

EFL student teachers' renewed comprehension of interculturality and research about interculturality

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Researching interculturality can be a complex task because of the multiple angles to consider in the context of English teacher education programs. This article aims to analyse the experiences of five Colombian EFL student teachers who participated as assistants in a cross-cultural and cross-national research project. Information was gathered from research group conversations and reflections written by the EFL student teachers around their work within the research. The data analysis showed that the EFL student teachers' participation in the research project contributed to giving a new significance to their understanding of the concept of interculturality and being intercultural. In the same way, they had the chance to demystify some ideologies learned during their major. And lastly, EFL student teachers renewed their attitude toward the intercultural research process. Finally, it is concluded that the active participation of EFL student teachers in research aimed at promoting interculturality contributed to their understanding of interculturality within their professional practice.

Introduction

Culture has always been an important aspect of society. However, with the recent trends towards incorporating cultural and multicultural perspectives in education, specifically in the applied linguistics and teaching of languages field, scholars are now more interested in better understanding how to integrate these themes more effectively into these areas of knowledge. One part of this trend is an upsurge in research studies into interculturality and culture-related aspects in international and national scenarios.

In the international scene, and especially within the last few years, scholars have been addressing the analysis of interculturality from different positions. Some of these contributions have explored how interculturality is being tackled in the field of education (Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020; Dervin & Simpson, 2021; Florez-Montaña et al., 2022). Others have concentrated on understanding how to incorporate this knowledge more effectively into preparing English language student teachers (Bousslama & Benaissi, 2018; Arcagök & Yilmaz, 2020). Although these actions have undoubtedly contributed to a broader theorisation of these fields, more research is necessary to expand and better understand this growing area and its global dynamics.

Colombia is no exception in this area, mainly because a number of scholars from this South American country have placed interculturality at the core of their research agendas and practices in the last decade. In general terms, it is observable that interculturality and

culture-related themes have been gaining momentum in Colombian ELT and applied linguistics (AL), which is perceived after analysing five specialised Colombian journals. Some of the trends found in this analysis are connected to interculturality. For instance, some scholars led studies oriented toward incorporating culture in the preparation of Colombian pre-service language teachers (Álvarez-Valencia & Fernández Benavides, 2019; Moya-Chaves et al., 2018; Ramos Holguín et al., 2012). Another trend is connected to the analysis of sociocultural experiences that prospective and in-service EFL teachers face within their teaching contexts (Bonilla & Cruz-Arcila, 2014; Cruz-Arcila, 2007). Colombian scholars have also investigated the role indigenous cultures and perspectives play in academic settings (Álvarez-Valencia & Wagner, 2021; Álvarez-Valencia & Miranda, 2022).

As suggested above, research about interculturality has been gaining thrust in the country. Some research groups include students in the role of assistants when they work in Colombian universities. In this role, the student teachers see research from a different perspective, allowing them to reconceptualise some of their beliefs about the constructs on which research focuses and the research process. However, despite this growing tendency, there seem to be few studies in Colombia informing the repercussions that research experiences revolving around interculturality have on EFL student teachers (also referred to as pre-service teachers, or initial teacher education students) after such a process. Under these premises, this paper focuses on analysing learning by five Colombian EFL student teachers who participated as research assistants in a research project oriented to identify their beliefs and reflections concerning some intercultural situations, through a telecollaborative strategy with participants from three universities in three countries (Colombia, Ecuador, and the USA).

Theoretical background

To perform this study, we framed our research based on three guiding constructs: (1) culture, cultural identity and interculturality; (2) formative research in initial teacher education; and (3) research about interculturality. Below we present a theorisation of each construct.

Culture, cultural identity and interculturality

Based on the characteristics of the participants of the study, student teachers belonging to different cultural contexts, and the purpose of the research, it is important to address the concepts of culture, cultural identity, and interculturality.

The notion of culture has been explored for decades in different fields, such as linguistics, sociology, anthropology, education, etc. However, reaching a consensus on what culture implies can be a complex task because culture can have different meanings for different people depending on the context (Nieto, 2008). In foreign language teaching and intercultural communication, several definitions of culture have emerged, linked to values, world views, traditions, political and social relations, attitudes, beliefs, norms and diverse behaviours (Rojas-Barreto, 2019). Besides, factors such as globalisation, individuals'

constant mobility and exchange have enacted a dynamic vision of culture (Dietz, 2018; Jokikokko, 2010; Karabinar & Guler, 2013; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Nieto, 2008; Tejerina, 2011; Witte & Harden, 2015). From this perspective, culture is conceived as a heterogeneous, diverse, changing and dynamic construct; a system of enduring rules that evolve over time, socially produced and distributed and shared by a group of people, but individually hosted by each individual. In other words, each individual houses their culture in a unique and unrepeatable way, based on all the information received and the experiences lived over the years, which forms their cultural identity.

Authors such as Karabinar & Guler (2013) state that culture is “the root of our identity, which is pervasive, shared, learned and dynamic” (p. 1317). Thus, cultural identity is

no longer static and one dimensional, but rather it is dynamic and multidimensional, expanding as we meet new ideas, new situations, and develop a new and evolving idea of our own selves, with multiple personal cultural identities, not mutually exclusive, coexisting and complementing each other. (Stein-Smith, 2019, p. 409)

In this vein of ideas, Block (2015) referred to identities in the plural to denote the multiplicity of the phenomenon. The author presented identities as development narratives, socioculturally constructed and developed through different space-time scales that start from the micro (local and immediate) to the macro (global and long term). Such sociocultural narratives emerge as the person participates in activities and communicates with others their beliefs, purposes, and values to varying degrees. All in all, cultural identities flow, are built and rebuilt from the diverse groups to which they belong (Kadianaki et al., 2015; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Paulsen, 2015; Tranekjær, 2015) and, consequently, they are not strictly tied or fixed to national or other affiliations, but rather evolve through interaction with other groups (Byram et al., 2002; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

As with the concept of culture, the interdisciplinary nature of the notion of interculturality leads to diverse definitions, depending on the perspective from which it is studied. The notion of interculturality was introduced in the field of communication, extending later to other areas such as education, business, linguistics and healthcare (Dervin, 2017). In education, it had its beginnings in the European and North American context as a result of a series of challenges faced by educational systems due to phenomena such as globalisation, migration and the convergence of cultures in Europe and USA, which generated an increase in foreign students with different cultures and languages. Hence, interculturality was perceived as the encounter of different cultures that allows contrasting and learning from each other, an awareness of the difference, to resolve conflicts.

Nevertheless, thanks to new, more holistic, emancipatory and critical perspectives, which are based on the realities of both hegemonic and non-hegemonic countries, definitions such as that of Dietz (2018) have come to light:

Interculturality is defined as the ensemble of interrelations that structure a given society in terms of culture, ethnicity, language, religious denomination, and/or nationality, an ensemble that is perceived through the articulation of different “us” versus “them”

groups that interact in often changing majority–minority constellations. These relations are frequently asymmetrical with regard to political and socioeconomic power, and they often reflect historically rooted ways of showing or hiding, of emphasizing or denying diversity, of stigmatizing otherness, and of discriminating against particular groups (p. 2)

Contrary to a multicultural approach which recognises the multiplicity of cultures that coexist in a society without necessarily interacting with each other (Walsh, 2005), the intercultural approach does not emphasise group composition but the kind and quality of intergroup relations within society. Interculturality goes beyond the mere recognition of the difference that is part of a colonial, racial and hierarchical framework and becomes a collective and local goal. It aims to transform structures, institutions and social relations and construct different conditions of existence and coexistence (Moya Chaves et al., 2019; Walsh, 2005).

Formative research in initial teacher education

Formative research is a teaching and learning modality that places EFL student teachers as the active protagonist of their learning process (Barros Morales et al., 2019). In this sense, formative research involves learning to learn by promoting the active participation of students in the apprehension and reconstruction of scientific knowledge within spaces and strategies designed for this purpose (Turpo-Gebera et al., 2021). Likewise, formative research can be seen as an organised pedagogical device oriented to acquiring new knowledge and skills. Specifically, formative research “configures a pedagogical approach that propitiates reflection on its nature, styles and purposes, requiring the illustration of epistemological horizons” (Turpo-Gebera et al., 2021, p. 3).

In this way, formative research becomes a strategy to foster curiosity and the capacity for wonder in the face of knowledge, which leads students to become concerned about the issues with which they relate daily, and there is where their interest in research in the strict sense begins. This interest leads students to search for strategies and programs that help them to satisfy their need to know; one of them being the research seedbed group.

Research seedbed groups are programs directed by research groups attached to the teaching programs. In this sense, those who join these research seed groups have the possibility of expanding their frontier of knowledge and becoming capable of approaching the theoretical, epistemological and conceptual boundaries of the discipline. By doing the above, the members of the research seedbeds group will be able to formulate pertinent questions applied to the context where they develop as well as propose correct methodological designs (Peláez Valencia & Montoya Ferrer, 2019). This research seedbed strategy is strongly related to current universities' interest in fulfilling their mission objectives of training professionals with defined research competencies, oriented to the analysis of the needs of the objects of study for the bachelors degree (Turpo-Gebera et al., 2021).

It is essential to clarify that the primary intention of formative research is not to build new knowledge but to achieve through a transformative learning approach a deepening of new researchers' understanding of what is being researched (Peláez-Valencia & Montoya-

Ferrer, 2019). This transformative learning approach is linked to the critical pedagogy that indicates that educational spaces are not to replicate or confirm knowledge generated by others, but rather become spaces of liberation and transformation that allow positioning one's own and local knowledge as legitimate (Barnett & Botes, 2022). Likewise, through this transformative learning approach, formative research focuses on identifying potential researchers who can later be linked to more complex research studies and even form part of research groups or institutes with a view to transformation from a social justice perspective (De Klerk & Palmer, 2020; Turpo-Gebera et al., 2021).

Research on interculturality

Research on interculturality refers to the comprehensive set of strategies, frameworks, methodologies, epistemologies, and pedagogies that scholars have long implemented to study within this knowledge area. Although this may be a rather simplistic definition at first, we deem it necessary to bring it up. In previous times, scholars focused on understanding interculturality and cultural studies from a functional perspective, which was mostly centred on understanding the different features taking place among varied cultures; nowadays, not only understanding but also empowering communities is at the core of research within this field. In this sense, it is possible to state that decolonial theories have permeated interculturality. As a result, some standpoints which had not been considered previously are being taken into consideration more frequently in the 21st century.

An analysis of scholarly literature indicates that interculturality, or intercultural dialogue, as it has also been recently labeled, is a dimension gaining increased attention across diverse fields of knowledge. This is noticeable in the large number of terms that have emerged from the multiple perspectives scholars have assumed for exploring and understanding interculturality. These include intercultural discourse and communication (Monaghan, 2014), intercultural capital (Pöllman, 2014), intercultural communication (Jackson, 2016; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2014), cultural pluralism, cross-cultural dialogues, and the intersection with identity and critical studies (Chen, 2014; Giorgis, 2017). However, the field of applied linguistics and, more specifically, the English language teaching field (ELT) are not inherent to this action. Because of this, ELT scholars are also advocating for the gradual inclusion of *knowledge otherwise*, as well as other notions which support those who have long been considered “subalterns” to keep advocating for new spaces for recognition and (re)existence. In the words of Ramos Holguin (2021, p. 94), further research on interculturality in ELT should continue focusing “on promoting spaces that acknowledge intercultural practices that aim at respect and embrace diversity”, as the 21st-century demands educators to be more aware of this in alignment with decolonial influences, which have been permeating language use. Additionally, she considers it crucial to showcase how ELT accounts for a diversity of thoughts and beings by stopping talking about “interculturality” as if it was a single and delocalised entity and continuing to use the term “interculturalities” instead (Ramos Holguin, 2021).

The above-displayed ideas show that the broad field of interculturality/cultural studies keeps opening new spaces for reflection, analysis, and re-existence, as interculturality now

seems to focus on both what makes us different and on what makes us similar as human beings. Dervin (2017) supported this idea when he said that “by separating diversities and fighting different battles, such hierarchies can lead to frustration, ignorance, patronizing attitudes, and disinterest in others. Diversity needs to become diversities” (p. 28). Consequently, we are experiencing a broader and deeper understanding of being(s), knowledge(s), and affiliation(s) in general, which disrupt the matrix of power.

To conclude this section, we also find it relevant to mention that the present research study intersects two areas of knowledge: interculturality/intercultural studies and the resignification of what this means and implies researching this specific field of knowledge. Moreover, and following the perspective of Ndimande (2012), it is possible to affirm that to some extent, we followed principles of decoloniality for data collection and analysis, as our participants, who performed at the same time as our research assistants, were not merely seen as “data plantations”. Furthermore, they were actively involved in this transnational qualitative study, which allowed them to change their role as intercultural beings and educators.

Method

We decided to view this research as a case study to meet the main objective of analysing five Colombian EFL student teachers' learnings concerning research and interculturality derived from their experience as research assistants on a broader research project. The case is represented in the group of student teachers who are part of a research seedbed and who, for one year, served as research assistants for a project related to the promotion of interculturality in telecollaboration spaces. It is worth mentioning that the university where our participants study allows them to choose one of the degree modalities offered, one of which is the research seedbed, which, as its name suggests, is a research group that seeks to plant a seed of interest and fondness for research in the participants.

This leads us to say that the research has the three components pointed out by Duff (2008) as essential to determining a case: (1) a particularity (student teacher understandings about research and research on intercultural matters); (2) a contextualisation (the research group and the research project of which the students were part); and (3) an interpretation (represented by the problematisation pointed out in the relation student teacher, research and interculturality).

Context and participants

The general context where this research was carried out was the research seedbed made up of student teachers in the last year of a degree in foreign languages at a public university in southern Colombia. The formation of this seedbed followed the university's regulations, and work and confidentiality agreements were established with each member. Within the research seedbed group, the student teachers were assigned a series of tasks that revolved around qualitative inquiry, interculturality, and intercultural research while participating in intercultural encounters with other students from two universities, one from the USA and the other from Ecuador, through telecollaboration spaces.

The five student teachers, members of the research seedbed, played two roles. The first role was being part of the population of a larger project in which they were to meet every two weeks with their counterparts from two other universities - five student teachers from Ecuador and five from USA - to discuss various intercultural issues, such as English as a *lingua franca*, international food types, intersectionality and intersectional identities, indigenous knowledge and social etiquette. Each session lasted approximately one hour and was conducted in English, the language being spoken by the students from the three countries. In total, six virtual and synchronous meetings were reached, through the *Google Meet* platform, during the second semester of 2021.

The second role played by the Colombian students was that of research assistants since they were the ones who arranged the synchronous encounters and recorded and transcribed them. Likewise, these students participated in consultation and discussion meetings with the leading professors/researchers that surrounded their research experience and their learning about the research process and interculturality. Finally, given the purpose of this case study, we will focus on analysing the experiences and learning of the five Colombian student teachers as research assistants and participants in a project on interculturality rather than on the transnational research. To preserve anonymity, the participant pre-service EFL teachers from Colombia identified themselves as follows.

Table 1: Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age
Artcu	Male	20
Ground Hog	Female	20
Onix	Female	21
Lana	Female	20
Vicky	Female	21

Data analysis

In this case study, we decided to examine the understandings of the student teachers through written reflections made at the end of their participation in the research project. These reflections were aimed at exploring their experiences as participants and co-researchers in the project. The writings were socialised and discussed in a focus group, from which some relevant data was extracted to achieve this research objective.

Each of the three researchers analysed these data through an open coding process. Subsequently, the results were triangulated, and three categories were obtained: (1) new significance to the understanding of interculturality and being intercultural; (2) opportunities to demystify some imposed ideologies; and (3) renewed attitudes towards research on interculturality.

Findings

The findings of this case study were directed towards the objective of analysing the written reflections of five Colombian EFL student teachers about their experience as

participants as well as assistants in a research project focused on the promotion of interculturality in telecollaboration spaces. In this sense, the categories we have discerned account for the phenomenon and are related to each other, giving a complete understanding of the transformations in the conceptions of what interculturality and research in interculturality are.

New significance in the understanding of interculturality and being intercultural

The student teachers had some knowledge regarding interculturality and intercultural competence, mainly acquired from some of the courses they had studied. However, the transnational encounters in which they participated provided them with a different vision of the cultural scenarios they had to analyse and discuss, which also led them to resignify the notion of interculturality. One clear example is Onix's insights regarding how she became aware of the way some factors (such as knowledge) enrich, construct and deconstruct her outlook on life. The quotation below from Onix and all other student teachers' quotes throughout the paper are presented using the participant's English.

I could learn it highly because, in my school, we had to take a course which taught us everything about other types of races that we have in Colombia in order to abolish racism; that helped me to develop the idea that we are different in many areas such as social, cultural, political, economical and religious, and this is not only around the world, this is also in our own community. However, at that time, I was unaware of the impact that that knowledge could have on enriching my perspective of life, engaging with complexity and multiple identities and avoiding stereotyping (Onix).

The student teachers' reflections also allowed us to glimpse samples of a critical interculturality, a construct that, for Granados-Beltrán (2016), "works as a decolonial, ethical, and political project aiming to challenge and transform existing structures, institutions, and social relations that maintain inequality in such a way that other ways of being, thinking, living, learning, and knowing are acknowledged" (p. 176). We assumed that, firstly, because most of the topics tackled during the different cycles were thoroughly discussed, they did not limit themselves to addressing the issues in a superficial way, but they usually tried to take a critical stand on the given topics and the others emerging from the discussions, which touched upon their sensitivities. The excerpts below are clear examples of the emerging criticality:

During the meeting, we also realize that the Colombian and Ecuadorian cultures have some similar aspects. The first one I noticed was that in both countries, in most of the cases, women are seen as objects. Sexual objectification is the term used to refer to how women are reduced to their sexual body parts (meaning that they are sexualised) (Vicky) In Colombia there's still a lot of forced displacement and violence which affect the indigenous communities in a grave manner. We can see indigenous women and children begging on the streets of the biggest cities because there's no protection or reparation to this affected people (Ground Hog)

The previous examples present some of the topics that emerged during the synchronous encounters, which gave rise to comparisons about a number of situations in their cultures. It made them realise that there are many commonalities and that interculturality is not

only differences but also shared features, as stated by Dervin (2017) “the proposed paradigm of interculturality which is currently gaining strength in global research places both similarities and differences at the forefront of attention” (p.90). Lana’s words evidence the developed awareness regarding the central role of commonalities for a sane living.

We learned that we had more things in common than we thought despite the fact that each one of us is from a different country, which means that we have different cultures and we get along well (Lana).

It is noteworthy that the points in common were more frequently presented in the South American students, accompanied by attitudes of empathy, especially when it came to the topics that referred to ancestral knowledge. Without detracting from the interest and empathy that North American students displayed in these issues, it was clear that they did not share as much knowledge on the subject. The passages below are some of the various instances identified in this regard.

It was very easy to start conversations with my partner, and I understood that the Latin American context to which we are both exposed influences our way of thinking (which, by the way, is almost always the same or oriented in the same direction (Artcu)

My partner from Connecticut did not know anything about the “Conocimiento Otros” (ancestral knowledge), which is the knowledge that indigenous people have and practice in their communities; a thing that my partner from Ecuador, and I, knew very well. (Ground Hog)

In this line of ideas, one of the aspects most highlighted in the majority of the student teachers’ reflections was their pride and interest in the preservation of ancestral knowledge as part of their culture and identity. For them, indigenous communities should no longer being stigmatised as a minority; on the contrary, this population and the ancestral knowledge they bring with them should be recognised as an important part of their country’s idiosyncrasy from an intercultural, rather than multicultural, perspective. Understanding multiculturalism as the diverse composition of society and its segmentation into different groups, groups that coexist without necessarily interacting with each other; on the other hand, as Dietz expressed,

The intercultural perspective does not emphasize group composition but the kind and quality of intergroup relations within society. Therefore, minority and majority are not distinguished here in demographic, numerical terms but in terms of power—the power to define who belongs to a majority and who is stigmatized as a minority (Dietz, 2018, p. 2)

The following insights evidence participants’ concerns about the situation of the indigenous communities and the preservation of their ancestral wisdom as part of their roots:

We discussed the difficulties that indigenous populations had to be able to preserve their costumes. In all of our three countries, the indigenous people were in a situation of vulnerability because of state abandonment, often isolated on territories that were given

to them by the same institutions that pushed them out, often by violent means, where they receive little to no protections, as little as they receive reparations for the multiple harms that have been systematically committed against them (Ground Hog).

We learned about the community and how they live, and we also got the chance to do a “trueque,” and it was an experience that I’ll never forget. Ancestral knowledge had an impact and made us realize how important it is (Lana)

In the same vein, students’ reflections revealed another important dividend from the intercultural encounters they took part in: it strengthened their knowledge of both their C1 and C2 (as in the quote below). Additionally, knowledge is one of the main components of different IC models (Byram, 2020; Deardorff, 2011; Fantini, 2009). For an appropriate intercultural encounter, it is important to have both knowledges of the cultures and of “how social groups and identities function and what is involved in intercultural interaction” (Byram et al., 2002).

It should be noted that this helped us in the sense that we strengthened our knowledge and also acquired knowledge that we were supposed to have culturally (Artcu)

This exercise did lead not only me but also my partners to reflect, to think about how much we have lost and how much we have ignored. It opened the door to “an individual act of introspection or a collective exercise within a closed group”, I understood that the intercultural perspective is a critique of the standardization and acculturation of native peoples. That there are heritages that must be recognized, cared for, and respected, and that at the same time, they have to be taught (Artcu)

As supported by the quotations above, one of the salient aspects that evidenced the new significance of the notion of interculturality is the greater (inter)cultural awareness student teachers displayed through their reflections after participating in the transnational research. This allowed them to tackle the issues addressed in a more critical, empathetic and ethno-relative way.

Opportunities to demystify some imposed ideologies

While the initial findings suggest that the student teachers had the opportunity for developing a new perspective of what interculturality and being intercultural means, it was also possible to establish that through the set of experiences they were immersed in, student teachers could debunk some ideologies they had concerning intercultural encounters with individuals coming from English speaking countries. This situation is observable in the following data, where Vicky manifests that before the meetings, she was highly preoccupied with not sounding equal to a native user of the language,

Another aspect that happened during most of the encounters was that I leaned on my Spanish-speaking partner when I did not know how to say a word or express myself. This started to happen when a female from the USA (that has Korean heritage) joined us. The first time we had the encounter as a group, I was afraid of not being able to communicate properly or making mistakes as I have always heard from my classmates and people in general that they would like to speak like natives and remove that accent Colombian has when speaking English (Vicky).

However, after being exposed to the intercultural experiences previously referred to, and after a continuous process of reflection triggered by these spaces, the participant identified as Vicky became aware that as English teachers, we have minimised our role as educators and users of the language. Consequently, she assumes a new standpoint and reaffirms that one of the ultimate goals of English in the 21st century should be promoting intercultural understanding among individuals from varied settings. Her standpoint is expressed in the following lines:

We tend to think that a native speaker or teacher is better because they were born in an English-speaking country, but the truth is that they are not qualified to teach the language. I have this ideology of native-speakerism in which there exists a belief that the 'native-speaker' teacher represents the L2 or target language that students are learning (Vicky).

Not being a native speaker of a language does not mean you are not good; in the end, the aim of a language is to be able to communicate with people around the world and make oneself understood (Vicky).

Still, it is worth pointing out that although the ideologies that student teachers showed were related principally to native-oriented norms, through the experiences they had in the research seedbed group, they were also able to understand that in current times teachers and individuals, in general, should be aware of the existence of ancestral and indigenous knowledge when it comes to education and knowledge production,

I think that it is fundamental for us, as citizens of a country with so much history of oppression to learn, understand and value the history and knowledges of the indigenous populations. I think it is important to inculcate on children that those places and knowledges are not strangers to them but part of what we are. Sadly, it is a heritage that is mostly ignored (Ground Hog).

We need to know our background, our territory and our shared ideals, which we have been raised in without caring about, then, we would help learners to compare their own cultural context with the unfamiliar contexts to which language learning introduces us (Onix).

As seen in the above-displayed quotations, the student teachers highlighted the necessity of detaching from "westernised" views of knowledge where specificities of our own aboriginal cultures are not addressed and further advocated for the need to reflect upon these aspects so that language educators can be more aware of the importance of these elements. Moreover, participants stressed that it is paramount to gradually insert knowledge otherwise in formal teaching and learning processes, to respect and rescue ancestral knowledges. Because of this, they proposed a series of tentative tasks to be implemented to achieve such a purpose. This is observable in the following quotation,

The meeting started with a video that we had to watch and then discuss. After that, we started talking about the knowledge that each one of us had. It all started quite well, and the discussion produced some interesting ideas about how we could bring ancestral knowledge into the classroom and how we could have improved the experience with the video, a day dedicated to culture (Artcu).

Besides the aspects that have been tackled up to this point, the overall data analysis allows our observing that participants could debunk the deep-seated belief that interculturality is about looking at the differences of others, rather than at the similarities we have. As stated above, in general, participants realised that interculturality and being an intercultural individual implies celebrating diversities.

All in all, and considering the previous analysis, it is possible to sustain that through their participation in intercultural encounters, student teachers did not have only the chance to demystify some ideologies they had regarding the English language, as is the case of native speakerism. Beyond that, and through their engagement in interculturally oriented dialogues, they were able to understand that detaching from westernised views of knowledge and looking at the other as an equal one, are aspects that lie at the core of interculturality.

Renewed attitudes toward research on interculturality

For some EFL student teachers, participating in a research project was not part of their goals during their studies. In fact, for some of the student teachers at the research seedbed, doing research was only the job for people with specific skills; for them, not just anyone could do research.

When I started my degree, I did not imagine or think I would be part of a research group. On the contrary, thinking about doing research or joining a research group scared me. I must confess that I tried to avoid it several times, but in the end, I ended up being part of one. The reason why this happened was that I did not know if I was going to be capable of fulfilling the whole process of doing research (Vicky).

A year ago, I was offered to be part of a research project based on interculturality. At first, I thought that I was not capable enough to be part of a project like this because I've never been used to being part of this type of thing, which I always thought it was boring and not interesting (Lana).

This lack of motivation to research also stemmed from some students' insecurities. They did not feel able to learn to do something that, from their perspective, was complicated, and they were unwilling to expose themselves to others for fear of being criticised.

Moreover, my younger self was frightened of "breaking the silence" (a term that one of my professors explained to us in our meetings) because I did not want people to judge me, to see myself as vulnerable or make mistakes (Vicky).

I thought I wasn't clever enough to be the type of person that does research (Lana).

However, their perception of doing research changed when they had the opportunity to join a research group and become research assistants. They gave meaning to what research implies, not only learning a series of processes but delving into a community's perceptions, conceptions and beliefs. In addition, they took on the task of integrating with their fellow researchers, making the experience more enriching in terms of learning what it means to be intercultural and what it means to do research, as the following quotes show,

The objective of the research is interculturality. In each phase, we were given a specific topic to discuss. It should be noted that this helped us in the sense that we strengthened our knowledge and also acquired knowledge that we were supposed to have culturally (Artcu).

At that time, I was unaware of the impact that that knowledge could have on enriching my perspective of life, engaging with complexity and multiple identities and avoiding the stereotyping that accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity (Lana).

Artcu's and Lana's quotes show the transformation they experienced after being involved in the research process. As a result, their attitudes and beliefs changed, demonstrating a renewed vision of doing research in interculturality. Nevertheless, these changes in attitude towards the investigation were not instantaneous. Even in the end, some student teachers still had reservations about the process. However, the reflection exercise on their experience helped them to recognise what they had learned and the transformation they had experienced. This fact shows that research seedbeds are invoked to transform students' visions through experience and reflection (Barnett & Botes, 2022; De Klerk & Palmer, 2020). This way, the attitude about research is renewed, and a different epistemological position toward knowledge is assumed (Turpo-Gebera et al., 2021). For example, fears of talking about research are diluted, as this quote shows:

I consider myself fortunate and could not wait to share with my investigation mates all that we know (Artcu).

This experience taught me about my culture, a little bit more about where I come from and how I can connect with that. Learning from this experience was a great way of knowing that through culture, we can find many ways to aim and participate in this (Lana).

The enthusiasm shown in the previous quotes confirms this change in attitude towards research, which includes the socialisation of results and the explanation of the findings. It is evident how the student teachers feel as protagonists of the research process (Barros Morales et al., 2019). These attitudes minimise the hegemonic patterns imposed in the investigative exercise, where the assistants are positioned below the principal investigators. Instead, it is seen how the student teachers have empowered themselves as researchers and knowledge builders to the point that they no longer feel afraid to socialise with others.

Conclusions and implications

The general purpose of this paper is to show the learning by the five student teachers who participated in the roles of research assistants and study participants obtained from their experience. Thus, the student teachers were able to resignify the paradigm of interculturality, which is now characterised as more comprehensive and far-reaching. In other words, the student teachers demonstrated in the reflections that they did not limit themselves to a superficial approach to the issues, but went beyond, adopting a critical stance, both from their own perspective and from that of others. However, this would not have been possible if they had not had at their disposal a series of thought-provoking scenarios and questions suitable for critical analysis.

The student teachers were led into re-examining and dismantling some deep-rooted ideologies regarding interculturality and interculturality research, which is linked with a transformative learning approach. Overall, it is noted that some of them were able to question the legitimacy of English and reaffirm their identity as language users. This occurred as, after the whole research endeavour, the student teachers understood that in the 21st century, English has a *lingua franca* (ELF) status and does not adhere only to native-oriented standards. In short, they developed a new perspective toward the use of English across national and international settings. Therefore, student teachers assumed a more critical position that led them to become aware that intercultural understanding should be at the centre of communication sustained through this language.

In the same way, the experience in the research project led them to rethink their role as researchers and allowed them to take an active position in the activities, so that they could lead processes and build knowledge collectively. Thus, it can be concluded that the active participation of student teachers in research processes is crucial for their professional development. On the one hand, it allows them to understand the mechanisms and actions involved in doing research, and on the other hand, it helps them to broaden their understanding of particular topics, which leads to transformations and actions aimed at professional training.

Some of the implications derived from this study are oriented to the choice of intercultural contents, appropriate situations, and intercultural spaces for the promotion and evaluation of intercultural competencies; contents that contribute to the development of intercultural attitudes and awareness instead of being limited to the transmission of superficial and introductory cultural knowledge. Likewise, it is expected that teacher training programs promote more research workshops that open spaces for those who want to become researchers, and together with this, program professors should generate strategies to involve relevant topics in the critical training of student teachers.

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