internal superiority over the non- or less proficient speakers of this language, or professionals in other fields.

ELTE Tensions, Transformations, and New Challenges in Colombia

According to recent studies, the Colombian ELTE community is unfolding how language education has evolved politically, academically, socio-culturally, and socio-linguistically. Language teachers, educators, and researchers are increasingly embarking on an overdue awakening that has recognized the inherent foreign nature embedded in ELTE pedagogical discourses and practices.

Remarkably, local scholarship has unveiled the colonial aspects that dominate ELTE; for instance, the hegemony of the English language (Guerrero, 2009; Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero-Polo, 2009; Mosquera-Pérez, 2022b; Ortega, 2019a), the permanence of foreign language teaching approaches and discourses (Bettney, 2022; Fandiño-Parra, 2021; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2021), the standardization of English language proficiency levels in performance and assessment (Benavides, 2021; Hernández-Ocampo, 2022), the celebratory view of English-speaking cultures in textbooks (Núñez-Pardo, 2020, 2022; Oviedo-Gómez, 2024), the vision of interculturality based on widely circulated models and theories (Castro-Garcés, 2023; Flórez-Montaña et al., 2022; Ramos-Holguín, 2021), and tensions in using colonial research methods to more decolonial research approaches and methodologies (Castañeda-Londoño et al., 2024; Mosquera-Pérez, 2022b; Núñez-Pardo & Téllez-Téllez, 2024). Besides, local scholarship has revealed the marked capitalist/neoliberalist view of language policies (Camargo Cely, 2018; Vélez-Rendón, 2003; Viana-Astaiza, 2023), the instrumentalized vision of English and professional training in language curricula and local programs (Buendía & Macías, 2019; González-Moncada, 2021; Peláez et al., 2022; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2020), the evident economic interest of well-known foreign and national organizations for 'educational' opportunities with the English language (Usma-Wilches, 2009a, 2009b), and the imposition of English language syllabi, methodologies, and didactic resources to schools and language centers regardless of their location (De Mejía, 2012; Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero-Polo, 2009; Guerrero-Nieto & Castañeda-Trujillo, 2024).

Besides, local scholarship has studied how English language teachers, educators, and learners shape and construct their personal and professional identities within the above-mentioned conditions (Acosta-Acosta, 2023; Barón-Pereira & Samacá-Bohórquez, 2018; Castañeda-Trujillo et al., 2022; Cruz-Arcila, 2020; Lucero-Babativa, 2023; Ubaque-Casallas, 2021). Scholars have also examined the relevance of gender and positioning in teacher and student subject constitution (Castañeda-Peña, 2021; Mojica & Castañeda-Peña, 2017). Moreover, attention has been paid to the implications of classroom dynamics and practices in learning English with learners across different age groups and proficiency levels (Arteaga & Hidalgo, 2016; Benavides, 2021). Furthermore, research has addressed how the gap between private, state-funded, urban, and rural educational institutions has widened due to language policies, financial and academic support, and impositions of teaching methodologies (Bonilla & Cruz-Arcila, 2014; Fuentes-Vásquez, 2023; García-Botero & Reyes Galeano, 2022; Ramos-Holguín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016).

As exposed in the previous section, over the last 60 years, ELTE in Colombia has been predominantly shaped by NABA's teaching principles and neoliberal language policies. While largely overlooked by the broader Colombian pedagogical community, ELTE is nowadays more actively engaged by emerging scholars in educational settings (schools, centers, universities), although its influence on national language policies remains limited. Despite this fact, Colombian ELTE has still been configured into subjects and practices containing must-do and must-be knowledge and responsibilities for teachers, educators, researchers, and student-teachers. Excluding each actor's and program's particularities, the mandatory tasks include professional training, academic reading and writing, language research, teaching performance, reflection, lesson planning, material design, and standardized assessment or testing. The profile to construct includes constant self-formation, experience, reflection, implementation, classroom management, speaking proficiency, and institutional figures.

Today, ELTE faces a growing increase in modalities to learn English that keep or combine in-person and online formats. The former taps into in-situ personal and social dimensions, factors, and variables of English language teaching and learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019), while the latter increasingly relies on teachers' choices of course design, activities and resources, creating quick access and autonomous, but solitary, emotionally disembodied, and less engaging online learning and time management (Resnik et al., 2023). Majorly, because of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 – 2022), online resources have become one of the most preferred modalities. When the pandemic hit, teachers, educators, and students worldwide were abruptly forced to virtual education and quickly develop and adapt technical skills at the expense of physical, emotional, and mental well-being, as well as increased work/study load (Resnik et al., 2023). When institutions were opened again, blended and hybrid education, which integrates significant online activities with face-to-face learning, started to dominate the field. Multiple online programs, courses, and applications have maintained their favoritism for many who want to learn English or pursue careers as language teachers (Yajie & Jumaat, 2023).

In agreement with Castañeda-Trujillo and Jaime-Osorio (2021) and Jaime-Osorio et al. (2023), virtual, blended, and hybrid modalities have brought several benefits to the Colombian ELTE. For example, the emergence of online environments for ELT has been proven to foster learning motivation and autonomy development and maximize learning outcomes in the new generations, at least at the beginning. Besides, Prieto-Guerrero and Ramírez-Valencia (2020) and Rizo-Peñafort and Alves-Pereira (2022) state that online education facilitates broader access to knowledge while promoting literacy activities and sociocultural interchange.

However, all these authors also warn of several considerations. The soundest one refers to how online education has made the social gaps in Colombian society undeniable. Exclusion and inequality have deepened due to a lack of technology, connectivity access, quality in rural areas, and urban low-income families, as well as limited digital literacy skills. This reality underscores that the lower the social class and income, the lower the chances for quality housing and education. These disparities promote stereotyping of these populations concerning their economic, racial, and social characteristics and conditions. In the same line of thought, these authors point out how educators, teachers, and students still need more training in virtual, blended, or hybrid education as difficulties using new technology, platforms, and applications persist. Concerning issues for implementing these modalities, the authors suggest more attention to studying methods, routines, and spaces; students' self-direction and self-management; and the strategies to carry out communication and interactional principles when online participation decreases and frustration increases.

Coupled with the above-mentioned technology-driven milieu, the ELTE landscape in Colombia seems marked by deep-seated tensions shaped by colonial legacies, neoliberal agendas, and socio-political influences. The portrayed dominance of English as the so-called 'global' language reinforces hegemonic discourses and practices that usually position it as a requirement for academic and professional success. By embracing foreign and profitable models, business plans, and widespread materials and resources, this vision has transformed the local ELT into a more commodified practice, in which standardized assessments, imported foreign teaching methodologies, and market-driven educational models overshadow and marginalize localized pedagogical approaches, languages, and knowledge systems. Moreover, contrary to their expected impact, the reality shows that language policies have exacerbated social inequality by widening the gap between private and public institutions, particularly disadvantaging rural and low-income institutions and individuals with limited access to quality English education. As a result, these disparities further reinforce stereotypes linked to economic, racial, and social conditions, which deepen existing inequalities.

In response to this complex and evolving panorama, Colombian ELTE scholars have critically examined established paradigms, advocating for approaches that center local realities, languages, and epistemologies. However, as active agents in the field, we still see that resistance to dominant ELTE discourses and practices remains limited, particularly in

policymaking, where foreign-driven frameworks ignore local scholarship and continue to dominate educational agendas; this situation is amplified when online education has expanded access to English learning and fostered a greater preference. In various areas, we cannot deny that educators, teachers, and students still require substantial training in digital literacy, online pedagogies, and engagement strategies to navigate the emotional and cognitive challenges of both in-person and virtual education.

Colombian ELTE and the Digital-driven World

Under the picture presented in the previous section, redefining how language education should unfold politically, academically, and socio-culturally becomes more challenging. In concordance with Cabrera Bolaños (2020) and Díaz Guillen et al. (2021), university virtual education has substantially increased recently, driven by pedagogical and technological components such as means and mediation types, virtual environment usability and effectiveness, content banks, and teachers' and students' access, workload, and autonomy. In addition, according to MEN (2023) and Gómez-Rodríguez (2025), a decrease in tuition revenues has compelled universities to look for economically viable alternatives to survive, with virtual education offering a prompt solution. As a result, universities feel caught between a rock and a hard place, struggling between the need to remain economically afloat and to offer quality, critical education. The ELTE field has not escaped this complex dilemma. On the one hand, they prompt to keep unveiling and creating awareness of how ELTE has emerged and continues to be dominated by pre-established academic, political, and econo-cultural interests. On the other hand, the pressure of surviving economically and socially has led to paradoxical positions, where they reinforce the commodified perspective towards language. The result is that, while many in the field express the need for more researchers, educators, and student-teachers in their programs to be conscious and critical of such realities, newer generations often pursue more materialistic and rapid gains in ELT, mainly through digital or virtual platforms.

This trend is also noticeable in the marketization and commodification of English through online applications, as well as the overstimulation of digital tasks during teaching and learning this language under this modality (Correa & González, 2016; De la Hoz et al., 2019; Fandiño, 2013). For instance, the emphasis on quick and 'tangible' results in language proficiency often overshadows the value of more reflective learning experiences. As previously discussed, although beneficial in many respects (including the tendency to study online, which represents more enrolled learners and student-teachers), relying solely on online technology in language learning can foster superficial engagement with language. This type of engagement is characterized by rote memorization rather than a deep comprehension of autonomy and language as a social practice in context (Herrera Bohórquez et al., 2019; Vega-Carrero et al., 2017).

Putting such described phenomena as part of the ELTE community, we frequently observe teachers, educators, researchers, student-teachers, and learners seeking immediate gratification in the process of teaching/learning the language, compromising the development and understanding of integrated language skills and sociocultural/linguistic language use in context. Many superficial stimuli, mainly through technology and media, including language-learning apps and online resources, focused primarily on linguistic forms, contributing to creating this dynamic.

The commodification of language teaching and learning as a product and the pressure on institutions to offer market-driven courses and certifications have reinforced the idea that English can be commercialized as a key to economic and (inter) national mobility and status (De Mejía, 2012; Guerrero, 2010), but now digitally and virtually. This view strengthens the notion of language education as a consumer good, rather than promoting it as a fundamental right or as a social investment and responsibility. Consequently, ELTE repeatedly falls into a business that sets aside more aspects of access and equity, community well-being, democratic participation and cohesion, linguistic freedom and empowerment, personal-potential gains, and collective progress (Addison, 2011; Fandiño-Parra, 2021; Murray, 2020). These issues are excluded from the more marketized world, now in virtual ELTE education.

As we have already stated, the proliferation of language policies responding to marketized interests makes English learners and teachers focus even more on self-optimization and personal efficiency over a deeper process of self-improvement¹², career advancement, or as a cultural or communicative tool. Furthermore, the commodification of English has turned it into a mass media spectacle, where online platforms and YouTuber teachers are more driven by linguistic proficiency, a ‘native-like’ image, and an amiable explanation performance. This media-driven representation of language learning aims to achieve language proficiency as a symbol of personal and professional status (Adebola Lasekan & Méndez Alarcón, 2021; Chao, 2022; Ho, 2023; Wang & Chen, 2020). Consequently, we see that sociolinguistics is underrepresented; linguistic, social, and gender identity construction is reduced to English language proficiency levels; language ideologies and power are overshadowed by native-like phrases and expressions; and the richness and legitimacy of English varieties are narrowed down to an ‘accent’ or the imperative to erase non-native accents.

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The role of media in shaping the above-mentioned perceptions of ELT and learning has become significant over the past decade. Promotional and visually appealing content and materials portray English proficiency as a symbol of success and modernity (Guerrero-Nieto, 2011; Martínez, 2015; Núñez-Pardo, 2022). This situation is more prevalent and

¹² Self-optimization emphasizes measurable outcomes and performance within the existing language policy system. Self-improvement prioritizes personal growth and development; this encompasses broader skills, knowledge, and intrinsic motivation beyond mere efficiency.

particularly evident on social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, where students are drawn by the promise of rapid and effortless language mastery. The constant demand for improving teaching and learning English via digital and online resources may cause cognitive and emotional exhaustion and increase frustration (Cunin Chimborazo et al., 2023; Mosquera Murillo & Yangali Vicente, 2021; Rizo Peñafort & Alves Pereira, 2022). As success is narrowly measured by quantifiable outcomes and individual achievement, rather than holistic development, teachers and students are more prone to burnout and exhaustion while being less satisfied overall.

In sum, the current digitally driven landscape likely perpetuates and reinforces Colombian ELTE into a commodity in which market-oriented, efficiency-based outcomes are prioritized at the expense of deeper and reflective teaching/learning experiences. We also see that, while the appeal for immediate language proficiency gains is tempting, educators, teachers, and learners can exert agency to foster critical engagement with English, besides other languages. This alternative empowers transformative Colombian ELTE approaches, enriches learning beyond mere proficiency, and promotes linguistic diversity. Transformative approaches for Colombian ELTE agendas should account for the overall socio-political, cultural, and ideological implications of language teaching and learning shaping language education today.

Transformative Approaches or Applications for Colombian ELTE

Overall, Colombian ELTE has created the pre-established practices described above, which are now also immersed in a digital-driven world. Despite this situation, there is a growing movement challenging the domination of the NABA's scholarly paradigms while advocating for policy definition in favor of local, contextualized knowledge for renewing ELTE. In our view, the goal of this struggle should not be to deny and reject what has thus far constituted Colombian ELTE. These structures exist, are sustained, and continue to be widely adopted. The endeavor is to examine the inherent knowledge(s) critically and deeply for language teaching and learning praxis in our territories. This knowledge and praxis still remain largely underexplored and unspoiled in terms of their roots and development.

As a community, we need to find which aspects of that foundational knowledge(s) are evolving in Colombian ELTE so that these can be reconciled with Colombia's multiple contexts, realities, needs, and practices. Achieving a balance between constitutional knowledge(s) and contextual realities is essential if we are to envision a renewed locally grounded ELTE collaboratively. Such renewal should span and consider other areas such as social justice, intercultural competence, digital literacy, translanguaging pedagogies, socio-political language dimensions, critical pedagogies, gender equity, indigenous knowledge systems, peace education, etc. Ultimately, transforming the current Colombian ELTE will

depend on the co-construction of alternative visions around the language, the recognition of pedagogical practices developed by the local, still subaltern, teachers and learners who challenge the *status quo* imposed by educational and linguistic policies, and acknowledgment of the understandings of pluriversity¹³ across our educational territories.

Over the past two decades, emerging-evolving transformative approaches and applications have created significant lines of work aimed at developing critical consciousness on the neoliberal practices instrumentalizing ELT. Such an intersection challenges the prevailing technical visions of language education through a more holistic formation process that recognizes the intercultural and contextual realities in our Colombian universities. In this vein, gradual pedagogical and research shifts rooted in our educational territories have emerged to support the co-construction of pieces of knowledge through collaborative efforts among student-teachers, teachers, teacher-educators, and researchers. These collective efforts focus on understanding and positioning our ELT field within broader socio-educational and political contexts through alternative research. For instance, critical and decolonial ELT pedagogies contest foreign dominance, advocating for locally grounded approaches (Castañeda-Londoño et al., 2024; Mosquera-Pérez, 2022b). A second line of inquiry involves the growing body of research on the impact of ELT policies on social inequalities, highlighting how language education has deepened economic and racial disparities, particularly in rural and state-funded schools (Bonilla & Cruz-Arcila, 2014; Fuentes-Vásquez, 2023). A third area of transformation deals with the incorporation of interculturality and identity formation into teacher education programs (Acosta-Acosta, 2023; Ramos-Holguín, 2021), enabling student-teachers to reflect on their roles as mediators of language and culture critically while challenging the traditional narratives of English as a neutral and universal language. These transformations call for the dismantling of hegemonic structures that perpetuate inequity while advocating for more inclusive and socially responsive praxis rooted in social, cultural, political, and educational transformation in pursuing social justice.

Developing critical consciousness of the neoliberal practices instrumentalizing ELT has been a relevant transformation for undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs. These initiatives have strived to question the pre-established practices and discourses in Colombian ELTE (Fandiño-Parra, 2021; González Moncada, 2020, 2021; Lucero et al., 2024). For instance, re-dimensioning curricula and/or incorporating critical pedagogies and socio-cultural-political perspectives into courses have prompted awareness of linguistic diversity and cultural identity across the Colombian landscape (Castañeda-Londoño et al., 2024;

¹³ Pluriversity in language education involves challenging the canon imposed by the Global North and advocating for alternative ways of knowing, being, and doing. It emphasizes co-existing and understanding relationality and pluriversity within territories (Escobar 2018; Ortega, 2019b) to disrupt dominant ELT narratives. In the Colombian context, this has embraced the recognition and integration of diverse cultural and educational perspectives, particularly those of indigenous communities (Padilla, 2019).

Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero-Polo, 2009). Additionally, several programs have promoted alternative research methodologies that align with local realities, including narrative inquiry, participatory action research, and ethnographic studies (Mosquera-Pérez, 2022b; Ramos-Holguín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016).

Drawing from teachers' and teacher educators' knowledge(s), co-constructed through their lived experiences, we advocate for continuous questioning of the instrumentalized visions of languages subtly embedded within official language policies and enacted through school agendas and curricular guidelines, as discussed in the second section. Engaging in this critical inquiry embraces understanding why and what we teach or learn English for, what we can do with languages, how, when, where, and with whom. By provoking this inquiry, we can reclaim language education as a site of pedagogical thinking and contestation rather than mere compliance with external and established standards.

This understanding provokes critical reflections on language as a social, intercultural, pluricultural, and political practice (Lagnado, 1999; Portilla-Quintero & Herrera Molina, 2021; Quintero, 2023; Vanegas Garzón & Bedoya Ríos, 2023). It also contributes to redefining the sociocultural, intercultural, pluricultural, linguistic, and pedagogical dimensions of ELT in Colombia by aligning them with principles of social justice. Such redefinition challenges the deterministic frameworks that have historically shaped the field and opens possibilities for more locally grounded and context-sensitive initiatives. In this line of thought, language becomes a right and a social practice for cross-border collaboration, broader knowledge dissemination, the sharing and exploration of cultural heritage, the enactment of activism and agency, and the strengthening of social bonds through varied modalities (Gutiérrez, 2022; Torres Escobar, 2022). This vision transcends the narrow scope of pre-established classroom performance and standardized tests' language proficiency levels (Giraldo, 2018, 2021).

Gradual pedagogical and research shifts rooted in our educational territories are context-thought and intentionally planned to challenge the technical focus and domains of mainstream ELTE. This has entailed a dialogical experience within undergraduate (and graduate) programs for teacher-educators and schoolteachers to think '*outside the box*' of traditional paradigms when educating student-teachers. These programs offer foundation, knowledge(s), and practice about English and language teaching that shape prospective teachers' future practices and ultimately shape the future Colombian ELT. Student-teachers are individuals with principles, values, beliefs, feelings, concerns, expectations, and challenges about themselves and their language teaching pedagogical and research doings (Bonilla-Medina & Samacá Bohórquez, 2020; Durán-Narváez et al., 2017; Lucero & Cortés-Ibañez, 2021; Lucero et al., 2024; Suárez Flórez & Basto Basto, 2017). Therefore, everything educational programs offer contributes to shaping teachers-to-be within an acquired discourse, constructed knowledge(s), and situated teaching praxis. In simple terms, any

ELTE program operates as a teacher-shaping institution. This constitution can be more plentiful when student-teachers are placed in varied local educational contexts, encouraged to be aware of such contexts' realities, and triggered to feel, think, and act with their emerging teacher selves concerning others and the contexts they serve.

Embracing this transformative vision of language education requires a collective commitment to recognizing the Colombian ELTE community's situated, emergent, and evolving pedagogical practices. As diverse and critical voices continue to emerge within this community, co-creating communal spaces is essential where localized knowledge and practices can be shared and expanded. Whether rooted in context, community, decoloniality, local literacies, dialogical perspectives, critical pedagogies, or de-racialization, these practices hold significant value within Colombian educational territories. Acknowledging and amplifying them is crucial for reshaping the dynamics of local knowledge construction and fostering meaningful transformations in ELTE. There remains a need to keep exploring the Colombian ELTE community's powerful pedagogical decisions to teach and learn English in close relation to their contexts and needs (Bonilla-Mora & López-Urbina, 2021; Cruz-Arcila, 2018; Ubaque-Casallas, 2021).

There might be multiple ways to challenge the canonical perspectives on ELTE. For example, we can challenge the established perspectives of doing research by systematizing experiences through autobiographies (Posada-Ortiz, 2021), collaborative autoethnographies (Campos Campos et al., 2021), critical autoethnographies (Castañeda-Trujillo, 2023), testimonies (Castañeda-Londoño, 2021), and narratives (Ubaque-Casallas, 2021). These approaches can be co-constructed from particular and innovative forms embedded in our everyday language pedagogical practices (as in Lucero & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2019; Oviedo-Gómez & Jaramillo-Cárdenas, 2024; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2020; Vanegas Garzón & Bedoya-Ríos, 2024). These ways provoke feelings, thoughts, and doings -a culture of inquiry-interrogating ELT theory and research-based literature applied to real-world practices and allow us to reflect and design context-specific methodologies, interdisciplinary work, and teaching materials (as in Aguirre Morales et al., 2022; Corrales et al., 2015; Escobar Alméciga, 2015, 2018; Guerrero-Nieto, 2022; Méndez-Rivera et al., 2020). Furthermore, by documenting and analyzing everyday pedagogical practices, the Colombian ELTE community positions itself as a co-constructor of knowledge(s) asserting its agency and actively resisting the traditional top-down flow in which foreign 'experts' often inform practice.

The growing practice of systematization of experiences has the potential to challenge the dominant discourses in ELTE and to foster a more pluralistic understanding of the field. It enables a collective reflection of challenges, supports the reshaping of teaching and research agendas, and nurtures a cycle of action, reflection, and transformation in language

education¹⁴. These lines of work, interrelated with broader fields, have provoked views and applications of social justice. Thus, besides dismantling the hegemonic structures and epistemic violence perpetuating inequity, they cultivate sensitivity and foster social, cultural, political, and educational practices. Such praxis is inclusive and transformative, recognizing ancestral pieces of knowledge and practices. This approach advocates cognitive-epistemic justice in teachers' knowledge(s) and doings, embracing differences and affirming rights in pursuing social justice.

Spaces supporting these lines of work include events and academic networks¹⁵, as critical reflection hubs, with a critical view of the above-mentioned panorama (Journal CALJ, 2020; Cárdenas, 2022; Lucero & Castañeda-Londoño, 2021). These spaces enable the Colombian ELTE community to continue reflecting deeply and critically while implementing necessary and situated changes for ELT practices and discourses. As a community, we can keep fostering interconnected academic events and networks with universities, associations, cooperative institutions, and policy-making departments. These hubs could serve as platforms to offer structured reviews, research group collaborations, and critical and decolonial-pedagogical dialogues and workshops. These initiatives can focus on promoting situated language spaces to rethink the role of English in Colombia's diverse communities and welcome other languages into our pedagogical and research praxis. Together, we can work as a community toward transforming the visions of languages by favoring a more plurilingual praxis¹⁶.

Another important pathway is developing a Colombian ELTE knowledge(s) ecosystem that documents, systematizes, and disseminates local ELT practices, methodologies, and research (as in Castañeda-Londoño, 2019; Correa, 2023; Lucero & Vera Peña, 2024). Published papers and books of research, teaching experiences, theoretical reviews, and reflections in Colombian and overseas' specialized journals and publishing houses constitute one of the key sources to create an evolving space where the Colombian ELTE Community not only consults but also contributes with and assimilates gained knowledge(s), context-specific methodologies, specialized research, and local sociocultural and linguistic realities.

¹⁴ In this section, we do not attempt to discuss the transformations in the digital-world-driven approaches for language education. Instead, we acknowledge Acosta López and Díaz Ramírez's article (this special issue). They broadly investigate the integration of distance learning models and ELT in Colombia through a conceptual reflection on their historical evolution and impact.

¹⁵ These lines of work, for example, can be developed through our association (ASOCOPI) and the specific events organized by teacher education programs, which are well-established and held annually.

¹⁶ A plurilingual praxis should embrace linguistic diversity in ELT; value local, indigenous, and other 'foreign' languages; foster inclusive education through translanguaging, multilingual interactions, and context-sensitive curricula; and challenge English hegemony while promoting equitable, diverse, and culturally relevant language teaching and research.

Similarly, Colombian universities' repositories (as in Asadi et al., 2019) serve as another valuable source to developing the ELTE field as they showcase students' local experiences, research culture developments, educational trends, and academic standings. By creating this localized knowledge(s)-sharing ecosystem, the Colombian ELTE community can reduce dependence on foreign models, promote a collective understanding of teaching English in Colombian contexts, and encourage the development of ELTE knowledge(s) grounded in Colombia's social, political, cultural, academic, and linguistic landscapes.

Conclusions

For the past six decades, ELTE in Colombia has been largely shaped by foreign theories, often overlooking local knowledge and needs. However, dedicated research efforts have paved the way for emerging and renewed ELT practices in the country. Despite efforts to contextualize ELTE practices, foreign influence, especially driven by NABA scholarship, continues to dominate teaching methods, materials, and policies. To advance, Colombian ELTE must prioritize local contexts, blending existing acquired pedagogical insights with more localized, sensitive, and transformative approaches.

As a community, we are living at a pivotal moment, confronting deeply ingrained foreign influences that have shaped ELT practices, discourses, and policies in Colombia. Although efforts to redefine them persist amid challenges, this shift requires equitable, context-appropriate, and inclusive pedagogical practices to fill systemic gaps in Colombian ELTE. Moving forward, addressing social disparities and enhancing teacher training in these modalities is essential. However, as a community, we undeniably face several challenges within a digital-driven world that reinforces English language commodification and marketization. Colombian ELTE undergraduate (and graduate) programs more steadily struggle to balance awareness of socio-political and economic influences with the push for rapid, marketable outcomes driven by digital modes. If we fall into the game without critical agency, the risk is reducing local ELTE to quick and profitable results, undermining reflective approaches and broader social engagement in its practices.

Therefore, transforming Colombian ELTE requires an intentional balance between historical knowledge and the evolving local contexts and current realities. As a community, we must emphasize collaborative and critical inquiry into entrenched academic practices. Emerging pedagogical and research shifts must promote more intercultural, contextualized, and socially just practices through localized teaching, innovative methodologies, and collective reflection. Creating knowledge-sharing ecosystems, collaborative networks, and more space for critical dialogue are our suggestions for a dynamic, community-driven transformation.

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