Disrupting Rural Local Realities through Inquiry-Based Learning in the efl Classroom

Revolucionar las realidades rurales locales mediante el aprendizaje basado en la investigación en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera

Bouleverser les réalités rurales locales grâce à l'apprentissage par enquête dans les classes d'anglais langue étrangère

Transformar as realidades rurais locais por meio da aprendizagem baseada em pesquisa na sala de aula de inglês como língua estrangeira

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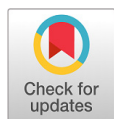
Abstract

English language teaching (ELT) in rural areas oftentimes deviates from the global agenda with practices that contribute to students' well-being beyond language skill development. This article reports a qualitative case study that explored the influence of inquiry-based learning (IBL) on EFL (English-as-a-foreign-language) students' awareness of local sociocultural issues at a rural public school in the department of Huila, in southwestern Colombia. Thus, a pedagogical intervention was implemented. Data were collected from 22 high school students who completed questionnaires and interviews, which were analyzed from a decolonial perspective. The thematic analysis of students' responses yielded three categories: (a) students' inertial take on local sociocultural issues: initial views formed from typical passive engagement, (b) the expansion of sociocultural perspectives: the quantum leap in students' critical thinking, and (c) momentum of change: students' sociocultural awareness and activism. Findings show that students critically addressed complex sociocultural issues, such as violence against women, drug abuse, and child abuse, which had previously been ignored. Additionally, students developed strategies to address their community's challenges. Therefore, students enhanced their sociocultural awareness and social activism, revealing IBL as a meaningful teaching approach to promote ELT holistically. By taking a proactive role in their learning process and through the emancipation from glocal political and economic agendas interfering with the educational system, students affirm their dignity and are empowered to help others overcome social issues in their communities.

Keywords: decoloniality, EFL, ELT, English language teaching in rural areas, inquiry-based learning

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Resumen

La enseñanza del inglés (ELT) en zonas rurales suele desviarse de la agenda global con prácticas que contribuyen al bienestar de los estudiantes más allá del desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas. Este artículo reporta un estudio de caso cualitativo que exploró la influencia del aprendizaje basado en la investigación (ABI) en la concientización de los estudiantes de EFL (inglés como lengua extranjera) sobre temas socioculturales locales en una escuela pública rural en el departamento de Huila, suroeste de Colombia. En la intervención pedagógica realizada en el marco del proyecto, se recogieron datos de 22 estudiantes de bachillerato que respondieron a cuestionarios y entrevistas, los cuales se analizaron desde una perspectiva decolonial. El análisis temático de las respuestas de los estudiantes arrojó tres categorías: a) la visión inercial de los estudiantes sobre las cuestiones socioculturales locales: puntos de vista iniciales formados a partir del típico interés pasivo, b) la expansión de las perspectivas socioculturales: el salto cuántico en el pensamiento crítico de los estudiantes, y c) el impulso de cambio: la conciencia sociocultural y el activismo de los estudiantes. Los resultados muestran que los estudiantes abordaron críticamente problemáticas socioculturales complejas, como la violencia contra las mujeres, la drogadicción y el maltrato infantil, ignoradas hasta entonces. Además, los estudiantes desarrollaron estrategias para afrontar los retos de su comunidad. Por lo tanto, mejoraron su conciencia sociocultural y su activismo social, revelando el ABI como un enfoque didáctico significativo para promover un enfoque holístico de la ELT. Al asumir un papel proactivo en su proceso de aprendizaje y emanciparse de las agendas políticas y económicas locales que interfieren en el sistema educativo, los estudiantes afirman su dignidad y se sienten capacitados para ayudar a otros a superar los problemas sociales de sus comunidades.

Palabras clave: decolonialidad, EFL, ELT, enseñanza del inglés en zonas rurales, aprendizaje basado en la investigación

Résumé

L'enseignement de l'anglais (ELT) dans les zones rurales s'écarte souvent de l'agenda global avec des pratiques qui contribuent au bien-être des étudiants au-delà du développement des compétences linguistiques. Cet article présente une étude de cas qualitative qui a exploré l'influence de l'apprentissage par enquête (APE) sur la sensibilisation des étudiants EFL (anglais langue étrangère) aux questions socioculturelles locales dans une école publique rurale du département de Huila, dans le sud-ouest de la Colombie. Dans le cadre de ce projet, une intervention pédagogique a été mise en œuvre, dans la quelles ont été recueillies données d'auprès de 22 lycéens qui ont rempli des questionnaires et des entretiens, lesquels ont été analysés dans une perspective décoloniale. L'analyse thématique des réponses des élèves a permis de dégager trois catégories : a) l'inertie des élèves face aux questions socioculturelles locales : les opinions initiales issues d'un engagement passif typique, b) l'élargissement des perspectives socioculturelles : le bond en avant de la pensée critique des élèves, et c) l'élan du changement : la conscience socioculturelle et l'activisme des élèves. Les résultats montrent que les étudiants ont abordé de manière critique des questions socioculturelles complexes, telles que la violence à l'égard des femmes, la toxicomanie et la maltraitance des enfants, qui étaient auparavant ignorées. En plus, les élèves ont développé des stratégies pour relever les défis de leur communauté. Par conséquent, les élèves ont renforcé leur conscience socioculturelle et leur activisme social, révélant ainsi que l'IBL est une approche pédagogique significative pour promouvoir une approche holistique du ELT. En

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jouant un rôle proactif dans leur processus d'apprentissage et en s'émancipant des agendas politiques et économiques locaux qui interfèrent avec le système éducatif, les étudiants affirment leur dignité et sont habilités à aider les autres à surmonter les problèmes sociaux de leur communautés.

Mots-clés : décolonialité, efl, elt, enseignement de l'anglais dans les zones rurales, apprentissage par enquête

Resumo

O ensino da língua inglesa (elt) em áreas rurais muitas vezes se desvia da agenda global com práticas que contribuem para o bem-estar dos alunos além do desenvolvimento de habilidades linguísticas. Este artigo relata um estudo de caso qualitativo que explorou a influência da aprendizagem baseada em pesquisa (abp) na conscientização dos alunos de ile (inglês como língua estrangeira) sobre questões socioculturais locais em uma escola pública rural no departamento de Huila, no sudoeste da Colômbia. Assim, foi implementada uma intervenção pedagógica. Foram coletados dados de 22 alunos do ensino médio que responderam a questionários e entrevistas, os quais foram analisados a partir de uma perspectiva decolonial. A análise temática das respostas dos alunos produziu três categorias: a) a visão inercial dos alunos sobre questões socioculturais locais: visões iniciais formadas a partir do típico envolvimento passivo, b) a expansão das perspectivas socioculturais: o salto quântico no pensamento crítico dos alunos e c) o impulso da mudança: a conscientização sociocultural e o ativismo dos alunos. Os resultados mostram que os alunos abordaram de forma crítica questões socioculturais complexas, como violência contra a mulher, abuso de drogas e abuso infantil, que antes eram ignoradas. Além disso, os alunos desenvolveram estratégias para enfrentar os desafios de sua comunidade. Portanto, os alunos aprimoraram sua conscientização sociocultural e seu ativismo social, revelando a abp como uma abordagem de ensino significativa para promover uma abordagem holística do ile. Ao assumirem um papel proativo em seu processo de aprendizagem e por meio da emancipação das agendas políticas e econômicas globais que interferem no sistema educacional, os alunos afirmam sua dignidade e têm o poder de ajudar outras pessoas a superar os problemas sociais em suas comunidades.

Palavras-chave: decolonialidade, ile, elt, ensino de inglês em áreas rurais, aprendizagem baseada em pesquisa

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Introduction

In Colombia, the National Ministry of Education (2018) mandates that English language teaching (ELT) promotes access to global culture and entertainment and increases socio-economic opportunities. However, ELT in rural areas oftentimes deviates from the global agenda with practices that contribute to students' well-being beyond language skill development (Bonilla-Medina & Cruz-Arcila, 2014; Cruz-Arcila, 2017, 2018b). Teachers, as illustrated by Ortega (2020) and Gómez (2018), can play a transformative role by proposing meaningful teaching practices that transcend linguistic competence.

Notably, critical and social EFL teaching practices have been predominantly studied in urban contexts (Ghaemi & Mirsaeed, 2017; Gómez, 2018; Mendieta, 2009; Ortega, 2020; Rincón & Clavijo-Olarte, 2016; Vaca & Gómez, 2017; Zakiyuddin et al., 2022), creating a significant gap in the understanding of rural ELT. The lack of research in rural areas and our shared perspective on ELT as a tool for achieving social justice inspired the inquiry-based learning (IBL) project reported here. This pedagogical intervention for secondary school students (grades 6th to 11th) attempted to enhance students' awareness of sociocultural issues and inspire them to become proactive agents of change.

Our primary research question was: "How does IBL influence EFL students' awareness of local sociocultural issues?" To address this, we established two specific research objectives: (a) To analyze students' positionality regarding local sociocultural issues before and after IBL, and (b) to describe students' actions and purposeful efforts to ameliorate social issues in their local context.

This study challenges the prevalent trend of capitalist influences in the education system (Remolina-Caviedes, 2019) by approaching ELT as a means of dignifying students' lives rather than serving global (glocal) interests. It also counters the portrayal of teachers as mere administrators of external agendas promoted internally by educational authorities (Correa et al., 2014; Guerrero-Nieto, 2010; Ortiz et al., 2019). Lastly, this paper contributes to filling the existing literature gap in rural areas and sheds light on how IBL can empower students in spite of their realities.

In the following sections, we present a literature review of IBL, followed by the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the study supporting three emergent research categories (see Figure 3). Finally, we invite teachers and students to emancipate themselves by appropriating ELT in ways that are significant beyond the classroom walls.

Literature Review

This literature review presents insights regarding IBL approaches to ELT. We considered three main keywords, IBL, EFL, and ELT, to filter primary open-access research studies published in the last decade and conducted in rural areas (see Appendix A). This inclusion criterion responds to our locus of enunciation (Grosfoguel, 2011) since our study took place at a rural public high school. In general, IBL appears as a flexible method aligned with critical and social pedagogy.

To begin with, Capitelli et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative case study with an elementary school teacher in a semi-rural setting in San Francisco, USA, using classroom videos, transcribed reflections, and researcher memos. The data yielded that the participant developed innovative, real-world-sensitive teaching practices. Likewise, Tong et al. (2014) found that minority English language learners (ELL) and non-ELL students in an ESL setting in Southeast Texas, USA, improved their reading skills through IBL. In Chinese literature, however, Jiang (2021) found that IBL as an EFL means was rather avoided among secondary schools, due to "existing test-based secondary school curriculum and resistance from teachers and students" (p. 15). Therefore, IBL may be significant in developing science and reading skills

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and reassuring students as equal individuals if educational stakeholders work together.

At a rural school in Colombia, Montoya (2020) conducted a qualitative study with fifth graders in Cajicá, Cundinamarca, focusing on social inequities through literacy about children's rights. Children learned that "violence was interwoven with corruption, labor exploitation, rape, and armed conflict" (Montoya, 2020, p. 115), raising their critical awareness of contextual issues. Similarly, Padilla et al. (2018) used IBL and ICTs at a rural school in Magdalena to connect students' interests with their contextual needs. Data from 40 elementary students were collected through observations and a closed-ended questionnaire. The study found that students improved their leadership, imagination, reflexivity, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills, aligning with the vision of education for social justice.

These studies show the power of critical pedagogies to engage in education for social justice. In sum, the literature review reveals the importance of IBL in developing critical and proactive individuals. It also underscores the necessity of conducting projects in rural areas to shed light on potential ways to promote education for social justice.

Theoretical Framework

We elaborate on three main constructs: the decolonial option, ELT in rural areas, and IBL from a transformative interpretive framework (Mertens et al., 2010), given that the main purpose of this study is to enhance students' local sociocultural awareness to promote a social transformation.

The Decolonial Option

Although coloniality encompasses a triad of power, being, and knowledge (Castañeda-Peña & Méndez-Rivera, 2022), we focus on the latter to highlight the nuanced ways coloniality manifests in the learning experiences of students

in rural areas. Colonial legacies on education have led to the prevalence of Eurocentric perspectives through methodological orthodoxy (Kumaravadivelu, 2016), shaping students' perceptions of their identities and value systems in ways that undermine their immediate realities and heritage. In conflict-affected rural areas, limited access to quality education and teacher training deepens inequalities tied to colonial legacies, perpetuating power imbalances. Likewise, the disregard for rural communities, the exclusion of indigenous languages from the curriculum, and the lack of resources further exacerbate the marginalization of these students and their lived experiences. Although some of these issues may not arise directly from colonialism, they are deeply rooted in historical and systemic structures shaped by colonial legacies.

Additionally, the decolonial challenges perpetuated hierarchies, power imbalances, and epistemic injustices within education (Carvajal Medina et al., 2022; Castañeda-Peña, 2018). Thus, decolonial pedagogies emerged from the need for justice (Escobar Gómez, 2019), rejecting the narratives that position the colonized as inferior (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) and establishing alternative narratives and approaches that acknowledge the singularities and experiences of the oppressed and overlooked communities (Fandiño-Parra, 2021).

Colombia grapples with the enduring impact of historical colonialism. The imposition of English as the official foreign target language has marginalized local knowledge, languages, and cultural contexts (Meighan, 2023). This situation becomes problematic and paradoxical because favoring English over other local languages results in a linguistic hierarchy, which can be evidenced in Colombia since its bilingual policies are a "mechanism installed in the country as part of the power matrix of the modern/colonial world" (Castañeda-Peña, 2018, p. 27). Unfortunately, Colombian policymaking complies with Eurocentric and oppressive colonial approaches (Henao Mejía,

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2020), hindering the inclusion of diverse local voices and perspectives.

Therefore, ELT should be approached with sensitivity to linguistic diversity and cultural nuances, ensuring that it does not undermine or overshadow local languages and knowledges (Álvarez Valencia & Valencia, 2023). Furthermore, decoloniality in EFL should emphasize English as a tool for communication with knowledges from other regions, strengthening situated local knowledge (Ortiz-Medina et al., 2022). In sum, by embracing decolonial perspectives, EFL educators can transform English into a vehicle for empowerment, inclusivity, and social justice, consequently contributing to the broader decolonization of education in Colombia and the visibility of local knowledge and singularities.

ELT in Rural Areas

In Colombia, national education authorities have promoted English language learning as a means to promote social mobility and competitiveness (Cruz-Arcila, 2017, 2018a; Gómez, 2018), which has been questioned by several authors who argue that the underlying motive is socioeconomic and political (Correa & Usma, 2013; Cruz-Arcila, 2020; Gómez, 2018; Hoyos-Pipicano, 2024; Roldan & Pelaez, 2017). Over the last 20 years, the Ministerio de Educación Nacional in Colombia, MEN, has implemented various bilingual policies (Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero, 2021), often driven by external institutions' influence, such as the British Council (Correa & Usma, 2013), the World Bank (Remolina-Caviedes, 2019), the Council of Europe (Gómez, 2018), or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (oecd) (Cruz-Arcila, 2018a).

This external interference leads to the disconnection between the so-called bilingual policies and the realities within educational communities (Acero et al., 2021; Bonilla-Medina & Cruz-Arcila, 2014; Bonilla-Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016; Pelaez & Usma, 2017; Roldan & Pelaez,

2017). In rural education, educator isolation, cultural adaptation, misconceptions about rural families, motivation issues, inadequate infrastructure, and exposure to violence (Ramos-Holguín & Aguirre, 2016) have been overlooked by these bilingual policies.

Therefore, it makes sense that ELT in rural areas deviates from the urban-centered guidelines established by the MEN. As highlighted before, sociocultural issues should be inherent and instrumental in teaching English and decolonizing education (Bonilla-Medina & Cruz-Arcila, 2014; Cruz-Arcila, 2020; Fandiño-Parra, 2021; Ramos-Holguín & Aguirre, 2016). Thus, it is paramount to embrace local pedagogies and rethink the English language role (Fandiño-Parra, 2021; Granados-Beltrán, 2018; Guerrero-Nieto, 2018; Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero, 2021; Núñez-Pardo, 2020). In alignment with this, teaching approaches such as IBL offer opportunities for significant ELT practices in rural areas.

Inquiry-Based Learning

The literature suggests several benefits of IBL implementation. These include independence, criticality, innovation, and autonomy (Huber, 2009; Jiang, 2021; Mieg, 2019; Pedaste et al., 2015; Wiemer, 2019), making learning a constructive process and an active processing of content that is self-regulated, cooperative, and situational (Wulf, 2019). In this line, teachers become facilitators, advisors, or co-researchers (Jiang, 2021; Mieg, 2019; Wiemer, 2019). Thus, IBL serves research and learning purposes (Mieg, 2019).

Healey and Jenkins (2009) explain that research-oriented IBL is interested in reaching a final stage, whereas learning-oriented IBL is interested in making the most of every step. Given the belief that "learning occurs when we perceive something as a problem and look for a solution" (Mieg, 2019, p. 11), our approach aligns best with the latter. Therefore, we draw on Wiemer's (2019) stance that IBL teaching practices should promote

open and independent environments for learning. Additionally, Pedaste et al.'s (2015) framework provides theoretical foundations for the cycle developed, identifying five stages: orientation, conceptualization, investigation, conclusion, and discussion, that are not necessarily sequential.

Method

Given that the present study delved into a group of students' positionality on local sociocultural issues before and after the implementation of IBL, a qualitative approach was selected to elicit subjective understandings and interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A case study methodology was particularly appropriate, as it allows sufficient time to explore real-life, contemporary bounded systems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), focusing here on the students' emic perspectives and ethical actions in relation to local sociocultural issues. Furthermore, this type of single-case study design enables the researcher to realize a deeper investigation into social networks and the intricate nature of social interactions and their context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Finally, this model provides a framework for analyzing how patterns in people's everyday lives develop within certain aspects of time.

Context and Population

The present research study took place at a public school located in the municipality of Colombia, Huila. The school's population consisted of students from rural areas whose families' main source of income was agricultural activities. Students from sixth to eleventh grade participated in the study; however, a particular and significant sample was deliberately selected (Patton, 2011). The inclusion criteria included critical completion of two questionnaires and active participation in group interviews. Overall, sixteen female and six male students whose ages ranged from 11 to 17 years old composed the sample. They were from different grade levels and came from nine villages (see Table 1). Finally, one of the researchers was a teacher and observer; thus, he implemented the

Table 1 Participants' Overview

Code	Age	Gender	Grade	Place of residence
S01	14	F	9	Santa Ana
S02	14	F	9	Santa Ana
S03	14	F	9	San Emilio
S04	14	M	9	Santa Ana
S05	17	M	10	San Marcos
S06	17	F	10	La Granja
S07	16	F	10	San Emilio
S08	15	M	9	San Rafael
S09	16	F	10	San Emilio
S10	16	M	10	Santa Ana
S11	17	F	10	San Marcos
S12	12	M	6	San Rafael
S13	11	F	6	Santa Ana
S14	12	F	7	Santa Ana
S15	14	M	8	San Marcos
S16	15	F	9	Santa Elena
S17	15	F	9	La Florida
S18	14	F	8	San Marcos
S19	14	F	8	San Emilio
S20	16	F	9	La Unión
S21	13	F	8	San Rafael
S22	15	F	9	Santa Ana

pedagogical intervention and collected data. The other researcher was an indirect observer who co-designed the research project and pedagogical intervention. Both researchers analyzed the collected data and edited this paper.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection involved two questionnaires and five group interviews administered over the course of eight months, assessing students' positionality pre and post IBL. Strict ethical norms were followed, with consent forms in Spanish explaining the study's objective, method, and participants' rights.

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The questionnaires, which consisted of open- and closed-ended items, gathered demographic data reflecting students' knowledge and experiences (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009) regarding the IBL project. The first questionnaire which inquired about students' ideas about environmental, interpersonal, and socioeconomic issues was implemented before the pedagogical intervention. The second questionnaire used open-ended questions to capture students' perceptions of local issues without predefined categories and was conducted at the end of the IBL project.

Finally, the five group interviews, each lasting 45-60 minutes and conducted in Spanish, delved into themes from the questionnaires. The researchers ensured a mix of students from different grades in each interview to facilitate idea exchange and the didactic nature of this instrument (Gibbs, 2012).

Pedagogical Intervention

This pedagogical intervention, structured into five phases (Pedaste et al., 2015), began with the orientation phase, in which students observed and explored their immediate contexts to identify the main issues. The first questionnaire then prompted them to list and describe the most salient problems per axis (environmental, interpersonal, and socioeconomic). In the next stage, the conceptualization phase, students visited the municipality's landfill, watched a movie depicting the consequences of substance abuse, and discussed the major sociocultural issues affecting the municipality with members of the community. These activities were tailored to the students' grade level and intended to broaden their perspectives and help them formulate thought-provoking questions. During the third phase, hands-on investigation, students delved into the selected issues, seeking diverse community perspectives and proposing solutions. Collaborative discussions led to the development of various activities, such as cleanup days (see Figure 1), designing posters (see Figure 2), handing out brochures, and writing letters to companies requesting improvement of some services.

Figure 1 Students Participating in a School Cleanup Day

Figure 2 Students' Depiction of Road-Related Problems and Potential Solutions
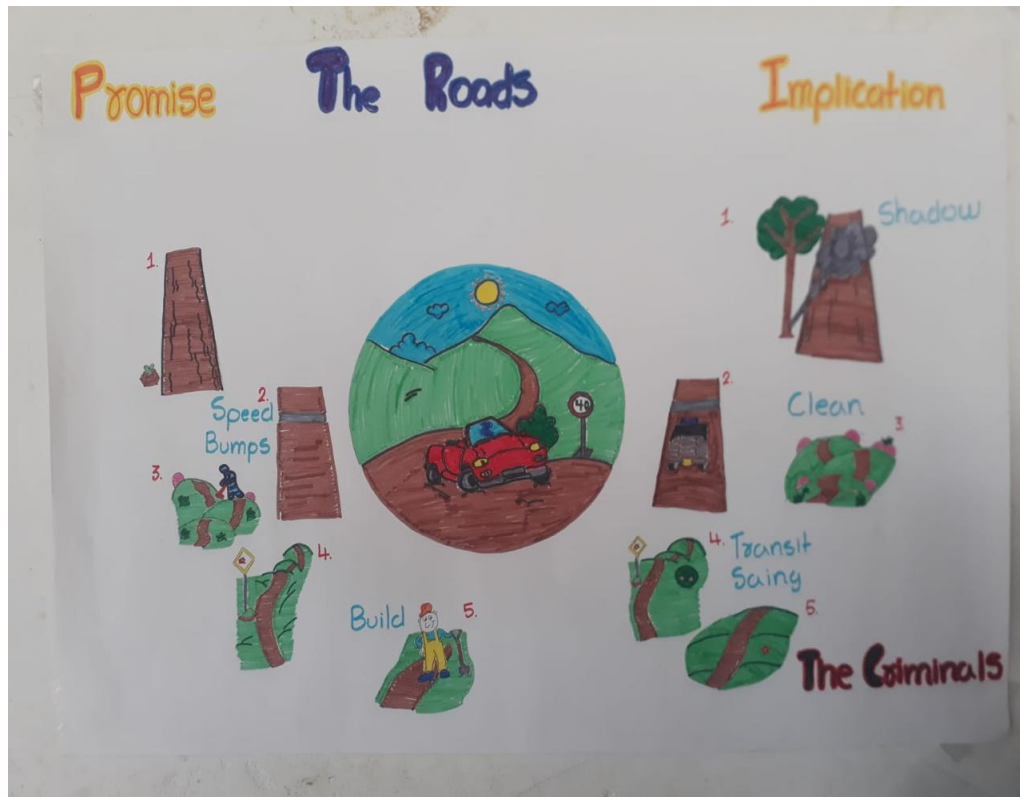
Finally, to complete the conclusion and discussion phases, the participants showed their projects to the rest of the educational community on English Day. Subsequently, the last questionnaire was administered, and the group interviews were conducted.
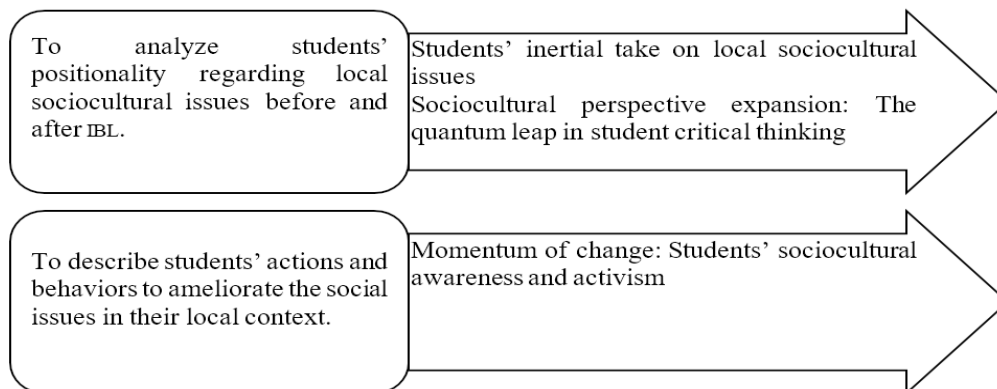
Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to systematically identify and organize patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2012), given the rich and diverse nature of the qualitative data gathered. The computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti, facilitated the systematic coding process, enabling researchers to segment the data by assigning codes to students' responses from the questionnaires and focus groups. These codes were then organized into seven emerging themes, including inactive critique of local systems, self-critique, expanded critique scope, among others. Finally, these themes were thoughtfully grouped into three overarching categories, revealing the intricate connections and patterns within the dataset. The following section comprehensively explores these themes and categories, shedding light on the substantive findings derived from the qualitative data.

Findings

This section presents the findings regarding the influence of IBL on EFL students' awareness of local sociocultural issues. All data, collected in the students' native language, were translated by the authors. We also recurred to physics metaphors (see Figure 3), given the connection between science and IBL (Jiang, 2021) and students' motion from passive to active engagement with local issues.

Figure 3 Research Objectives & Categories

| To analyze students' positionality regarding local sociocultural issues before and after IBL. | Students' inertial take on local sociocultural issues. Sociocultural perspective expansion: The quantum leap in student critical thinking |
| To describe students' actions and behaviors to ameliorate the social issues in their local context. | Momentum of change: Students' sociocultural awareness and activism |

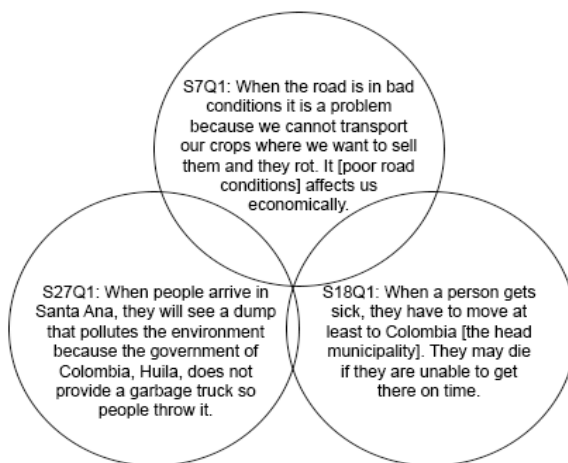### Students' Inertial Take on Local Sociocultural Issues

The relationship between science and IBL can be observed metaphorically through the release of energy when a static object begins to move. Newton's first law of motion posits that "an object at rest remains at rest, and an object in motion remains in motion at a constant speed and in a straight line unless acted on by an unbalanced force" (NASA, 2023, Review Newton's Laws of Motion). Therefore, we leveraged this principle to illustrate the "autopilot" positionality of students prior to engaging in IBL projects. Students'

initial state of inertia was evident in their criticisms of road, health, and environmental systems, which were predominantly addressed from an external perspective, as evident in Figure 4.

Figure 4 shows excerpts related to global governance challenges, biodiversity loss, and global health disparities. The issue of road conditions was placed at the top because students associated it with most of the communities' challenges. For instance, the limited access to medical facilities prompts concerns about potential health risks, as expressed by S18. Additionally, S27 addressed an environmental issue related to a garbage dump

Figure 4 Students' Positionality Regarding Sociocultural Issues Before IBL

S7Q1: When the road is in bad conditions it is a problem because we cannot transport our crops where we want to sell them and they rot. It [poor road conditions] affects us economically.

S27Q1: When people arrive in Santa Ana, they will see a dump that pollutes the environment because the government of Colombia, Huila, does not provide a garbage truck so people throw it.

S18Q1: When a person gets sick, they have to move at least to Colombia [the head municipality]. They may die if they are unable to get there on time.

at the town's entrance, attributing the issue to a lack of support from regional administrators. These issues reflect a glocal dynamic where local challenges are shaped by the broader interplay of national policies and international agendas. While these issues were frequently discussed, students also touched on topics such as alcohol consumption, family disputes, and a lack of communal participation.

> Burning trees is a problem because it contaminates the air and soil. Likewise, when somebody dies, their children fight for the goods inherited. This is a problem because they do not share equally, and some individuals take advantage. Another problem is when an event to collect funds for the community is being held, and people argue because not everybody wants to help. (S09Q1)

Nevertheless, despite showcasing a certain level of local sociocultural awareness, students' reflections appear inertial. First, they adopted an outer perspective by making other individuals responsible for the issues mentioned. To exemplify, they explained how other people are disunited or throw garbage at the town's entrance. It is only when economic issues are involved that one of the students uses first-person pronouns (we, us). Second, while they criticized the lack of government intervention, they offered few solutions. This reluctance to actively address local issues suggests a state of inertia. However, the implementation of IBL positively encouraged a deeper, introspective examination of their community dynamics, as highlighted in the second category.

Sociocultural Perspective Expansion: The Quantum Leap in Student Critical Thinking

This category focuses on students' reflections on a plethora of situations closely related to their daily lives. Hence, there was an expansion of students' local sociocultural perspective, and their positionality post IBL reflected a self-conscious and critical tendency. This transformative shift is likened to a quantum leap, understood as "the set of ideas developed to better explain and describe processes" (O'Brien, 2016, p. 619). Figure 5

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Figure 5 Sociocultural Issues Addressed After IBL

illustrates some of the new issues tackled by students within this category.

Apart from the road, health, and environmental issues mentioned before ibl, students reflected upon complex humanistic issues such as violence against women, child abuse, and drug abuse after the ibl project.

> Men are very chauvinist; according to them, "women ought to be at home" and can only do house chores. Women find it difficult to participate in activities simply for being women. (S09Q2)

> Many children are exploited in jobs, and because of these jobs, some children do not study or make many mistakes. They do not grow to be good people. (S05Q2)

> Bad habits [drugs] are problematic because many people hurt themselves even though they do it because they feel sad or want to forget about their problems. One never knows for sure why they do it. (S09Q2)

The first student criticized men's chauvinistic ideas and challenged gender roles that encapsulate women as housewives. The second student addressed child labor and its potential repercussions such as dropping out of school and moral decline. The third student referred to child abuse and analyzed possible root causes for drug abuse. These testimonies reveal not only an expansion of sociocultural awareness but also a demonstration of critical thinking, challenging patriarchal discourses, foreseeing consequences, and analyzing underlying causes.

The broadened worldview also extended to socioeconomic issues beyond road conditions. Thus, students mention situations related to thefts, insecurity, lack of communication, and lack of solidarity.

> Thefts, contamination, poor road conditions, insecurity and bad communication. These problems have been endured throughout the years but have never been listened to, even though we have done marches and strikes. The worst of the situation is that city people suffer because they want us to transport the food we harvest, but they never help us. (S14Q2)

Thefts are problematic because they lead to misunderstandings that in turn, may lead to deaths or arguments in the community. (S09Q2)

Like the extended humanistic issues mentioned, students acknowledged new socioeconomic challenges from a personal perspective, with one student discussing marches and strikes as if she had participated. This student also highlighted the lack of mutual understanding between rural and urban residents despite their interdependence. Another student examined the potential sociocultural impacts of theft on community cohesion, beyond just the economic loss.

Finally, students drew on their ibl projects to address one common issue experienced at school: bets. This demonstrates awareness of local sociocultural issues, considering the school is often regarded as their second home. In this line, one of the students commented that "bets become a problem because there are people who do not like losing and because of this [losing], they argue, fight and end up hurt." (S05Q2). Evidently, the student prioritized individuals' well-being, departing from the global concerns mentioned before ibl.

Among the sociocultural issues discussed, students took the most responsibility for the littering issue, as evidenced in this excerpt from one of the group interviews:

> At school, if one has a piece of litter, one keeps it and throws it where it belongs, but when it comes to the garbage dump, one also throws garbage there [the garbage dump at the town's entrance]. (S09)

> To say that one does not litter is a lie but one tries not to do it. (S13)

> I am an accessory [to the litter issue] because one goes to an event and sees people throwing garbage, breaking bottles, and one does not say anything. (S14)

> We do not have a health center even though we should have one. We are in a faraway area and do not do anything to change that. We are sinvergüenzas [shameless]. (S11)

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Clearly, the first three students expressed self-criticism for their lack of proactivity concerning the garbage dump, with one using the term "sinvergüenza" to describe their irresponsibility regarding road maintenance. Thus, the students' reflections showed a quantum leap, considering they embraced their co-responsibilities from a humanistic perspective. Finally, students engaged in significant actions to address the issues they deemed most important, as we now explain.

Momentum of Change: Students' Sociocultural Awareness and Activism

The last metaphor underscores the impetus acquired by students during the development of their IBL projects. This momentum of change refers to the force or energy (willingness) that students developed to better their community. It also alludes to the pivotal role of students' sociocultural awareness and activism in their endeavors to ameliorate local sociocultural issues impacting their community.

As noted in the preceding category, students exhibited an increased awareness of the myriad sociocultural issues prevalent within their community. This heightened awareness rendered them more critical and motivated to modify their everyday behaviors and raise awareness. In doing so, students actively resisted and sought emancipation from the influence of glocal political and economic agendas, contributing meaningfully to positive transformations within their community. Through their engagement in IBL projects, students embarked on a journey of constructing and reconstructing their own outlooks, as well as those of others, with respect to their community and the issues affecting it. Consequently, this led to a surge in student-driven initiatives within the school. The following excerpt illustrates a student's intention to continue taking action to improve her community. It also reveals a newfound sense of appreciation for her town, a sentiment that had not been articulated before the implementation of the IBL projects.

> I am going to avoid littering and polluting the water. At school, I will be running a campaign about pollution, letting people know that we need to take care of our town and its landscapes, which are the most beautiful. (S35Q2)

The students' heightened awareness of local sociocultural issues ignited change both inside and outside of school. Clean-up days, designing and distributing brochures, submission of formal service improvement requests, designing posters, community outreach, upcycling and recycling initiatives were some of the strategies that students developed in order to ameliorate the sociocultural issues that affected their community. These multifaceted strategies reflected both students' better understanding of local issues and their commitment to mitigating the difficulties afflicting their community. Thereby, IBL enabled students to become agents of change, proactively taking action to address and resolve issues within their local community.

Interestingly, after the implementation of the IBL projects, there was a noteworthy increase in student commitment to maintaining the cleanliness of their school environment and serving as role models for their peers, as evidenced during the group interview: "For example, I hardly throw away paper wrappings anymore. I have a handful of trash here" (S14), and "when we set an example [on how to behave] or when we see someone who threw something away and we tell them 'Hey, pick it up, please'" (S9). These excerpts reveal a salient theme related to students' adaptability and concern for the school environment, which had been a recurring topic among students prior to the implementation of the project.

Interestingly, in some cases, students' willingness to address sociocultural issues was often influenced by external factors, such as threats to their well-being and familial or economic sanctions. Specifically, aggressive physical confrontations, either in or outside of school, made students hesitant about intervening due to the risk of being

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physically harmed. This was evident in their responses, which reflected their concerns about personal safety:

> Faced with physical aggression, one becomes complicit because one is watching and does not say anything. (S11)

> But the thing is, by getting involved, they might also end up punching you. So, it depends on the person. Sometimes, one steps in and says, "Come on, don't fight," and tries to separate them, but there are some [students] who are very aggressive, so one does not get involved there. (S09)

The second group includes familial and economic factors. Some students struggled to persuade their parents to alter routines, since economic incentives often overshadow environmental concerns in community practices, as evidenced here:

> S09: The thing is, one sees it [environmental issues], but one does not say, "I am going to analyze the situation, I am going to try to help solve this."

> S10: Exactly.

> Interviewer: And why not?

> S09: Because often, adults do not pay attention to us.

> S10: Sometimes people prefer money. They prefer to cut down trees, destroy mountains, and dry up the rivers for the sake of money.

The students demonstrated a newfound drive fueled by their desire to improve their community. This drive was closely intertwined with their heightened sociocultural awareness, which made them more discerning and motivated to effect positive change. As students engaged in the construction and reconstruction of their perspectives, activism surged within the school community. Their gradually visible commitment to environmental and social issues and their willingness to serve as role models, marked a notable departure from the pre-project inertial position.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that some students faced external factors, such as lack of support at home or school, economic constraints, and peer pressure, among others, which influenced their willingness to confront sociocultural issues. These findings provide valuable insights into the dynamics of student engagement and the role of external pressures in shaping their responses. The ensuing discussion and conclusion will delve further into the implications of these results, offering a comprehensive understanding of the significance of IBL in the EFL classroom.

Discussion

The results obtained in this study showcase a significant enhancement in students' sociocultural awareness and activism, indicating a shift from a global outlook to a more introspective examination of their sociocultural practices. This shift is consistent with Rincon and Clavijo-Olarte's (2016) findings on heightened social awareness among secondary students in Bogotá. These findings suggest that as long as teaching approaches draw on contextual conditions, they are likely to engage students and impact their lives positively (Cruz-Arcila, 2020; Prada et al., 2021). Hence, this study further underscores the significance of tailoring teaching methods to contextual conditions to lead to meaningful changes in students' awareness and engagement with sociocultural issues.

Furthermore, students' newfound perspective aligns with the principles of civic education (communication and collaboration, critical thinking skills), challenging the notion of education solely for marketable purposes and emphasizing the development of values (Romero & Perez, 2021). Also, this introspective perspective brought a sense of co-responsibility in local sociocultural issues, reinforcing the significance of IBL in empowering students with social rights and duties (Mendieta, 2009; Ortega, 2020; Vaca & Gómez, 2017). Therefore, by integrating IBL and emphasizing social responsibility, ELT education can be crucial in nurturing well-rounded individuals who actively contribute to their communities and society.

This study also reveals differences in the educational pathways taken in urban and rural contexts. While several studies reviewed here prioritized ELT endeavors (Chang et al., 2016; Derseh, 2020; Ghaemi & Mirsaeed, 2017; Zakiyuddin et al., 2022), we prioritized students' sociocultural needs, challenging dehumanization in education (Cruz-Arcila, 2020). Integrating local cultural references, stories, and traditions into the curriculum, addressing socioeconomic challenges through resource allocation, implementing socially sensitive teaching approaches, and promoting inclusivity and relevance, can disrupt traditional practices and address the existing disparities in educational approaches and outcomes between urban and rural areas while creating supportive learning environments tailored to the individual needs of rural students.

Moreover, the findings presented here reveal students as proactive agents of change. In this case, they critically analyzed glocal issues and dynamics such as violence against women, child abuse, drug abuse, lack of communication, thefts and bets. Hence, this study yields similar results to those found in Montoya (2020), whose primary student participants developed criticality about children's rights and threats to which they are often exposed. Like Montoya's (2020) participants, the IBL project inspired appropriation and understanding of local sociocultural issues. Therefore, we converge with Padilla et al.'s (2018) idea that inquiry enhanced research aptitudes.

However, we do not intend to romanticize the State abandonment denounced by learners here. We can find evidence from students' voices of the harsh conditions of poverty, low quality of life and lack of opportunities mentioned by Acero et al. (2021), Cruz-Arcila (2017), and Ramos-Holguín and Aguirre (2016). Likewise, the students' claims reaffirm the fallacy of English language learning as a promoter of social change and competitiveness (Cruz-Arcila, 2017, 2018a; Gómez, 2018), given that learning English does not represent significant opportunities for students to address the complex sociocultural issues aforementioned. Hence, we must emphasize the need for alternative approaches to teaching English in peripheral contexts, focusing on methods that align with students' sociocultural realities and address their specific needs, rather than adhering to a global (glocal) agenda that may overlook these factors (Bonilla-Medina & Cruz-Arcila, 2014; Cruz-Arcila, 2018b; Peláez & Usma, 2017; Ramos-Holguín & Aguirre, 2016; Roldán & Peláez, 2017).

To summarize, the results of this IBL project highlight the limitations of English language learning as a tool for promoting social change in peripheral contexts. This underscores the broader need for educational policies and practices that are not only contextually relevant and responsive to students' diverse needs but also aligned with the specific sociocultural realities they face. Such an approach would ensure equitable access to quality education and opportunities while addressing the systemic challenges these learners encounter.

Conclusions

In this paper, we explored the influence of IBL on EFL students' awareness of local sociocultural issues considering their positionality before and after the pedagogical intervention as well as actions and behaviors to ameliorate such issues in their context. The study revealed that IBL was pivotal in shifting students' positionality, leading them to acknowledge their co-responsibility in sociocultural issues previously attributed to others. Furthermore, there was an expansion regarding the sociocultural practices perceived as issues. Finally, the students actively participated in various initiatives, such as cleanup days, brochure design and distribution, signal service requests, community outreach, and upcycling and recycling projects, demonstrating their commitment to enhancing the community's dynamics. Overall, this study emphasizes the transformative power of IBL.

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The previous ideas reveal rural ELT's interconnection and interdependence with sociocultural variables. Hence, this study reaffirms the importance of localized pedagogies that acknowledge students as subjects rather than objects of their learning process (Montoya, 2020; Padilla et al., 2018; Prada et al., 2022; Rincón & Clavijo-Olarte, 2016). In this line, embracing ELT as a complex system interconnected with global and local systems, including political and economic aspects, becomes crucial in localizing pedagogies (García-Chamorro & Rosado-Mendinueta, 2021). Thus, we urge stakeholders to reimagine teaching and learning holistically and humanely. As we have shown, opening spaces for students to reflect critically upon their realities may lead to worldview expansion and social activism.

This report provides novel insights into ELT for three main reasons: it enhances the limited literature on rural ELT, integrates IBL with ELT in southern Colombia for the first time, and explores IBL's potential beyond science classes and language skills. Hence, we offer the following pedagogical implications:

a. students ought to be recognized as active agents in their learning process; after all, they are *educandos*: protagonists of their learning.

b. teachers and students ought to emancipate themselves from the global and national agendas that promote English proficiency as the ultimate goal in the EFL classroom. Instead, we argue that English is a means to achieve social justice.

c. educational stakeholders and educators need to understand ELT as a complex system, emphasizing its interconnectedness with global and local systems, including political and economic dimensions.

Therefore, reevaluating ELT methodologies to make them contextually relevant and socially conscious is essential. Future research should delve into alternative pedagogical approaches that combine language learning with critical reflection and activism within local contexts and explore the long-term impacts of IBL on students' civic engagement and social responsibility.

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Appendix A List of Avenues Consulted

Source	Author	Title	Result
Digital Databases			
ERIC	Bouqetyn (2021)	Project work in Moroccan EFL classroom: between the official guidelines' recommendation and the challenges of implementation	1
Scopus	Cappitelli et al. (2016)	Understanding the development of a hybrid practice of inquiry-based science instruction and language development: A case study of one teacher's journey through reflections on classroom practice	2
	Tong et al. (2014)	A randomized study of a literacy-integrated Science intervention for low-socio-economic status middle school students: Findings from first-year implementation	
Science Direct	Chang et al. (2016)	Motivational strategies in a mobile inquiry-based language learning setting	1
JSTOR			0
The World Wide Web			
Google Scholar	Derseh (2020)	Enhancing EFL students' writing performance through inquiry based learning	3
	Jiang (2021)	Challenges of Implementing Inquiry-based learning in Chinese secondary school EFL classrooms: A review of teachers' and students' perceptions	
	Zakiyuddin et al. (2022)	The effect of using computer-assisted reading with inquiry-based learning on student reading comprehension	
Journal Websites			
Análisis Revista Colombiana de Humanidades			0
Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal			4
Cuadernos de Lingüística Hispánica			0
Cultura, Educación y Sociedad			1
Educación y Educadores			0
Educación y Humanismo			0
ELT Journal			1
Folios			0
GIST — Education and Learning Research			0
HOW Journal			0
Ìkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura			2
Magis, Revista Internacional de Investigación en Educación			0
Pedagogía y Saberes			0
Praxis & Saber			0

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List of Avenues Consulted (continued)

Journal Websites	
Profile: Issues in Teachers Professional Development	2
Revista Colombiana de Educación	0
Revista Interamericana de Investigación, Educación y Pedagogía	0
Signo y Pensamiento	0
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