



**CRITICAL LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT: A PEDAGOGICAL
MEDIATION TO ENHANCE BILINGUALISM IN A VIRTUAL LEARNING
ENVIRONMENT**

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Abstract

This action research explored the implementation of critical language pedagogy to enhance bilingualism among Colombian Army learners in a virtual setting. Data were collected through virtual classroom observations and analysis of artifacts. The findings revealed the interrelation of three emerging categories: social justice values, critical thinking awareness in the Language Learning Environment (LLE), and engagement in a Virtual Language Learning Setting, which reflected the iterative nature of the action research cycle. The categories that emerged from the narrative frame revealed the complexity of implementing critical language pedagogy and assessment in a virtual learning environment. The pedagogical intervention fostered reflective and critical thinking skills among learners, positively influencing their identity development in the virtual environment.

Additionally, the researchers found how valuable it was to know these types of pedagogical experiences that gave learners a voice in virtual learning environments and offered a different perspective on educational practices and their challenges in the 21st century. These findings highlighted the importance of integrating critical pedagogy in virtual environments to foster bilingualism, critical thinking, and learner identity, addressing contemporary educational challenges.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Virtual learning environments (VLE), Critical language pedagogy (CLP), Critical thinking, Social justice in education, Action research

Resumen

Esta investigación acción exploró la implementación de la pedagogía crítica del lenguaje para mejorar el bilingüismo entre los aprendices del Ejército Colombiano en un entorno virtual. Los datos se recopilaban a través de observaciones en aulas virtuales y análisis de artefactos. Los resultados revelaron la interrelación de tres categorías emergentes: valores de justicia social, conciencia de pensamiento crítico en el Entorno de Aprendizaje de Lenguas (EAL) y compromiso en un Entorno de Aprendizaje de Lenguas Virtual, que reflejaron la naturaleza iterativa del ciclo de investigación acción. Las categorías que surgieron del marco narrativo revelaron la complejidad de implementar la pedagogía crítica del lenguaje y la evaluación en un entorno de aprendizaje virtual. La intervención pedagógica fomentó habilidades de pensamiento reflexivo y crítico entre los aprendices, influyendo positivamente en su desarrollo de identidad en el entorno virtual.

Además, los investigadores encontraron cuán valioso fue conocer estos tipos de experiencias pedagógicas que dieron voz a los aprendices en entornos de aprendizaje virtual y ofrecieron una perspectiva diferente sobre las prácticas educativas y sus desafíos en el siglo XXI. Estos hallazgos destacaron la importancia de integrar la pedagogía crítica en entornos virtuales para fomentar el bilingüismo, el pensamiento crítico y la identidad del aprendiz, abordando los desafíos educativos contemporáneos.

Palabras clave: Bilingüismo, Entornos de aprendizaje virtual (EAV), Pedagogía crítica del lenguaje (PCL), Pensamiento crítico, Justicia social en la educación, Investigación acción

Introduction

Research in the design of optimal learning environments emphasizes the importance of addressing students' needs, motivations, skills, knowledge, and modes of participation to achieve educational goals (Rodríguez, 2021). However, traditional language learning environments often reveal significant gaps, particularly in fostering active student engagement. In many cases, students act as passive recipients of knowledge, responding mechanically to exercises without integrating their personal context or background into the learning process. This lack of integration can limit opportunities for deeper interaction and self-reflection, as students may not see the relevance of course topics to their own lives and experiences.

In the context of language learning, Brown (2000) emphasized that educators must provide emergent bilinguals with opportunities to actively engage with their own learning journey. Yet, when language learning is confined to an artificial classroom setting, it lacks the dynamic interactions found in natural communication environments. This issue has become particularly pronounced in virtual education due to the abrupt shift during the COVID-19 pandemic, which left many institutions with insufficient time to adapt their programs to online learning requirements (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MINEDUCACIÓN], 2022).

As a result, learners often focus exclusively on course content, neglecting the personal, social, and cultural dimensions crucial for meaningful learning. This study argues that Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) can address these gaps by encouraging students to reflect on their own contexts, engage with others, and recognize themselves in the learning process. Such an approach fosters social presence in virtual environments and promotes social justice by acknowledging the diversity of students, thus transforming the learning space into a more inclusive and meaningful environment (Lynch, 2001). By integrating CLP with assessment

practices, educators can facilitate authentic, interactive communication experiences that are better aligned with the realities of students' personal and professional backgrounds.

The research context of this thesis is the implementation of CLP and assessment practices in a virtual learning environment for a group of learners belonging to the Colombian Army. The focus is on understanding how CLP can enhance bilingualism and create a more engaging and inclusive learning experience. The research question guiding this thesis is: What are the results of implementing Critical Language Pedagogy and Assessment (CLPA) to enhance bilingualism in a group of learners belonging to the Colombian Army?

Literature review

1.1 Critical language pedagogy

In the field of bilingual education, disruptive methodologies that place emergent bilinguals at the center of educational aims have gained recognition within the last decades (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Holbah & Sharma, 2021). While focusing on the understanding of social concerns, identity construction, and fostering critical thinking, Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) has been defined by scholars such as Crookes and Ziegler (2021) as an "alternative approach" to language learning. This approach represents a significant shift from traditional focuses on language accuracy, improvement, or forms to an emphasis on understanding the "universe of the educatee" (Crookes, 2021, p. 5). The promotion of a decolonizing discourse, social change, and the development of critical thinking are central elements for bilingual practices. Several studies have outlined a series of strategies to approach CLP, such as "dialogues, pair work, conversation circles" (Wallerstein, 1983, as cited in Crookes & Ziegler, 2021, p. 1). Nonetheless, research has emphasized that this pedagogy itself does not specify practical protocols on how to approach and support the L2 process (Wallerstein, 1983, as cited in Crookes & Ziegler, 2021). Further, more recent research suggests that CLP pedagogy requires the

integration of language learning methodologies to show advantages in learners' language advancement, despite its opposing perspectives (Parba & Crookes, 2019).

Piedad Ortega Valencia (2014) discusses the theoretical and practical foundations of critical pedagogy in Colombia, emphasizing its role in addressing deep inequalities and exclusions within the educational system. Ortega Valencia highlights that critical pedagogy in Colombia is not merely an educational approach but a field that promotes new pedagogical practices, theoretical reflection, political mobilization, and the dynamization of expressions and discourses of resistance. This approach aims to re-signify the modes of subject constitution in contexts marked by profound social disparities. Ortega Valencia's study underscores the importance of recognizing the multiple initiatives that have made critical pedagogy possible in Colombia. The author identifies key theoretical traditions influencing critical pedagogy in the country, including the Latin American tradition represented by Paulo Freire, the Anglo-Saxon tradition with Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux, and the Spanish tradition with authors like Joan Carles Mélich and Fernando Bárcena. Additionally, Colombian authors such as Marco Raúl Mejía, Alfredo Ghiso, and Alfonso Torres are noted for their contributions to education and critical pedagogy. CLP differs from traditional language learning methodologies in its selection of “themes” that reflect students’ realities. Its aims are derived from the context within which learners interact. Some researchers have labeled it as the “situational method” (Wallerstein, 1983). CLP promotes values of social justice, such as “diversity, inquiry, cooperation, and respect” (Edge, 1996, as cited in Crookes, 2021, p. 250). Additionally, Edge (2013) emphasizes values like commitment, equity, caring, and dialogue, while other studies have revealed that CLP fosters values related to the environment and peace (Curtis & Romney, 2006). Crookes (2013) summarized these values as promoting “more democracy” (p. 251). These arguments, along with the fact that CLP “fosters the freedom and ability to act of students” (Crookes, 2022, p. 3) and

empowers students' right to and power in decision-making (Crookes, 2022, p. 4), form the theoretical foundations for the current research proposal.

Hans Oviedo-Gómez (2024) examines the relationship between critical interculturality and textbooks for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Colombia. The study analyzes 94 documents, including articles, dissertations, and book chapters, to understand how different scholars have analyzed textbooks in their contexts. Oviedo-Gómez identifies seven tensions that reveal traditional ways of analyzing textbooks, the need for deeper critical intercultural views, biased cultural and intercultural representations, uncritical literacy practices, coloniality of being, bilingual policy hegemony, and controlled evaluation, selection, and use of EFL textbooks. The author argues that there is a need to consider critical interculturality as an attempt to decolonize traditional ways of teaching at different educational levels. The analysis suggests a research gap regarding critical interculturality and EFL textbooks, highlighting the importance of decolonizing educational materials to foster a more inclusive and critically aware learning environment.

Nidia Mabel Román Castro (2021) explores the application of critical pedagogy in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Colombia. The study aims to appropriate some tools of critical pedagogy to enrich the teaching and learning process of English. Román Castro emphasizes the importance of moving away from traditional, rigid structures in EFL that are often commanded by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and focuses on the four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) with a high grammatical content. The author's investigation is grounded in the Investigación Acción Educativa (IAE) method, which involves reflection, planning of alternative actions, and validation of their effectiveness. Román Castro's work highlights the use of authentic materials, such as newspaper articles, videos, blogs, and literature, to incentivize reflection and critical thinking among students. The

study concludes that incorporating critical pedagogy in EFL can lead to a more humanistic education, fostering critical thinking and a deeper understanding of social, political, and cultural realities.

The works of Ortega Valencia, Oviedo-Gómez, and Román Castro collectively underscore the significance of critical pedagogy in the Colombian educational context. They highlight the need for educational practices that address social inequalities, promote critical thinking, and foster a more inclusive and reflective learning environment. By appropriating tools from critical pedagogy, educators can enrich the teaching and learning process, making it more relevant and impactful for students in diverse contexts. Building upon these principles, this study aims to explore how CLP can be effectively implemented in a virtual learning environment to enhance bilingualism and critical thinking among Colombian Army learners. By focusing on themes that reflect the learners' realities and promoting values of social justice, this research seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge on CLP and its practical applications.

1.2 Critical language assessment

Assessment is a central component of the learning process and is intrinsically linked to the principles of CLP. It involves analyzing learners' skills and development in a subject area, such as language learning. This analysis informs decisions about various aspects of educational design, including content selection, learning principles, objectives, sequencing, and learning materials. Effective assessment in the context of CLP is an ongoing process that includes monitoring progress, providing feedback, and setting new learning goals. It should be a collaborative effort, involving not just educators, but the entire educational community (Giraldo, 2019).

This collaborative approach ensures that assessment practices are sequenced, coherent, and consistent, leading to reliable outcomes and supporting student learning. By integrating the

values and aims of CLP into assessment practices, educators can create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. This approach not only evaluates language proficiency but also considers the broader social and cultural contexts in which learners operate, thereby fostering a more holistic understanding of their development.

1.2.1 Considerations around assessment and bilingualism

It is crucial to recognize that bilingualism is not a monolithic entity, but rather a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing varying degrees of proficiency and dominance across languages (Peña et al., 2021). This project aligns with Ofelia García's comprehensive framework, which posits that bilinguals possess a complete and integrated linguistic system rather than two separate monolingual systems. García's work emphasizes the interconnected nature of a bilingual's languages and the dynamic interaction between them (García, 2009).

García, a prominent scholar in the field of bilingual education, has extensively discussed the importance of social justice and translanguaging in bilingual education. Her work in 2009 and 2014 emphasizes the need for a sociocritical position that acknowledges the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students. This approach not only promotes inclusivity but also ensures that assessment practices are fair and equitable, reflecting the true capabilities of bilingual learners. By adopting a decolonial pedagogical framework, educators can create a more just and inclusive learning environment that values the linguistic and cultural diversity of all students (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014).

Assessment practices should move beyond simply measuring proficiency in a standardized way and delve into understanding the individual's unique language profile. This includes considering factors such as language exposure, use, and experience, which significantly influence both proficiency and dominance (Peña et al., 2021). Employing both direct measures of language comprehension and production, as well as indirect measures like questionnaires, could

provide a more comprehensive picture of the individual's communicative competence across languages.

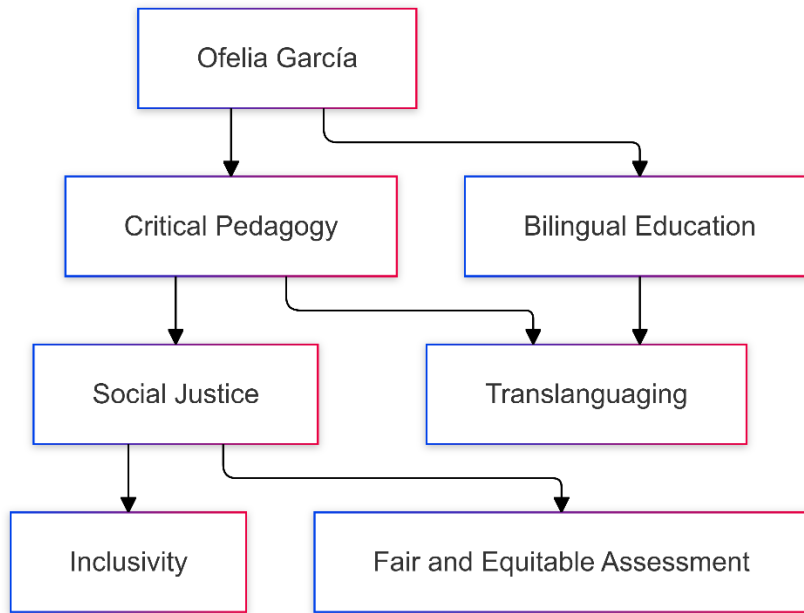
García and Wei (2014) propose a dynamic form of bilingualism where "the language practices of bilinguals [which are] complex and interrelated; . . . do not emerge in a linear way or function separately since there is only one linguistic system" (p. 14). This perspective challenges traditional views of bilingualism as the mastery of two separate languages and instead recognizes the fluid and integrated nature of bilingual practices. When selecting assessment measures, it is crucial to ensure they align with the intended purpose and accurately reflect both linguistic and cultural knowledge (Peña et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the interconnected nature of a bilingual's languages, recognizing that they form a complete linguistic system rather than two separate monolingual systems (Grosjean, 2024). This holistic view of bilingualism has significant implications for assessment. It suggests that evaluating proficiency in one language alone might not accurately reflect an individual's overall communicative competence. Instead, assessments should consider the bilingual's ability to utilize their full linguistic repertoire, including the ability to transfer skills and knowledge between languages. This might involve tasks that require the use of both languages or assessments that focus on the individual's ability to adapt their language use to different contexts and interlocutors.

Extensive research in this field has depicted a consecutive evolution on the issue (Cummins, 2008). Assessment in the foreign language, as argued by Turnbull (2017), has shifted from the traditional evaluation of language grammar accuracy to a much more intricate process of communicative competence by setting students in real-life-like scenarios where communication in the target language is required. More modern approaches to language assessment suggest that language is a social construct (García & Otheguy, 2020), hence assessment should be regarded as such. It must not only be restricted to criterion-referenced evaluations. A socio-critical

perspective, aligned with the decolonial pedagogical approach to bilingualism, would allow educators to implement performance-based assessment where students could work in groups, pairs, or individually depending on the kind of tasks. Assessment activities should often resemble real-life situations such as writing an email to a friend, working on a project and showing results, etc. It should allow the emergent bilingual to understand the context of such performance, the type of interaction, and agency. García et al. (2019) suggest that assessment instructions need to be suited to learners' needs. García's work on translanguaging emphasizes the importance of recognizing the fluid and dynamic nature of bilingual practices. She argues that translanguaging is not merely a pedagogical practice but a political act that challenges monoglossic hegemonies and promotes social justice (García, 2014). By embracing translanguaging, educators can create inclusive learning environments that validate the linguistic repertoires of all students.

García (2009) argues that bilingual education is the only way to educate children in the 21st century. She presents a comprehensive overview of bilingual education, discussing various models and frameworks, and advocating for a heteroglossic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of languages in bilingual individuals. García's work highlights the benefits of bilingualism, including cognitive and social advantages, and emphasizes the need for educational policies that support bilingual education.

Figure 1. Interrelationship between Ofelia Garcia's bilingualism and critical pedagogy



Note: Own elaboration (Considerations around Assessment and Bilingualism)

1.2.2 Assessment vs testing: A critical pedagogy perspective

The contrast is necessary to understand how assessment can be used to challenge power dynamics and promote social justice in education whereas testing focuses on results, the former advocates for pedagogical learning processes that involve dimensions going beyond the linguistic code and skills to integrate sociocultural and contextual factors.

- **Assessment:**
 - A broader concept than testing, encompassing the systematic gathering of information to inform educational decisions (Lynch, 2001).
 - Can include a variety of methods, both formal and informal.
 - Emphasizes the process of learning, as well as the product.
 - When viewed through a critical pedagogy lens, it becomes a tool for empowering students and promoting social justice.

- Can adopt a qualitative view on individuals, offering a potentially disruptive alternative for more objective judgments in language evaluation.
- **Testing:**
 - Focuses on measuring and quantifying student knowledge and skills at a specific point in time.
 - Often relies on standardized instruments and procedures.
 - Emphasizes the product of learning (e.g., test scores)
 - May perpetuate inequalities and power imbalances in the classroom.
 - Serves the purpose of collecting specific, often quantitative, information required for decision-making in education (Lynch, 2001).

Critical pedagogy challenges traditional notions of assessment by shifting the focus from merely measuring achievement to fostering student empowerment and agency. In this perspective, monitoring becomes a process of observing and understanding students' learning journeys, strengths, and challenges in their social and cultural context. Learning is viewed as a collaborative and transformative process where assessment provides opportunities for students to reflect on their own learning, set goals, and actively participate in their education.

1.2.3 Introduction to formative assessment

Formative assessment was a crucial component of the educational process, providing ongoing feedback, scaffolding learning, and tailoring instruction to meet the diverse needs of the students who participated in the project. This type of assessment supported the research exercise since it is related to the principals of critical language pedagogy (CLP); for instance, formative assessment fosters the identification of language learning regarding students' needs and also,

addressing language teaching by considering equitable and inclusive bilingual learning environments.

In the article “Learning in the 21st Century: Research, Innovation and Policy. Assessment for learning formative assessment” (2008), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) explained the difference between formative and summative assessments:

“Summative assessments are used to measure what students have learnt at the end of a unit, to promote students, to ensure they have met required standards on the way to earning certification for school completion or to enter certain occupations, or as a method for selecting students for entry into further education. Ministries or departments of education may use summative assessments and evaluations as a way to hold publicly funded schools accountable for providing quality education. Increasingly, international summative assessments – such as OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) – have been important for comparing national education systems to developments in other countries... In classrooms, formative assessment refers to frequent, interactive assessments of student progress and understanding to identify learning needs and adjust teaching appropriately. Teachers using formative assessment approaches and techniques are better prepared to meet diverse students’ needs – through differentiation and adaptation of teaching to raise levels of student achievement and to achieve a greater equity of student outcomes,” OECD (2008, p.1).

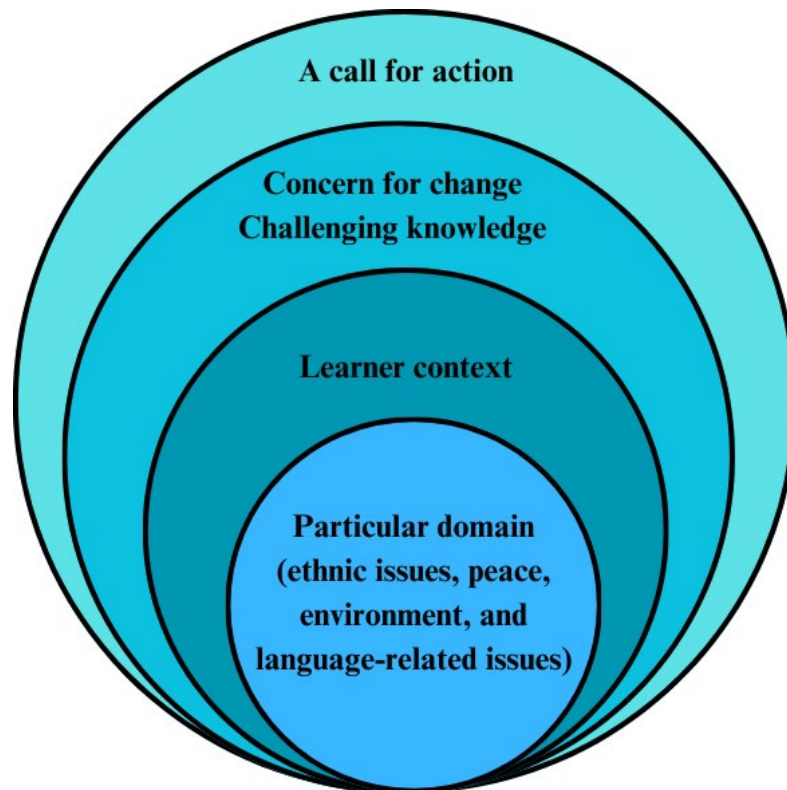
The previous types of assessment are part of educators’ decision-making process as of whether and when it is necessary to implement each one of the approaches described. Shohamy (2001) has made the most significant contribution on the field of Critical Language Principles for Testing and a Critical perspective stated by Lynch (2001). Special attention has been paid to the term coined by Shohamy (2018): Critical Language Testing which is labeled Critical Language Assessment to be consistent with the arguments presented in the previous sections of this discussion. Lynch (2001) emphasized on the article by mentioning the importance to rethink assessment from a critical perspective, which also suggested assessment instead of testing for the implications both terms reflect. The aforementioned author approached this critical perspective for assessment under four broad dimensions explained as it follows:

- A particular interest in gender, class, ethnicity, and the ways that language and language-related issues are interconnected.
- The importance of going beyond dominant paradigms to establish a post-positivist influenced one.
- Furthermore, the idea of changing the human and social world, which means a ‘transformative agenda’, with the related and motivational concern for social justice and equality, Lynch (2001, p.363).

This scholar challenges assumptions in language assessment by addressing that these practices are not to be separated from cultural, societal, political, educational and ideological agendas. On the second place, Shohamy (2018) showed concern over the fact that evaluators cannot avoid to include their view of the world in the design of evaluations and establishes guidelines on how to be objective. This author suggests evaluators to question themselves whose agenda is serving the purpose for specific evaluations design. Additionally, assessment needs to reflect a call for action. Last but not least, assessment needs to provide opportunities for negotiating knowledge by challenging it.

The previous guidelines were crucial so as to suggest an assessment framework which will serve the purpose for validating the current pedagogic mediation. This framework is presented on figure 1, as evidence of the interrelation of the concepts that construct this theoretical section.

Figure 2. Critical language assessment



Source: Own elaboration (adapted from Shohamy et al., 2018; Lynch, 2001).

Figure 1 addresses the dimensions for the evaluation component of the current intervention, taking as a point of reference for this description the smallest circle, a particular domain from a critical perspective. In other words, a social concern related to race, gender, ethnicity, or even the environment. On the second circle, the learner context is identified in such a way that the learning situation is identified. On a third circle, a concern for change within the context and the particular domain is posed by the teacher. For example, if the language social concern is “egalitarian access to housing and accommodation for a specific community,” on the third sphere, it will be posed that not everyone in the community has access to adequate housing. By "adequate housing," we mean housing that meets basic standards of safety, sanitation, and comfort, providing a dignified living environment for all residents.

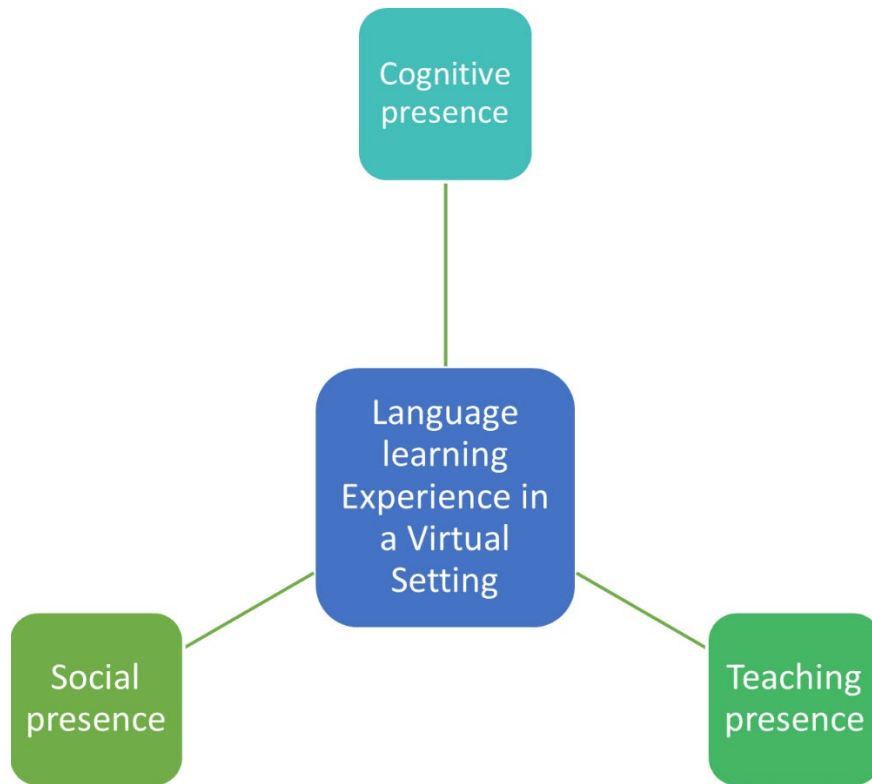
The condition for this situation is that neither the learner nor the educator have preconceived answers to this issue. It challenges knowledge in nature. The last sphere “A call for action” requires the mediation of the learners to overcome the difficult situation. All things considered; this is the critical assessment proposal this paper aims at executing in the intervention. It is precise to remark that the dimensions of the circle have nothing to do with a hierarchy, the figure aims at displaying the interconnections established according to the elements that need to be taken into consideration to create opportunities for critical assessment.

1.3 Virtual learning in bilingual contexts

Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) offer unique opportunities for language acquisition in bilingual contexts. Research by Mohan (2018) highlights the potential of virtual reality (VR) programs to immerse learners in authentic language environments, fostering real-world communication practice. Additionally, VLEs facilitate peer interaction and collaboration, transcending geographical boundaries. Pérez-Cañado et al. (2021) explored virtual exchange platforms, enabling bilingual learners to engage with native speakers, promoting both language skills and intercultural understanding. These interactive and collaborative features of VLEs align with critical language pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of authentic communication and social interaction in language learning.

Traditional language learning in VLEs often lacks principled interventions and paced learning practices, focusing on content transmission rather than fostering critical engagement (Greyling, 2007). The Instructional Strategy Model, adapted from the Community of Inquiry model (Garrison et al., 2000), offers a framework for enhancing the learning experience in bilingual VLEs.

Figure 3. Adapted from the construct community of Inquiry



Note: Taken from the article: “Rethinking assessment from a critical perspective”. By Brian Lynch.

Language Testing (2001). <https://doi.org/10.1177/026553220101800403>

The model emphasizes the importance of social, cognitive, and teaching presence in constructing meaning within the virtual environment. By fostering social presence, learners can explore their identities and develop a sense of belonging within the learning community. This aligns with critical language pedagogy's focus on empowering learners and validating their diverse identities.

Online learning encompasses a broader range of web-based activities, including asynchronous and synchronous learning, providing flexibility and accessibility for bilingual learners (Liu et al., 2021; Belz & Steinwachs, 2019). Access to authentic materials in both target languages further enhances cultural understanding and language acquisition (Kukulska-

Grzeszczuk et al., 2020). These features of online learning support critical language pedagogy's emphasis on learner autonomy and the use of meaningful, real-world resources.

The bilingual virtual program under study has been promoted as a virtual learning environment (Armada de Colombia, 2021). Virtual education, as opposed to online education, carries a specific connotation within the educational landscape. While both involve internet-based learning, virtual education typically replicates a physical classroom environment to a greater extent. This can include features like scheduled live sessions with instructors, online collaborative activities, and virtual learning platforms designed to mimic traditional classroom layouts (Moore, 2011). Additionally, it emphasizes the need for basic computer skills to navigate the program's platform, further suggesting a structured virtual environment rather than simply open-ended online resources.

The learning management system for the bilingual program at the military institution has offered virtual classroom and ubiquitous access to lessons and materials for the participants. As Bates (2019) outlines in *Teaching in a Digital Age*, effective use of technology in education requires careful design of teaching and learning activities, which in this case includes the tutors' role in creating social experiences through interaction. These characteristics of online learning were also defining through the concepts of teaching cognitive and social presences according to Anderson and Garrison (2000).

Integrating critical language pedagogy and assessment into bilingual virtual and online learning environments can create a more transformative and empowering learning experience. By prioritizing social interaction, learner autonomy, and authentic assessment, educators can foster not only language skills but also critical consciousness and intercultural understanding.

In conclusion, the bilingual program from the Armed Forces leverages a virtual education delivery method, providing a structured learning experience that replicates some aspects of a physical classroom. The previous arguments account the pertinence and need to validate a pedagogical mediation to humanize the bilingual learning experience through critical situations in class. It is important to mention that the following section will address the research design, which means the explanation about action research as the methodology that framed the study.

2. Research design

The research design for this study was guided by the principles of action research, which emphasizes a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). This approach was chosen because it aligns with the goals of Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) and Critical Language Assessment (CLA), which aim to empower learners and foster critical consciousness.

At the center of critical language assessment and pedagogy, there is an iterative process of observation, reflection, and action which resembles action research. As defined, this cycle begins with observation, followed by reflection, suggesting change, and assessment (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, as cited by Hatch, 2002).

2.1 Action research

Action research is a reflective process of progressive problem-solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a community of practice to improve the way they address issues and solve problems (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). It involves a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, which allows researchers to continuously refine their practices and interventions based on real-time data and feedback.

In the context of this study, action research was employed to systematically investigate and improve the implementation of Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) and Critical Language Assessment (CLA) in a virtual learning environment. This approach enabled the researchers to actively engage with the participants, gather data on an ongoing basis, and make data-driven adjustments to the pedagogical interventions. By doing so, action research facilitated a more dynamic and responsive learning environment that addressed the unique needs and contexts of the learners. This approach promotes a more inclusive and equitable language education and allows for a deeper understanding of the complexities of language use and instruction (see Figure 3).

Figure 4. Action research



Source: Own elaboration (adapted from the article: “Doing qualitative research in education settings,” Hatch (2002).

2.1 Research objectives

General objective

- To establish bilingualism learning enhancement and experience in a virtual environment **through Critical Language Pedagogy and Assessment (CLPA) in a group of learners** belonging to the army context.
- **Specific objectives**

To identify needs and gaps regarding the pedagogical practices in a group of learners of a virtual bilingual learning environment belonging to the Army context.

To describe emerging results through the implementation of Critical Language Pedagogy and Assessment (CLPA) in a group of students belonging to the Army context.

To interpret the initial insights of an exploratory stage after a Critical Language Pedagogy and Assessment (CLPA) implementation for bilingualism enhancement in a group of beginners at the Army context.

2.2 Data collection instruments

The following are the instruments that guided the process of data collection through the pedagogical implementation and the research study.

Table 1

Data collection instruments

Specific Objectives	Descriptions	Instruments
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To identify needs and gaps regarding the pedagogical practices of students in a virtual bilingual learning environment belonging to the Army context.

Chart or matrix of pedagogical coherence

The intervention used the matrix of pedagogical coherence to compare pedagogic principles at the curricular proposal in the Naval Army - ENAP context against Crookes' (2021) principles for CLP and CLA focusing on military students' experiences.

[Chart or matrix of pedagogical coherence](#)

[Lesson plan 1 - housing and accommodation](#)

[Class recordings](#)

To describe emerging results through the implementation of Critical Language Pedagogy and Assessment (CLPA) in a group of students belonging to the Army context.

Classroom observation checklist

The Classroom Observation Checklist aims to assess students' societal role reflection, while researchers analyze the integration of CLP principles into the lesson plan and their application to eight language sessions. Each one of the three researchers described and interpreted notes for the class observation framework. Evidence is available in the appendix

[Class Observations Checklists](#)

To interpret the initial insights of an exploratory stage after a Critical Language Pedagogy and Assessment (CLPA) implementation for bilingualism enhancement in a

Student's artifacts

Initial insights were obtained from the CLPA implementation within the virtual learning environment

[Students' Artifacts](#)

group of beginners at the Army context.

2.3 Participants' characterization: Selection criteria and context

To select this context for this action research project based on Crookes (2021), Critical language Pedagogy and Assessment involve principals, and several criteria aligned with the project's objectives considering the main features of the bilingual military program:

- Diverse students' population
- Proficiency Level
- Technology enhanced learning Environment
- Flexible and diverse learning environment
- Opportunities for online engaging language assessment
- Challenges of remote learning access
- Professional needs and Real-World Application

Table 2

Participants' characterization

Characteristic	Description
Learning Environment	Blackboard (LMS)
Participant Level	A1 (Beginner)
Institution	Colombian Army

Participants	
Number	14
Location	Rural and urban areas such as Coveñas, Barranquilla, Cartagena, Bogotá, Santa Marta, Tumaco, Bahía Málaga or while on missions from different countries.
Age range	21-53 years old
Challenges	Geographic diversity, varying internet connectivity, diverse learning styles.

Note. From the tables above, the following section addresses the discussion of results including the conclusions, limitations and further research.

2.4 Pedagogical intervention and mediation

It is important to clarify that the pedagogical intervention comes from the first data collection instrument that articulated (a) the pedagogical framework at Escuela Naval de Cadetes Almirante Padilla -ENAP, (b) the EFL syllabus and competencies, (c) the principles of the Critical Language Pedagogy approach, (d) the Critical Language Assessment direction.

During the observation process of virtual classes, some stages have been identified:

a) Students are greeted in English and required to use everyday language to greet the teacher and some other students.

b) After that, learners are required to review the activities done in the previous session. Students are encouraged to guess what is going to be practiced in the current lesson.

c) Through educational videos, the context of the class is set. It can be a specific situation to depart from and interact orally.

d) Then, there is a stage of language guided practice to use the content in context. This stage is monitored by the teacher, generally the teacher is who addresses students' questions or inquiries. Once students have shared answers on this stage,

e) they are ready to work independently. Finally, it is time for students to exchange ideas on the exercises proposed in the independent practice. Students are required to take turns to exchange answers and verify the correct information.

The previous systematic classroom practice depicts little or no concern for engaging students in complex process of thinking or developing language in a social dimension. The cyclical structure of action research allowed to implement an intervention stage under the premises of critical language pedagogy and assessment to suggest the pedagogical practices and anticipate positive results in the learning experience. Nonetheless, after the intervention and the application of the field notes instrument; the following categories emerged.:

Table 3

Critical Language Pedagogy Dimensions

Dimension	Description
Particular	The focus is on teaching values. Language learning is a consequence.
Domain	Language learning is not the point of departure. The extent to which values are fostered is predominant.
Learners	The learning experience is situated on a social dimension. It generally depicts
Context	a problematic situation.
Concern for	There is an urgent need for transformation of the current issues. Learners
Change	need to be informed in order to be able to react.

A Call for Action In the form of assessment, a call for action is required. This dimension opens up space for students' interaction and talking time during the session. Learners are included in the decision-making process of evaluation and type of assessment (oral, written, mixed).

Educator' Role Educators' role, applying critical language testing and identity-based strategies namely translanguaging in the language classroom require a flexible attitude where educators become students among students Crookes (2021). Teachers are mediators who build scaffolds for students to construct their own identity within the social context of the educational setting and with the help of others. Tutors walk hand in hand with students in order to help them find who they truly are.

Learners' Role Learners' role, learner's identity at the center of the language practices redirects dispositions towards the content, syllabus and curriculum design since acquiring competences and skills in a foreign language is a freer and more spontaneous activity. Skills mastery is a subsidiary outcome while the main purpose is to provide learners with opportunities to develop their identities within context of social interaction where the ethnocentric discourse is no longer perpetrated. The point of departure for educational initiatives is a dialogical discourse where learners are provided with decision-making opportunities towards their educational outcomes. They decide what to say, when to say and most importantly what language to use to talk to their teacher, peers or even superiors since it was a military organization.

Critical Language Assessment Finally, assessment under a critical language pedagogy allows opportunities for the development of critical thinking skills where students rather than being stigmatized or classified depending on their performance, find opportunities to answer their own questions through a cyclical process that resembles the process carried out to jump to these conclusions.

Note. Own elaboration based on Shohamy (2018) and Crookes (2021)

The following section will address the discussion of findings and the interpretation of evidence. Likewise, it will be described the data analysis management and process established by the researchers.

3. Data analysis

This action research project aimed to establish the students' and the bilingualism learning experience in a virtual environment through Critical Language Pedagogy and Assessment (CLPA) in a group of learners belonging to the army context. The qualitative approach employed allowed for an in-depth exploration of the implementation of the CLPA principles through the stages of action research: observation, reflection, suggesting change, and assessment (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, as cited by Hatch, 2002).

Data collection took place over a period of two months, from April 14th to June 14th, 2024. Following the data collection phase, the analysis process spanned an additional two months. Classroom observations were conducted by two non-participant researchers, Andrés Felipe Hensley Pino and Jennifer María González Herrera, who focused on documenting the interactions between the teacher and students, the implementation of CLPA principles, and evidence of critical thinking and engagement (Singh, 2006). Cristina Rosario Cabrales Pérez

participated as a participant observer in the learning process, providing an insider perspective on the students' experience. Additionally, students' artifacts, such as the environmental projects and presentations on housing and stereotypes, were analyzed to assess the depth of understanding and critical engagement with the course content. A pedagogical needs chart was also used to identify initial gaps and areas for improvement in the virtual learning environment.

The data analysis process followed the action research cycle, which involved a continuous loop of observation, reflection, suggesting change, and assessment (Hatch, 2002). This approach allowed the researchers to gather data, analyze it, and make data-driven adjustments to the pedagogical interventions in real-time.

The action research cycle, as depicted in Figure 3, was instrumental in ensuring that the pedagogical interventions were responsive to the unique needs and contexts of the learners. By continuously observing, reflecting, suggesting changes, and assessing the impact of the interventions, the researchers were able to refine the interventions and ensure that they were aligned with the principles of CLP and CLA.

This presents the findings and results of a study that employed a combined deductive and inductive approach to analyze qualitative data. This approach involved examining the data for evidence of Critical Language Pedagogy and Assessment (CLPA) principles in practice, while also allowing for the emergence of new themes and categories related to the implementation of CLPA and its impact on the students' learning experience.

The study utilized content analysis techniques to identify patterns and meanings within the collected data, which included classroom observations, student artifacts, and a pedagogical needs chart. The data analysis was further supported by the use of MAXQDA 2024 software that allowed the researchers to manage data and address initial coding; then, the researchers established by going deeper through data interpretation, the emergent categories and

subcategories. This comprehensive approach enabled a nuanced understanding of the data, allowing for both the validation of existing theoretical frameworks and the emergence of new insights grounded in the observations.

A combined deductive and inductive approach was used to analyze the data. Deductively, the project began with the theoretical framework of Critical Language Pedagogy and Assessment, examining the data for evidence of its principles in practice. Inductively, the data analysis allowed for the emergence of new themes and categories related to the implementation of CLPA and its impact on the students' learning experience.

Content analysis techniques were employed to identify patterns and meanings within the collected data according to Hatch (2002). This approach allowed for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the data, enabling both the emergence of themes from the observations and the interpretation of those themes through the lens of critical pedagogy.

Figure 5. Steps for data analysis

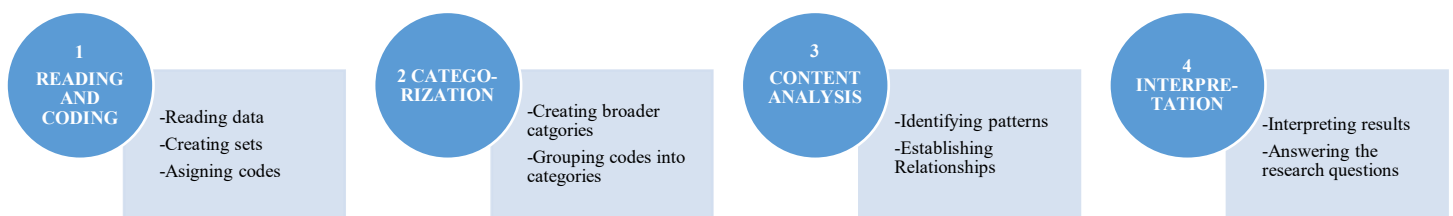


Note. This flowchart illustrates the four-step data analysis process used in this study. The process involved a combined deductive and inductive approach to coding, with emergent categories organized and verified using MAXQDA 2024 software.

The triangulation process began with the design of an Excell matrix consisting of the initial categories of the research project (Critical Language Pedagogy, Critical Language Assessment and Virtual Bilingual learning Environment [TRIANGULATION MATRIX](#)). In column B, the initial categories from the literature have been listed. Subsequently, in column C, the instruments appear. In column D, there was enlisted the initial coding that emerged from the vertical and horizontal interrelation and analysis of the keywords outlined in the different instruments. This process was carried out through reading the data collected. After that initial coding, some common patterns were

highlighted in column E. To label categories and subcategories from column F, the terms from the initial coding were grouped under broader concepts derived from the reference from the authors in column G. Evidence to argue for these interpretations is found in column G. The following figure summarizes the process for this content analysis.

Figure 6. Content analysis

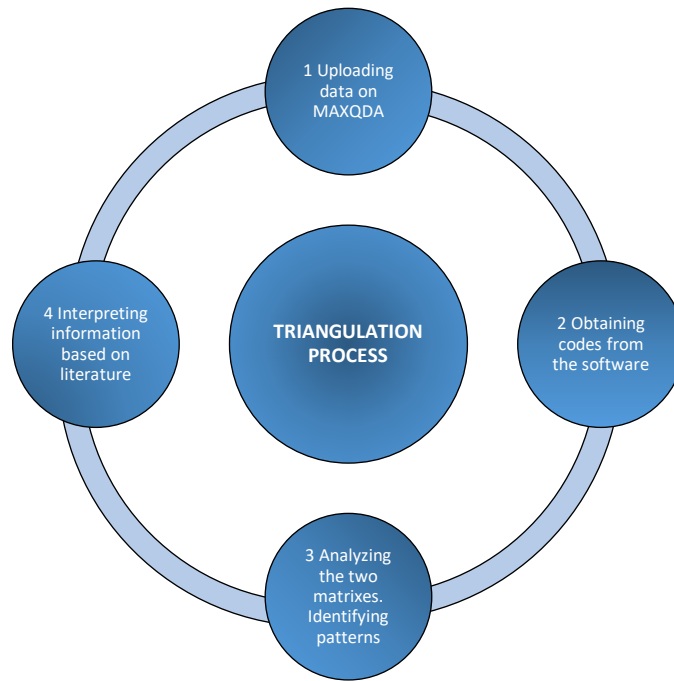


Note: Own elaboration: (Adapted from Classical content analysis: A review by Bauer, 2000).

Additionally, the MAXQDA software was used for a more in-depth coding process where eight video recordings, students’ artifacts, class observation checklists and matrix of pedagogical coherence were uploaded as a set of data to be coded and categorized. The software granted access to a new set of codes that were subsequently tested and categorized against the triangulation matrix, you may refer to this content here [MAXQDA SOFTWARE MATRIX](#). For this analysis the initial matrix and the one provided by the software showed similar results regarding codes [EVIDENCES](#). Patterns were established according to the coincidences found in the two documents through the study of literature. After the evidences analysis, the common patterns were registered and redefined within a specific column in the triangulation matrix (see column E) in the [TRIANGULATION MATRIX](#). This systematic process employed automatic coding which resulted in more intricate relationships trough the association of concepts. The correlation between both the software assisted and non-assisted matrixes advocate for the

reliability of consistent results that prevent the risks of manual coding biases and ensures a robust and reliable data interpretation.

Figure 7. Triangulation process



Note: Own elaboration: (Adapted from Classical content analysis: A review by Bauer, 2000).

The following triangulation matrix synthesizes the analysis of the information collected through this intervention. Three main categories (see table 4) emerged after employing a triangulation matrix where dimensions of the research proposal were triangulated and emerging categories were subsequently tested against the data analysis software MAXQDA 2024. The categories and subcategories are described below:

Tabla 4
Categories emerged from software

Initial Categories	Instruments	Emergent Categories from the Data Analysis	Subcategories
-Critical Language Pedagogy	Pedagogical needs chart CLP - Instrument 1 - pedagogical needs chart	-Social justice values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting the social context. • Reflection on values. • Action for change.
-Critical Language Assessment	Classroom observation checklists CLP- Instrument 2 - class observation checklists	-Critical thinking awareness in the Language Learning Environment -LLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical and creative thinking awareness. • Ecological awareness through language learning. • Sociolinguistic competence awareness. • Students' interaction through digital resources. • Problem-solving & decision-making.

<p>Bilingual and Virtual Learning Environments</p>	<p>Students' artifacts CLP-Instrument 3 - students' artifacts</p>	<p>-Students' engagement in a Virtual Learning Environment VLE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection & self- assessment. • Social learning and interaction in the VLE • Learners' engagement • Teacher and student's agency • Interconnected learners' contexts
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Note. Represents the emergent categories derived from the data triangulation of the literature categories, data collection instruments and tested against the software MAXQDA for validity.

3.1 Discussion of findings

From the chart above, the data obtained through data collection allowed the researchers to define emergent categories and sub-categories. The following texts go in-depth with the researchers' interpretation and sample of evidence. The first category corresponds to social justice values articulated with the initial category Critical Language Pedagogy.

- **Emerging category 1. Social justice values**

Since the project addressed a critical perspective that integrated a pedagogical exercise that articulated values to encourage among learners' reflections on social justice, the military professional role and awareness about their local and global context. In this sense, the lessons mirrored dimensions in the virtual language learning environment by considering principles

defined by Muszyńska & Hansen-Thomas (2023). The authors stated the acronym IDEA which stands for: “Inclusion, diversity, equity and access” (p.34).

In this sense, it might be said that the group of learners was encouraged to engage in reflections and participate in a virtual language learning scenario that intended to involve the following dimensions: (a) recognizing social barriers and crossing borders; (b) positioning identity; (c) finding an authentic voice among learners; (d) examining multiple perspectives and hearing others; (e) engaging in action and reflection on society, contexts, and people. Such values and principles were stated by Muszyńska & Hansen-Thomas (2023).

Hence, the importance of approaching the language class from the lenses of social justice for the learners to understand values in conjunction with the language learning process, which besides, encourage the learners to “problematize assumed knowledge and affect change” or better, creating awareness to signify the foreign language as a vehicle that connects the students’ context, needs and environment” (Muszyńska & Hansen-Thomas, 2023, p. 24). While carrying out the implementation from the instructional and pedagogical plan, and once completed the data analysis, some sub-categories were identified in conjunction with the relationship described here.

- **Sub-categories**
- **Connecting the social context:**

Scholars have argued that “Critical language pedagogy advocates for allowing our lived experiences into class experiences because the personal cannot be separated from the academic” (Muszyńska & Hansen-Thomas, 2023, p. 27). Tracing back to the dimensions of a critical pedagogy at the introduction of the category, it was the researcher’s responsibility to create the conditions for learners to experience a critical class. Classes departed from raising awareness on social issues within the specific learners’ context.

In the following exchange from one of the micro-stages lessons related to equity, learners are inquired to analyze from graphics at the National Statistics Department in Colombia (DANE) whether all Colombian citizens have access to decent living conditions.

Student 1: *“¿Hay gente que vive en cuevas? Confiar 100% en lo que dice el DANE aunque sea una institución no se puede confiar 100% en lo que dice el DANE.*

The teacher continued... “Las encuestas no puede emplear palabras que lleven a interpretación o especulaciones”

This type of task allows learners to question “...dominant systems involving social relationships that position people as members or outsiders” (Muszyńska & Hansen-Thomas, 2023, p. 27, citing Ciardiello, 2004, p. 143). In this sense, learners found meaning in the proposed activity since it advocates for their lived experiences in two ways. Notably, the topic “accessing decent homes” appeals to their personal experiences, ages, interests, and professional backgrounds. Additionally, learners could easily relate to the discussion topic “Do all Colombian people have access to decent homes?”, because it is directly involved with their military activities. The fact that information was not imposed, but rather derived from a specific problem that learners identified within their context, made language be perceived as a byproduct used to communicate ideas.

Learners analyzed the context and suggested solutions; pronunciation and accuracy were not the focus of the class. The next extract from a lesson related to the value of diversity, depicts learners stating facts vs opinions to contrast personality adjectives to the existing stereotypes of people from different regions from Colombia: (see [appendix 1](#)):

“Learner: We are going to present information about opinion and facts about llaneros. “

“Teacher: Why did you focus on Llaneros? Not many people were interested in this region ...It’s not very common. It is the first time that I hear opinions about llaneros. I didn’t know about their ability to cross rivers or lagoons. Is one of you from the Llanos.”

“Learners: Because we love the music llanera, the food llanera and the people llaneros.”

“...This region is not popular because it is in a frontier zone and the culture is Venezuelan and in Colombia is not very popular...”

Learners demonstrated to be engaged in the discussion by seeking for opportunities to validate their personal experiences about a forgotten area from Colombia. In addition, by fostering the diversity value, learners used language as the resource to pose their critical perspectives on a problematic in their context. The language teacher provided the conditions established through research: “...we must first intentionally recognize social barriers and assist our students with crossing those barriers” (Muszyńska & Hansen-Thomas, 2023, p. 30). This underlying evidence supports privileging the social context in a critical pedagogy to pivot language use not the other way around (See [appendix 1](#)).

- **Reflection on values**

Critical classrooms are often characterized by a slow process towards learning goals specifically within contexts under difficult circumstances (Porto, 2022 citing Shahim, 2018). Learners are guided to understand how power structures have influenced the perception of themselves and others (Muszyńska & Hansen-Thomas, 2023). In doing so, questioning about diversity and its relationship to their surroundings emerges.

For this purpose, during this intervention, learners were required to analyze how stereotypes permeated their perspective about people from different regions in Colombia. It was through the use of a technological tool to create word bubbles, that learners were able to reflect upon the

value of identity and how it shaped their thoughts of different ethnical groups (costeños, paisas, llaneros) around Colombia (see [appendix 7](#), stage (2), microcycles 3.1 and 3.1 about personality and physical appearance; See [stage 2 - micro cycle 3.1 - personality - recording 3.mp4](#) 1:18 minute); [stage 2 - micro cycle 3.2 - physical appearance - recording 4.mp4](#) minute 7:59).

Learners used personality adjectives that had been studied previously in order to sketch stereotypes about the ethnical groups. Terms such as dancers, lazy, noble, hard-working, generous rose. In [appendix 4](#), for example, when learners were asked about their opinion about paisas, some answers were:

“People from Medellín are very good businessmen. Those from the Antioquia region have a variety of delicious food. Paisas have a tongue that will entangle everyone.”

Then, these types of opinions needed to be contrasted against facts in a facts vs opinions chart ([appendixes 1,2,3 and 4](#)). Learners went over reliable sources to contrast their opinions and provide reliable judgements on the topic of discussion in class, for example:

“According to an article in la República, paisas are known for buying cheaper and selling higher than others being quick and persistent in commercial business”

“Antioquia’s cuisine reflects the diversity of ingredients available in its fertile lands and the creativity of its people as it suggests chipviajero.com/Antioquia-colombia-gastronomía-típica/”

“The paisas are known for the ability to speak and their distinctive accent. They have a very distinctive way of speaking and use many expressions, words unique to the region

<http://getvico.com/blog/es/palabras-paisas-lista-completa-1/>”.

After designing the facts vs opinions chart learners were required to evaluate whether the arguments for opinions were reliable when contrasted against facts. Learners developed this sense of “regaining one’s identity” and “finding an authentic voice” coined by Muszyńska & Hansen-

Thomas (2023, pp. 33-34). This practice prompted the reflection upon learners' reality through the lens of diversity in classroom (see [stage 2 - micro cycle 2 - overcoming stereotypes - recording 6.mp4](#) minute 36:08).

Again, language learning was a subsidiary outcome which emerged while learners sought for sources to validate their ideas.

Another example on this connection between the reflection and values in the classroom is the activity where learners designed a coat of arms (see [appendixes 8 and 9](#)). According to Crookes, "...all perspectives on language education have values, implicit in central concepts or goals, but CLP is explicit about its intentions" (2021, p. 247). For that reason, all lessons designed for this project had as the main outcome to foster a social justice value. In order to foster identity, learners were required to read the history of coat of arms and how traditional families used it as a symbol to represent their values.

Language was used to fulfill a broader aim related to the goal of fostering learner's identity. To complete this task, learners studied the parts of a coat of arms and at a higher level of thinking skills, they were required to match these symbols to personal and family values. The critical assessment for this activity was to present a coat of arms that reflected family values and how it connected to the content studied in class (colors, shapes, prepositions and symbols of a coat of arms). The group rounded up in discussions such as:

Learner 1: At the top there is the crest with a cross on it meaning love to God. Below the shield there is a banner which says union and familiar strength to face problems.

Learner 2: The helmet is in a central position, forward, it symbolizes the mind which is the spirit of the family. Two lions located on the right and left side holding the coat of arms, symbolize strength and teamwork. The banner located below the coat of arms, with the word "Just us", refers to the fact that the family is all. The shield located in the center of the coat

of arms, oval-shaped, its blue background color symbolizes tranquility and the mixture of green and white colors are hope and union.

Learners were encouraged to develop their own presentation materials using an online app that assisted in the creation of coats of arms. This activity was designed to foster a deeper understanding of personal and family values, as well as to promote engagement and motivation among the learners. The process involved several steps that allowed learners to reflect on their identities and connect with their peers in meaningful ways.

First, learners were introduced to the history and significance of coats of arms, understanding how they have been used traditionally to represent family values and heritage. This background knowledge helped learners appreciate the symbolic importance of each element in a coat of arms, such as colors, shapes, and symbols.

Using the online app, learners were guided through the creation process, where they could select and customize various elements to represent their personal and family values. For example, they could choose colors that symbolized tranquility or hope, shapes that represented unity or strength, and symbols that reflected their cultural or familial backgrounds. This creative process allowed learners to express their identities visually and to think critically about what values were most important to them.

Throughout this activity, learners experienced high levels of motivation and engagement. The interactive nature of the online app made the task enjoyable and accessible, while the focus on personal values made it personally relevant. Learners were eager to share their creations with their classmates, leading to discussions about the meanings behind their choices and the values they represented.

This engagement with a social value related to their context, presented through their linguistic possibilities, fostered a sense of self-identity. By reflecting on and representing their

values visually, learners gained a deeper understanding of who they were and what they stood for. This self-awareness was further enriched by the opportunity to explore the perspectives of their classmates. As learners shared and discussed their coats of arms, they learned about each other's values and backgrounds, fostering a sense of community and mutual respect.

Moreover, this activity allowed learners to practice their language skills in a meaningful and authentic context. They used the target language to describe their coats of arms, explain their choices, and engage in discussions with their peers. This linguistic practice was not merely an academic exercise but a tool for self-expression and interpersonal connection, making the learning experience more impactful and memorable.

In summary, the activity of creating coats of arms using an online app was a powerful way to foster self-identity, promote engagement and motivation, and enhance language learning. It provided learners with an opportunity to reflect on their values, connect with their peers, and practice their language skills in a meaningful and authentic context.

- **Action for change**

The way in which content was evaluated for the purposes of the lessons in this project was under the lens of action for change as suggested by the data analysis software. A synonym for this subcategory is “the call of service” (Muszyńska & Hansen-Thomas, 2023, p. 31). In the words of Ciardello “civil of moral activism” or “an act of moral transcendence” (Muszyńska & Hansen-Thomas, 2023, p. 30 citing Ciardiello, 2004). Lynch has labeled it as a “A call for action” (Lynch, 2001, p. 357).

This subcategory refers to the need to incorporate opportunities for learners to transform agendas. It is stated that a shift from reflection to action is crucial. In that sense, for example, when studying living conditions in Colombia, to foster the value of equity, learners were required to suggest alternatives on how the government could provide access to decent home in Colombia



([stage 1- micro cycle 2 - housing and accommodation recording 2.mp4](#) - minute 37) to improve living conditions (see [appendixes 9, 10, 11 and 12](#)). Some of the arguments presented in class refer to:

Teacher: The idea is that we all have access to the information and the opportunity to check ideas. So, I'm happy to see this information its interesting for me that you have done research and investigated.

Learner: Ok, this is my information and ideas. Number 1, Increase the stimulus in the process of current housing improvements with greater financial investment for homes in rural and urban areas.

Teacher: Interesting, that you didn't only include urban areas but rural too. You were inclusive. And the investment? Is it from the public and private sector?

Learner: Yes, Miss. Both, both sectors.

Learner: Of these homes in rural and urban areas, after the improvements made and verified by the authority, proceed to translate these families to a Social Interest Housing located in the same area, and allocate the unoccupied home with improvements to a family without a home. This as a stimulus for the housing improvement process from the previous point.

Teacher: Move families? Let me check if I understood. Can you explain with you own words. Tell me about this idea, like one example or something.

Learner: I can proceed, Miss?

Teacher: I want to check number two again; you said you were going to improve the houses and then families are going to be moved to social interest housing. That is brilliant! It is similar to some European movements. The name in Europe is transit housing. They have regulations they are going to be living in the houses for three years. After three years they

have to move out. The government assumes that after three years the family has saved money to move to another place.

Learner: Ok, Miss. Create a lower category for Priority Interest Housing from 90 to 50, Minimum Monthly Salary in areas of high vulnerability for people or families with incomes below 1 Minimum Monthly Salary.

Teacher: Were you inspired from different countries or is your idea?

Learner: It's my idea according to what I see in the living conditions in Colombia.

Teacher: And then, we continue with number 4.

Learner: Promote the construction of houses with prefabricated material for Priority Interest Housing in rural and urban areas.

Teacher: For me it's completely interesting that you don't only think of the city but also about rural spaces. Is not only cities, building and development, but rural areas cannot be forgotten. A good perspective from you, that are all inclusive. And the next?

Learner: Allocate the properties confiscated to forfeiture of property, for temporarily housing of homeless families for 02 years, during which the family, through their rental savings, could access a Priority Interest Housing or Social Interest Housing.

Teacher: So, I was telling you that this was like a model in Europe, you had this idea from something you saw in a different place?

Learner: Yes, Miss.

Teacher: you are referring to confiscated properties.

Learner: Hace rato en San Andrés yo vi ese modelo en los años 90. Confiscaron un arpo que se los quitaron y lo ofrecieron como vivienda fiscal a las personas por un corto tiempo, pero luego fue devuelto al estado. En realidad esas casas son de la nación.

The learner displays a judgmental perspective and arguments based on previous experiences to suggest change. The comments evidence that knowledge rather than being assumed is challenged (Crookes, 2021). Learning is perceived from a broader spectrum that takes place while learners experience transformative thoughts that challenge previous knowledge and require them to suggest alternatives on how to solve problematic situations using their repertoires express ideas.

- **Emerging category 2. Critical thinking awareness in the language learning environment -LLE**

The pedagogical implementation carried out through the research proposed activities that fostered among learners the development of critical thinking skills. Learners were asked to elaborate artifacts that encouraged them to address projects requiring, on the one hand, a different learning positioning by working collaboratively and, on the other hand, making possible an interconnection between the language, the context, and the students' agency.

The topics involved in the implementation were about environmental projects, housing and overcoming stereotypes. These topics were chosen regarding the pedagogical goals from the perspective and principles identified from critical language pedagogy CLP and critical language assessment CLA. As it was stated in the literature review the performance and assessment activities connected learners with their everyday life and military context situations.

It was evidenced that learners supported their opinions and the activities by demonstrating a more critical perspective considering that the project was justified considering the emphasis on structural components without a connection with their context and their identity. In this way, the pedagogical intervention helped them develop critical thinking skills.

Critical thinking awareness was evidenced through the following sub-categories derived from the data analysis:

- **Sub-categories:**
- **Critical and creative thinking awareness:**

Language comprehension must be paired with a deep understanding of social, political, and historical contexts to achieve a truly rigorous and transformative education. This multifaceted approach allows students not only to identify biases in written and spoken language, as Willingham (2010) pointed out, but also to critically evaluate information and form their own reasoned judgments.

The study conducted by Rodríguez (2010) provides valuable insights into the sociolinguistic characteristics of the communicative interaction among members of the National Police in Bogotá. The author highlighted how different social and linguistic components can be analyzed to demonstrate a dynamic and distinguishable communicative interaction among individuals who share not only the same language but also similar sociolinguistic behaviors due to their labor activities. For instance, Rodríguez (2010) noted that "different social and linguistic components can be analyzed in a speech community to demonstrate evidence of a dynamic and distinguishable communicative interaction among individuals" (p. 107).

This analysis was particularly relevant in understanding how language is used within specialized communities of practice, such as the military or police forces. The values and behaviors within these communities significantly influence the way language is perceived and utilized, reflecting the broader social and professional contexts in which these individuals operate. By cultivating this deep understanding of language within a broader context, students evidenced through the research their ability to appropriate English from a wider perspective of bilingualism. This perspective connected their being and mission within the military and naval contexts. It also aligned with the activities they are expected to perform in accordance with the

values of their military force. For example, the Escuela Naval Almirante Padilla establishes professional and life missions such as commitment, honor, courage, discipline, loyalty, and leadership.

Despite these values being specific to the military context, what was significant for the research participants was understanding that language is both a sense and a vehicle for viewing and understanding the world, achieving a level of language awareness in relation to the learners' identity and societal positioning.

The [chart or matrix of pedagogical coherence](#) emphasized innovative language use and critical thinking, aligning closely with the principles of Critical Language Assessment (CLA). This instrument aimed to integrate Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) and CLA into the syllabus design at Escuela Naval de Cadetes Almirante Padilla (ENAP). Given the time constraints, four specific language goals were aligned with CLA to ensure a focused and impactful implementation.

These goals included designing a poster with suggestions on how to improve housing conditions in Colombia, creating a comparative chart of Colombian stereotypes, evaluating conservation projects at the Colombian Navy through the design of an interactive brochure, and designing a decalogue on using language commands to carry out a deception strategy to protect troops on a mission in the Amazon. Each of these goals was carefully selected to encourage creative action and foster critical perspectives and ethical decision-making among learners.

For instance, the goal of designing a poster on improving housing conditions required learners to research and analyze social issues, propose innovative solutions, and present their ideas visually and linguistically. This activity not only enhanced their language skills but also developed their ability to think critically about social justice and community development. The comparative chart of Colombian stereotypes encouraged learners to challenge preconceived

notions and promote a more inclusive understanding of cultural diversity. By evaluating conservation projects, learners engaged with environmental issues and developed a sense of responsibility toward sustainable practices. Lastly, the decalogue on language commands for deception strategies in the Amazon fostered strategic thinking and ethical decision-making, as learners had to consider the moral implications of their proposed strategies.

Moreover, it was evidenced through various artifacts and classroom observations that the participants understood the language to perform and use it innovatively, generate new ideas, and challenge conventional thinking (Smith & Jones, 2020). For instance, during the project where learners designed a coat of arms, they not only followed traditional guidelines but also incorporated personal and family values in creative ways. This activity demonstrated their ability to think critically and express their identities through symbolic representations.

Additionally, in the environmental projects and presentations on housing and stereotypes, learners showcased their capacity to analyze complex social issues and propose innovative solutions. They utilized the target language to discuss and debate these topics, reflecting a deep understanding of both linguistic and cultural nuances. This comprehensive understanding of language not only enhanced their communicative skills but also empowered them to engage more effectively within their professional and social environments.

For example, during a classroom discussion on housing inequities, learners proposed practical solutions such as increasing financial investment in rural and urban housing improvements and creating programs to support families in need. These discussions were conducted entirely in the target language, demonstrating the participants' ability to use language as a tool for critical thinking and problem-solving.

Furthermore, the use of technological tools, such as word bubbles and online apps for creating coats of arms, allowed learners to engage with the material in innovative ways. This

technological integration fostered a dynamic learning environment where students could experiment with language and explore new ideas collaboratively.

In summary, the evidence from these activities and discussions highlights that the participants were not only proficient in using the language but also capable of applying it creatively and critically. This holistic approach to language learning empowered them to become more effective communicators and active contributors to their professional and social contexts. Within the analysis of this category, several sub-categories emerged as further evidence of the aforementioned arguments. Learners demonstrated innovative language use by creating visually compelling posters and interactive brochures that effectively communicated their messages. They showcased critical thinking by challenging stereotypes, proposing environmentally conscious solutions, and considering the ethical implications of their strategies. These activities not only aligned with the principles of CLA but also promoted a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between language, context, and social responsibility.

- **Ecological awareness through language learning**

The activity demonstrated a commendable focus on ethical concerns. By actively engaging learners in discussions about environmental conservation, and other pertinent issues, it fostered a strong sense of ethics and social responsibility (Banks, 2008). This emphasis on ethical reasoning was particularly evident in a classroom observation where learners were tasked with the creation of the following artifact it is evidenced how students use critical language having ecological awareness through language learning. The brochure's images (Figures 5-6) illustrate how students used critical language to promote ecological awareness. For instance, the brochure features a heart infused with blue, symbolizing commitment, passion, and sacrifice for Colombia.

This visual representation underscored the students' understanding of the interconnectedness of language, context, and their mission as environmental agents within the

military and naval context. [Appendix.13](#). from the artifacts contained the blue heart project. A couple of images were included here to illustrate the sub-category.

Figure 8. Artifact evidence of the Corazón Azulado project

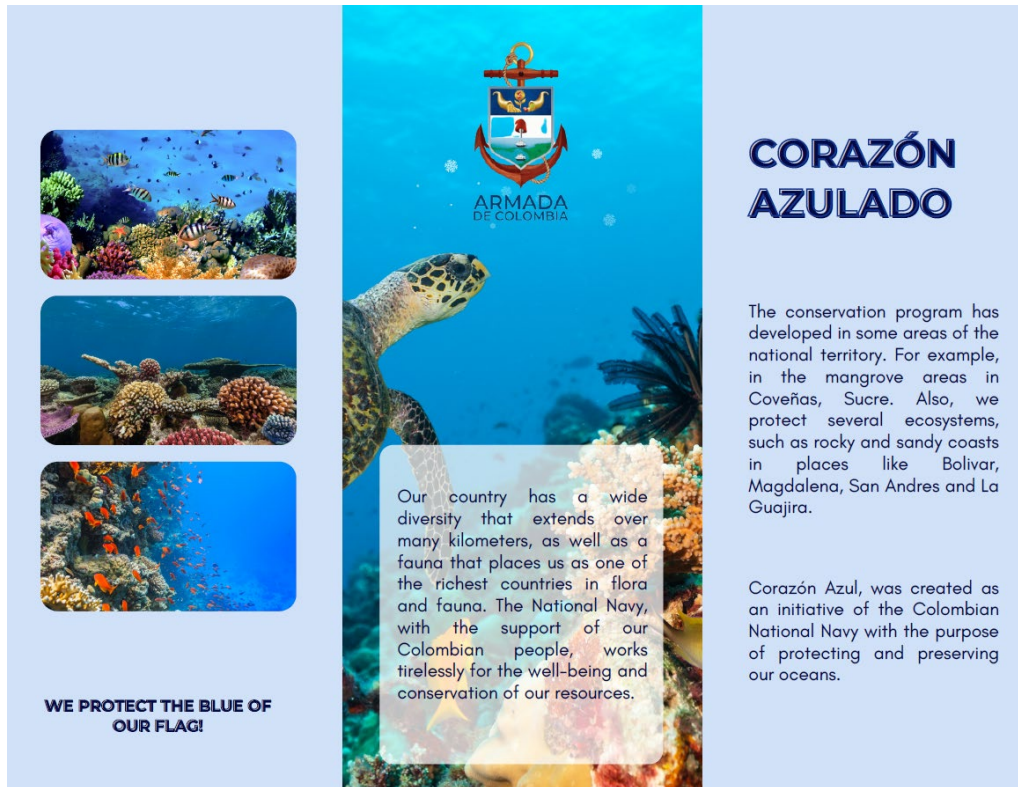


Figure 9. Artifact evidence of the Bluish Heart project



As discussed in Steinberg and Down (2020), critical pedagogy is not something done to students, but rather something done with them. It is a pedagogy that challenges the types of knowledge and ways of knowing that have been traditionally privileged in the classroom. Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) and Critical Language Awareness (CLA) offer a refreshing departure from traditional language activities. They invite educators to connect with learners' values as humans, professionals, and language students, fostering critical thinking and creativity. In essence, CLP and CLA empower students to view language not merely as a neutral tool for communication, but as a powerful force for shaping a more just and equitable world. This resonates with Freire's (2011) profound insight that language is inseparable from power structures and can be harnessed for either oppression or liberation. By embracing this critical lens, we pave the way for students to become agents of change, using language to challenge injustice and create a more inclusive and equitable society.

Another perspective related to the previous evidence is that critical language learning in the virtual learning environment (VLE) is a way to promote ecological awareness. Critical language learning helps students understand the interconnectedness of all living things. By teaching students to be critical of the language they use, they are also being taught to be critical of the world around them. For example, during the environmental projects, learners created interactive brochures evaluating conservation efforts at the Colombian Navy. These brochures not only showcased their language skills but also demonstrated their understanding of environmental issues and their commitment to sustainable practices. One notable artifact was the "Corazón Azulado" project, where students designed a brochure highlighting the Navy's conservation efforts, including protecting marine ecosystems and promoting sustainable fishing practices.

The artifact evidenced that collaborative and common virtual space was also useful for the students to create bonds around their military mission as care environmental agents. For instance, during the project, learners worked together to research and present information on various conservation initiatives. They used online collaboration tools to share ideas, provide feedback, and collectively develop their brochures. This collaborative process not only enhanced their language skills but also fostered a sense of community and shared purpose among the learners.

Furthermore, the use of technological tools, such as word bubbles and online apps for creating coats of arms, allowed learners to engage with the material in innovative ways. This technological integration fostered a dynamic learning environment where students could experiment with language and explore new ideas collaboratively. For example, learners used an online app to design coats of arms that represented their personal and family values, incorporating symbols that reflected their commitment to environmental conservation and social justice (see [Appendixes 8 and 9](#)).

In summary, the evidence from these activities and artifacts highlights that the participants were not only proficient in using the language but also capable of applying it creatively and critically. This holistic approach to language learning empowered them to become more effective communicators and active contributors to their professional and social contexts. The integration of CLP and CLA in the VLE promoted ecological awareness and fostered a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between language, context, and social responsibility.

- **Sociolinguistic competence awareness:**

Students evidenced a level of appropriation of the foreign language in different social contexts, demonstrating awareness of variations in register, style, and nonverbal communication. Learners demonstrated critical thinking skills by examining local personality stereotypes about people from different regions of the country (according to Paul & Elder, 2006). Learners researched reliable sources to gather factual information about individuals from those regions, focusing on how these individuals exemplify or challenge those stereotypes.

Stereotypes were one of the main class topics and students showed how they connected the representations and conception including the regional identity they associated with the context and the places where their partners came from. The following observation reflected on one of the lessons illustrate how learners were able to express such connection. Bringing the teacher's instructional directions, they received the following instruction taken from one of the direct observation instruments:

Learners were required to find reliable sources of information in order to compare and contrast local personality stereotypes about people regarding their place of birth VS actual facts about people regarding their place of birth such as people from the

Caribbean coast being creative such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez or Shakira. Taken from [class observation #4](#).

Besides, in the mentioned class, the teacher encouraged learners to reflect on the sociolinguistic implications of stereotypes related to different regions in Colombia. For instance, the teacher prompted discussions on how language and dialects can influence perceptions and stereotypes. Learners were asked to consider how the distinctive accent of "Paisas" might affect social interactions and perceptions.

Teacher: *"Paisas are known for their distinctive accent. How do you think this accent influences how others perceive them?"*

Learners were guided to analyze newspaper articles and other media sources to understand how language is used to perpetuate or challenge stereotypes. For example, learners cited articles from "La República" to discuss how commercial practices and regional stereotypes are portrayed in the media. This activity helped learners develop a critical lens towards the sociolinguistic aspects of media representation.

Learner: *"According to an article in La República, 'Paisas are known for buying cheaper and selling higher than other being persistent in the commercial business.'"*

The teacher facilitated collaborative exercises where learners worked together to create charts comparing facts and opinions about regional stereotypes. This collaborative work allowed learners to engage in deep discussions about the sociolinguistic competence required to navigate different cultural contexts. For instance, learners discussed how the music and food of the "Llaneros" region contribute to their cultural identity and how language plays a role in shaping these identities.

Learner: *"We are going to present information about opinions and facts about Llaneros."*



Teacher: *"Why did you focus on Llaneros? Not many people were interested in this region... It's not very common. It is the first time that I hear opinions about Llaneros. I didn't know about their ability to cross rivers or lagoons. Is one of you from the Llanos?"*

Learner: *"Because we love the music llanera, the food llanera, and the people llaneros."*

The teacher encouraged learners to take transformative actions by suggesting ways to overcome stereotypes through language use. Learners were prompted to think about how they can use language to challenge and change negative stereotypes. For example, learners suggested that highlighting the positive contributions of the "Llaneros" culture, such as their music and culinary traditions, could help counteract negative stereotypes.

Learner: *"This region is not popular because it is in a frontier zone and the culture is Venezuelan and in Colombia is not very popular..."*

Group: *"The group showed concern on the Llaneros' culture by comparing it with other cultures or regions inside our country and the group suggested this region has been disregarded from our culture due to their proximity with a neighboring country. The group suggested no matter this situation this region has strong musical and culinary influence for our country. In this sense learners adopted a transformative action towards stereotypes in the Colombian regions."*

The teacher valued the local context of the learners by encouraging them to share their personal experiences related to regional stereotypes. This approach allowed learners to connect their sociolinguistic competence with their real-life experiences. For instance, learners shared their love for "Llanera" music and food, which helped them understand the cultural significance of these elements and how language plays a role in their appreciation.

These interactions and activities demonstrate the teacher's commitment to fostering sociolinguistic competence awareness through critical pedagogical practices. The teacher's guidance and the learners' engagement in these activities highlight the importance of understanding the sociolinguistic dimensions of language use in a bilingual learning environment.

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to understand and use language appropriately in different social contexts, recognizing the nuances of language use, including variations in dialect, register, and cultural norms. The student artifact activity depicted in [Appendix 6](#) provides a practical example of how sociolinguistic competence awareness can be fostered through educational activities. This process aligns with critical language assessment approaches that emphasize the development of critical thinking and information literacy skills. Students can use language to express themselves in original and imaginative ways through writing, speaking, and other creative mediums (McKay & Brown, 2015)

By presenting facts that counteract negative stereotypes, the activity highlights the diversity within cultural groups. This helps students appreciate the richness and complexity of different cultures, fostering a more inclusive and respectful attitude towards linguistic and cultural differences. The activity underscores the importance of understanding language use in different social contexts. By examining how language is used to express opinions and facts, students gain insights into how language can shape and reflect cultural perceptions.

- **Students' interaction through digital resources**

The integration of technology in language classrooms has been shown to effectively promote critical thinking skills and facilitate learner autonomy (Shuell, 2008). Digital tools offer

students a platform to engage with information actively, construct meaning, and express their own perspectives. In this observed lesson, the use of Mentimeter, a versatile online learning (VLO) tool, provided a dynamic environment for students to critically interact with the topic of stereotypes, as the teacher depicted in the observation format:

“Mentimeter was employed to create an interactive word cloud exercise. Students were prompted to respond to questions related to stereotypes using keywords from the lesson. This activity not only reinforced vocabulary learning but also encouraged learners to analyze and evaluate the complexities of stereotypes, fostering critical engagement with the subject matter”.

Taken from [class observation #3](#).

By enabling students to visualize and contribute to a collaborative word cloud, Mentimeter facilitated active learning and stimulated meaningful discussion (Howard, 2015). Furthermore, this visual representation of diverse perspectives may have prompted students to consider viewpoints different from their own, further enhancing critical thinking skills (Crook, 2010).

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2001) propose that social presence in virtual learning environments is crucial for fostering a sense of community and belonging among students. Social presence refers to the ability of participants to project themselves socially and emotionally in an online learning environment, which facilitates interaction and collaboration. In the context of Mentimeter, the creation of a collaborative word cloud can enhance social presence by allowing students to see and recognize the contributions of their peers, thereby fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Additionally, teaching presence, which refers to the instructor's ability to design, facilitate, and direct the educational process, is essential for guiding and supporting student learning. In the use of Mentimeter, teaching presence can be manifested through the active

facilitation of discussion and critical reflection on students' contributions to the word cloud. This not only helps students consider different perspectives but also provides the necessary structure and guidance to develop critical thinking skills.

In summary, the integration of Mentimeter in the classroom can be seen as a tool that not only facilitates social presence by promoting interaction and collaboration among students but also supports teaching presence by providing a medium for active facilitation and critical reflection. These combined elements can significantly enrich the learning process in virtual environments. To further promote critical thinking skills in the target language, learners engaged with a digital learning tool called Padlet that was evidenced in another observed class:

“Learners used Padlet as a technological aid to summarize ideas regarding stereotypes about Colombian people by completing a facts VS Opinions chart so that critical skills were displayed using the foreign language to communicate”. Taken from [class observation #4](#).

This activity required students to actively evaluate information and differentiate between factual statements and subjective opinions, demonstrating their ability to analyze and interpret information critically. By engaging in this process using the foreign language, learners further developed their communicative competence while simultaneously honing their critical thinking skills. This use of technology to foster critical thinking and collaborative learning is supported by research on digital literacies and language education (Kern, 2014). Moreover, the collaborative nature of Padlet, which allows for simultaneous contributions and interactions, likely fostered peer learning and a sense of shared ownership in the learning process.

- **Problem-solving & decision-making:**

As stated by Steinberg & Down (2020), critical pedagogies establish that students are able to apply their language skills to solve complex problems, consider multiple perspectives, and make informed decisions. The emphasis on transformative action is clear in the way learners are

encouraged to suggest solutions to problems posed in class. Critical thinking was displayed during the evaluation stage when learners were able to suggest ideas. In the following observed class, it is evidenced how students could be agents of change and make decisions and solve problems critically:

"Learners are engaged in all of the stages of the process by asking and contributing with their questions to build community and solutions to questions that are brought to the class not only by the teachers but the classmates as well."

"Practical application of the topic in the class to the students was found in the way learners contributed to suggest alternatives on how to overcome stereotypes and how to counteract the negative effect stereotypes had in our community." Taken from [class observation #4](#).

Critical pedagogy is about the collective construction of a language of critique and transformation that moves students from the margins to the center of pedagogical engagement and the production of critical knowledge. It is a project of solidarity and hope that recognizes the power of collective voice and the importance of individual agency in the fight for a more just and equitable world. Furthermore, it is a pedagogy that embraces the power of difference and the transformative potential of those often-excluded narratives, voices, and experiences that bear witness to the complex heterogeneity of the social and classroom landscape.

This focus on problem-solving and critical analysis reflects a commitment to empowering learners to become agents of change (Freire, 2000). By fostering critical thinking and collective action, critical pedagogy aims to equip learners with the skills and knowledge necessary to challenge existing power structures and create a more just and equitable society.

One of the significant projects undertaken by the learners was focused on environmental conservation, particularly the care of the ocean. The learners were tasked with designing an

interactive brochure that evaluated conservation projects at the Colombian Navy. This project not only encouraged creative action but also fostered critical perspectives and ethical decision-making among learners. The brochure aimed to raise awareness about the importance of marine conservation and the role of the Colombian Navy in protecting marine ecosystems.

Moreover, the project encouraged students to think critically about the environmental challenges faced by marine ecosystems and to propose solutions. By designing the brochure, students were able to apply their language skills to solve complex problems, consider multiple perspectives, and make informed decisions. For example, learners proposed initiatives such as increasing public awareness campaigns about marine pollution, advocating for stricter regulations on fishing practices, and suggesting community clean-up events to protect local marine life ([see Appendix 13](#) for examples of student-designed brochures).

In another observed class, learners participated in a debate on the effectiveness of current conservation efforts. They used evidence from scientific articles and reports to support their arguments and proposed alternative strategies to enhance marine conservation. This activity not only showcased their critical thinking and problem-solving skills but also their ability to engage in informed decision-making (see [class observation #5](#) for detailed notes).

Furthermore, during a classroom discussion on housing inequities, learners proposed practical solutions such as increasing financial investment in rural and urban housing improvements and creating programs to support families in need. These discussions were conducted entirely in the target language, demonstrating the participants' ability to use language as a tool for critical thinking and problem-solving (see [class observation #4](#) for detailed notes).

In summary, the evidence from these activities and discussions highlights that the participants were not only proficient in using the language but also capable of applying it creatively and critically. This holistic approach to language learning empowered them to become

more effective communicators and active contributors to their professional and social contexts.

The integration of critical pedagogy in the virtual learning environment promoted a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between language, context, and social responsibility, aligning with the principles of critical pedagogy that emphasize the importance of collective action and the transformative potential of education.

- **Reflection & self-assessment:**

Students can reflect on their own language use and creative processes, identifying areas for growth and improvement. Students can demonstrate understanding and respect for diverse cultures and perspectives, communicating effectively across cultural differences. Critical pedagogy is about the collective construction of a language of critique and transformation that moves students from the margins to the center of pedagogical engagement and the production of critical knowledge (Steinberg & Down, 2020).

As observed in the class, the teacher acted as a transformative intellectual, guiding reflection and encouraging learners to share their ideas. The emphasis on transformative action is clear in the way learners are encouraged to suggest solutions to problems posed in class. The teacher guided reflection questions around the central topics of the class, suggesting learners share ideas while wearing a critical lens on the issues. The teacher always used question prompts such as:

"Do you think..." "Is it possible..." "What are your thoughts on..." "What is your opinion about..." "Is it true that...". Taken from [class observation #4](#).

The project “corazón azulado” is an evidence of the successful implementation of Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) and assessment practices in fostering social presence within a virtual bilingual learning environment. During the observed session, learners actively engaged in discussions and collaborative exercises that challenged assumptions and stereotypes about

Colombian people based on their place of birth. The teacher encouraged a learner-centered atmosphere, prompting students to reflect on real-world applications of the language concepts and to use technology for collaborative work and idea sharing. Learners demonstrated critical thinking by using evidence from reliable sources to support their opinions and by identifying practical applications of the topic to their own lives. The class environment valued the local context of the students, reflecting their realities and encouraging transformative action towards stereotypes. This approach not only enhanced the students' language skills but also fostered a deeper understanding of social justice and cultural diversity, aligning with the principles of CLP as articulated by Freire (2000) and Crookes (2022). This approach aligns with the principles of critical pedagogy, which emphasizes the teacher's role in facilitating critical consciousness and empowering learners to challenge the status quo (Giroux, 2011). By adopting this role, the teacher creates a learning environment that values critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility.

In this virtual environment, the teacher's use of open-ended questions plays a crucial role in fostering critical thinking and intellectual curiosity. This type of questioning encourages learners to analyze information, evaluate perspectives, and construct their own arguments (Walsh & Sattes, 2017). In another observed class, there were translanguaging moments to aid comprehension and allow for a deeper understanding of the problematic situations. This approach is supported by García and Wei (2014), who argue that translanguaging enables learners to make connections between their prior knowledge and new information. There was evidenced in this section: *“There is a time for translanguaging in the class when learners are encouraged to relate the problem to their local context by bringing examples from their experience (the discussion is lead in Spanish).”* Taken from [class observation #3](#).

Translanguaging practices can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment while also promoting deeper cognitive engagement and language development (James, 2017). As noted by Canagarajah (2013), translanguaging fosters among learners the possibility to negotiate meaning and co-construct knowledge with their peers. Additionally, Lewis, Jones, and Baker (2012) suggest that “translanguaging can facilitate metalinguistic awareness and language reflection, leading to more effective language learning” (p. 28).

Evidence of these benefits was observed during several classroom activities. For instance, during a discussion on housing inequities, learners were encouraged to use their native language to clarify concepts and share ideas before translating them into the target language. This practice allowed learners to express their thoughts more accurately and confidently, leading to richer and more nuanced discussions. One learner noted, "Using my native language helped me explain my ideas better, and then I could translate them into English more effectively". (Taken from [class observation #4](#)).

In another activity, learners worked in groups to create a comparative chart of Colombian stereotypes. They used translanguaging to discuss and debate the stereotypes, drawing on their shared cultural knowledge to challenge and refine their understanding. For example, a group of learners from different regions of Colombia used a mix of Spanish and English to discuss the stereotypes associated with "paisas", ultimately creating a more comprehensive and culturally sensitive chart (see [Appendix 4](#) for the opinions and facts chart).

Furthermore, during the project where learners designed coats of arms, translanguaging was actively employed. Learners used their native language to brainstorm and discuss the symbols and values they wanted to include in their designs. This process not only facilitated a deeper understanding of the task but also allowed learners to incorporate personal and cultural elements into their work. One learner commented, "By discussing in Spanish, we could better

understand the significance of the symbols we chose, and it made the project more meaningful".

(Taken from class observation [class observation #6](#)).

In summary, the use of translanguaging practices in these activities demonstrated their effectiveness in creating a more inclusive learning environment, promoting cognitive engagement, and enhancing language development. These practices allowed learners to negotiate meaning, co-construct knowledge, and reflect on language use, aligning with the principles outlined by Canagarajah (2013) and Lewis, Jones, and Baker (2012).

The implementation of Critical Pedagogical Assessment (CLA) is clearly multidimensional, covering a wide range of concerns and principles (Gottlieb, 2006). The integration of CLA into the [chart or matrix of pedagogical coherence](#) design is evident in the way units of topics are aligned with CLA dimensions such as equality, diversity, environmental conservation, and peace. Four dimensions on critical language pedagogy suggested through the literature were considered for the current proposal: 1) Equality, 2) Diversity, 3) Environmental Conservation, and 4) Peace. Akbari (2008) emphasizes the importance of equality in educational settings, while Crookes (2022) highlights the role of diversity in language education. Edge (2013) discusses the significance of environmental conservation in pedagogical practices, and Ortega (2012) underscores the necessity of promoting peace through language teaching. This multidimensional approach reflects a commitment to addressing the complex social and ecological challenges of our time through language education.

The [chart or matrix of pedagogical coherence](#) effectively connected learning to students' lives. The observation of class # 1 highlights that *"the local context of students is valued since the activities reflect their specific context."* This approach makes learning more meaningful and encourages students to apply critical thinking to real-world issues within their own communities and the use of diverse assessment practices, including a poster design, critical analysis, and the

evaluation of conservation projects provides students opportunities to demonstrate their critical thinking skills in various ways. It was observed that, "*Assessment practices were evidenced through the implementation of an application in order to establish comparisons between military housing vs civilian housing,*" which further exemplifies the practical application of these skills.

Taken from [Class Observation # 1](#).

These activities encouraged and engaged learners with language creatively and critically, applying their understanding of social and cultural contexts to analyze and challenge stereotypes as it is evidenced in the following artifact. However, it is important to consider and evaluate the multiple ways in which Critical Language Awareness (CLA) can be implemented. In the tradition of critical pedagogy, educators must be careful of simply substituting one pedagogical model for another. For instance, implementing CLA without interrogating the content and/or the context of learning activities is not sufficient for a critical reading of language. As Santomé (2008) argues, students are not necessarily more critically aware or engaged when collaborative learning is the primary pedagogical model. Rather, what matters is the extent to which students are challenged to think critically about the content of what is being learned.

- **Category 3. Students' engagement in a virtual learning environment VLE**

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, the integration of critical language pedagogy into Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) represents a transformative and revolutionary approach to teaching and learning, mainly, when from the context it emerges needs to connect the learners' context through authentic materials, as stated by Sandoval Pérez et al. (2024)

Authentic materials in conjunction with language teaching and learning materials are significant to elicit critical reflections among students by participating in real conversations, real-life situations and contexts of language that as it was evidenced in this project helped students

“become familiar with authentic language and develop a more effective understanding of the foreign language,” Sandoval Pérez et al. (2024).

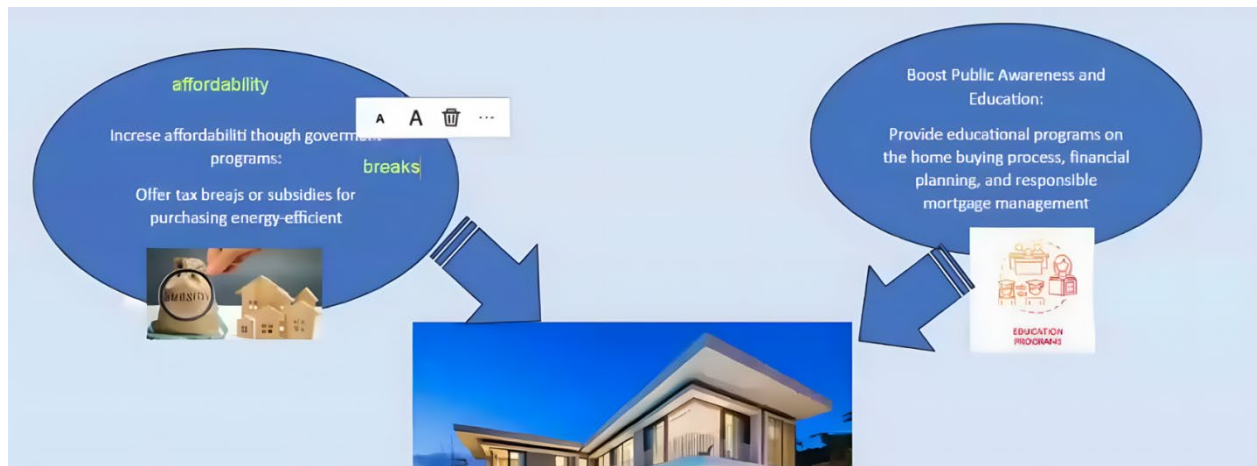
The innovative pedagogical direction above mentioned challenges traditional language instruction by addressing the complex interplay of social, cultural, and linguistic factors, creating a more inclusive and learner-centered educational experience. Critical language pedagogy encouraged throughout the research study the participants to reflect on the power dynamics embedded in language, empowering them to become active participants in their learning journey.

For instance, learners were asked to develop a pedagogical activity through which they went beyond the linguistic description of housing and accommodation, firstly familiarized with the Colombian local context but also with the adaptability military service life requires for them to live in tents.

Furthermore, what captured the attention through the analysis was the capacity manifested by the learners to establish a critical position about housing and living conditions in our country since they proposed needs to qualify and improve living settings, what let us evidence a step forward through the language learning process to establish a critical view while addressing this topic in the English class. In the following image, the evidence obtained from micro-cycle (2), students proposed some political and economic strategies based on information the inquired about how to qualify housing and accommodation from a social and critical perspective.

One of the students. established needs to have affordable housing programs, taxes reductions and sustainable financing planning to boost public possibilities for citizens including education programs.

Figure 10. Artifact evidence obtained from the virtual English session, micro-cycle (2)

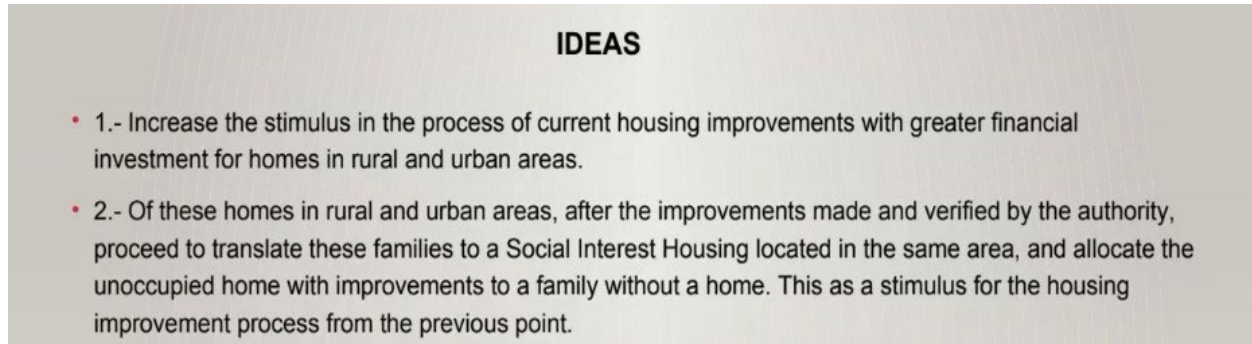


Within the Virtual Learning Environments -VLEs, critical pedagogy gains an additional layer of relevance as it leverages digital tools and resources to provide flexible, accessible, and engaging learning opportunities (Rahmat, 2023). The authors highlight the benefits of language learning exposure through online settings where from the basis of a guided and contextualized pedagogical framework, learners are able to become more socially engaged and receive positive “influences changes in learners’ behaviour, how instructor support influences changes in learners’ behaviour, and the relationship between instructor support and learners’ behaviour, learners’ environment, and social engagement”, (p. 696).

By incorporating virtual learning objects, robust assessment strategies, well-defined learning objectives, and fostering meaningful learner engagement, educators can create environments that not only improve bilingualism but also promote critical thinking and linguistic equity, as it was evidenced through the artifacts of the project and the pedagogical direction previously highlighted. It was interesting to evidence that another learner’s artifact showed how it is important to consider whether urban or rural inhabitants, some people require financial support

to have a permanent or a housing possibility, due to displacement realities in our country. This topic was part of the reflections addressed in the virtual sessions of the implementation.

Figure 11. Artifact evidence obtained from the virtual English session, micro-cycle (2)



This convergence of elements offers a unique opportunity to reshape language education, transforming it into a practice that not only builds linguistic competencies but also equips learners to navigate and challenge the sociolinguistic realities of their world. Through this exploration, it is relevant to highlight how critical language pedagogy in virtual settings can redefine the boundaries of traditional education, paving the way for more inclusive and empowering learning experiences, considering Steinberg & Down (2020).

Critical pedagogy challenges the traditional, passive way of teaching where knowledge is simply handed down. Instead, it emphasizes active learning and encourages students to engage with the world around them. This approach aims to develop students' critical thinking skills and social awareness. By fostering a dynamic interaction between students and their reality, critical pedagogy seeks to empower them to question, analyze, and ultimately transform their world. This analysis further revealed several sub-categories within this theme category, it emerged the following sub-categories.

Sub-categories

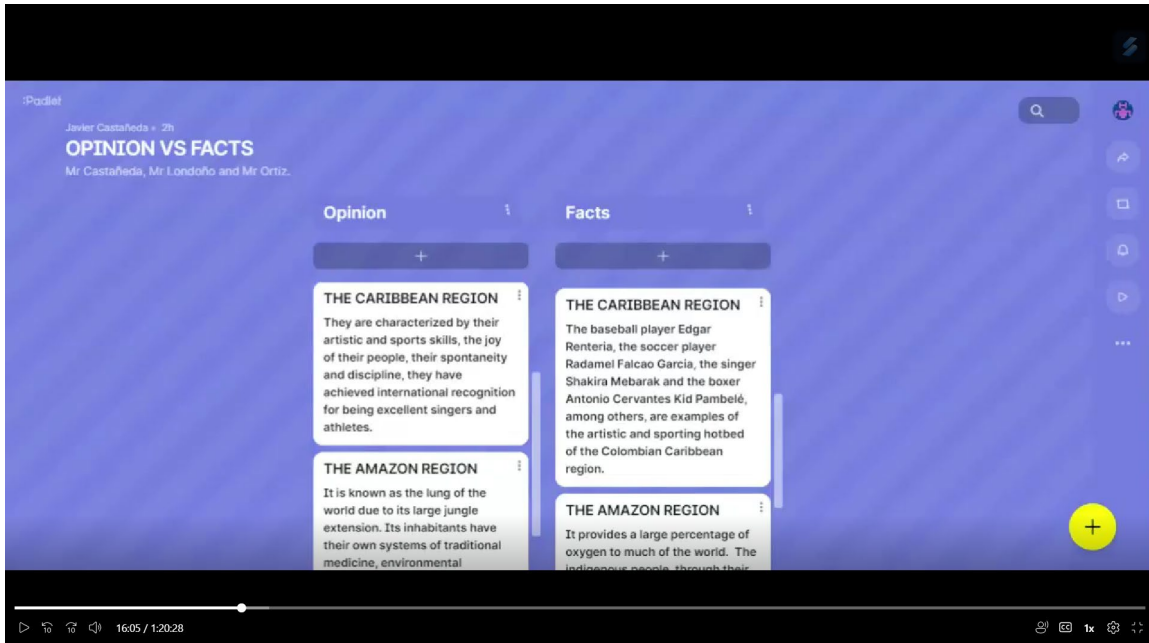
- **Social learning and interaction in the VLE**

Social learning is understood as the collective construction of knowledge through interaction among individuals. It is a fundamental principle in the context of Virtual Learning Objects (VLOs) as defined by Steinberg & Down (2020). It is highlighted from the research study the importance of linking students' personal worlds with educational content. This approach allowed the research participants, students at the ENAP, not only to access information but also to adapt and contextualize it based on their own experiences and perspectives, fostering more active and meaningful participation.

Cruz Aguilar (2020) as citing (Freire) about an education that could guide the learner to a social and knowledge awareness, emphasizes the significance of dialogue as a tool for knowledge construction, which can be associated with the educational scenario proposed through the Critical Language Pedagogy CLP in the VLE. Virtual environments provide various platforms for students to interact with each other and with the content, facilitating an exchange of ideas that promotes critical understanding and reflective thinking. This type of interaction apart from connecting the teacher and students' interaction in real time and space, also enhanced and involved the learners' engagement in their learning process. The CLP proposed in the study allowed students to reflect and respond at their own pace, creating a more personal and inclusive learning experience.

Additionally, Steinberg & Down (2020) underlined that language, the world, and being are intrinsically connected. This perspective is reflected in VLEs when interactive activities are integrated, not only to transfer knowledge but also to encourage deep reflection on the external world and its connection to the texts and content being studied. Technological tools such as discussion forums, virtual debates, and collaborative activities facilitate this connection between students' personal worlds and the educational content, providing rich social interaction.

Figure 12. Artifact evidence obtained from the virtual English session, micro-cycle (2)



In practice, such interactions can be observed on platforms like Moodle or Blackboard, where students engage in discussion forums, respond to peers' comments, and create collaborative projects. These interactions not only allow the exchange of knowledge but also foster the construction of a learning community that extends beyond the traditional classroom setting.

- **Learners' engagement**

Student engagement is essential for success in any learning modality, particularly in virtual environments, according to Steinberg & Down (2020) more possibilities for learners situated in different regions and coming from different socio-economic backgrounds can be together and participate in the construction of educational process and language programs as the one implemented by the ENAP.

Students had the opportunity to emotionally connect with the material, increasing their involvement and motivation to learn. The pedagogical activities offered students the opportunity to explore the addressed topics and allowed them to relate the content to their personal

experiences and needs. When Cruz Aguilar (2020) cited (Freire) also highlighted that student engagement is strengthened when they have the opportunity to participate in a learning process that not only transfers information but also empowers them to transform their reality.

This critical perspective on engagement is important in the VLEs, as it occurred in this project, when students interact with learning materials that go beyond the language knowledge, also, challenge them to question and transform their view of the world. It can be concluded that VLEs should be designed to go beyond the idea of the learner as a “recipient of information but active participants in their own learning process,” Cruz Aguilar (2020, p.198).

- **Teacher and student’s agency**

The agency, understood as the capacity to make decisions and act autonomously within the educational process, is essential in any critical pedagogical approach. Steinberg & Down (2020), discusses how the relationship between language, the world, and being can strengthen the agency of both teachers and students. In virtual learning environments (VLEs), students must be empowered to take control of their own learning by choosing paths that align with their interests and needs. This not only fosters autonomy but also responsibility and critical thinking, which are fundamental principles in critical pedagogy.

Cruz Aguilar (2020) cited (Freire), who pointed out that the teacher's role in promoting agency should be that of a facilitator, not an authoritarian figure. In a virtual environment, the teacher must act as a guide, creating a space where students have the freedom to explore and question. This translates, in the context of VLEs, into offering resources and tools that allow students to decide how to approach the topics while the teacher provides guidance and support when necessary. Teacher agency, therefore, is reflected in their ability to design learning experiences that promote student autonomy without losing the necessary structure to achieve educational goals.

The concept of teacher agency, as discussed by Ahmad & Shah (2022) is closely linked to continuous professional development and the teacher's ability to adapt to the changing demands of modern education. In their study of the Cambridge English teacher program in the Gulf, these authors highlight how ongoing training and access to professional networks enable teachers to make informed decisions that favor the autonomy of both students and themselves. Teacher agency is not limited to the design of learning activities but involves a commitment to continuous learning, critical reflection on educational practice, and the integration of new technologies, which are essential in VLEs.

In virtual learning environments, the process of negotiating roles between teachers and students is crucial. According to Steinberg & Down (2020) critical pedagogies require a constant negotiation of their implementation, where both the teacher and the student must adjust their roles within the educational process. In VLEs, this negotiation is intensified by the technological and pedagogical needs of students, who must learn to use digital tools to maximize their learning, while teachers must adapt their pedagogical approaches to provide an inclusive and flexible learning environment.

Student agency in VLEs can be observed when students have the ability to choose from different learning modalities, such as self-paced courses, interactive modules, or collaborative activities. Continuous feedback tools, such as discussion forums and blogs, allow students to express themselves and reflect autonomously, which strengthens their agency in the learning process. This approach aligns with the ideas of Ahmad & Shah (2022), who emphasize how teacher professional development facilitates the creation of learning spaces that promote student autonomy, allowing students not only to participate actively but also to take a central role in their own learning.

However, despite the opportunities to foster agency in both students and teachers, the use of VLEs presents certain challenges. Technological platforms can be complicated for some students, especially those with less experience in using digital tools. This may reduce student agency if proper support is not provided to navigate these environments. Therefore, teachers must be prepared to offer additional support, ensuring that all students have the ability to exercise their agency within the virtual environment. A teacher's ability to adapt to students' needs, as emphasized by Ahmad & Shah (2022), is a crucial aspect of achieving effective teaching in these environments.

Teacher agency, in this sense, is not only manifested in the design of activities or content creation but also in the teacher's ability to manage online interactions and offer personalized support, ensuring that all students, regardless of their technological skill level, can make the most of learning opportunities. Continuous teacher training, as suggested by Ahmad & Shah (2022), is an essential element for educators to stay updated on best pedagogical and technological practices, thus enhancing their ability to promote student agency.

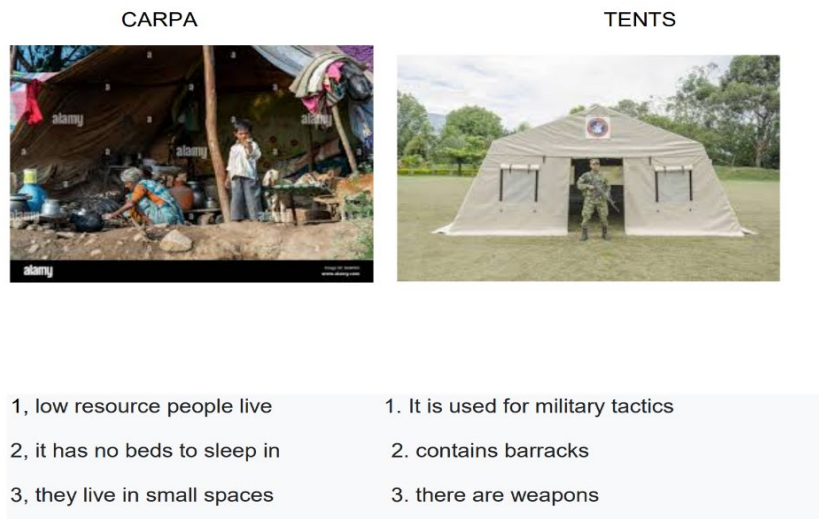
In summary, agency, both for teachers and students, is a fundamental element in virtual learning environments. While VLEs provide a space for autonomy and the development of critical skills, they also require a constant adaptation of the roles of both teachers and students. Teachers must be facilitators who guide students in their autonomous learning process, while students must be trained to use digital tools that allow them to take control of their learning. The study by Ahmad & Shah (2022) reinforces the importance of continuous professional development for teachers, enabling them to create an environment that fosters student agency and meaningful learning.

- **Interconnected learners' contexts**

The social, cultural, and personal contexts of students deeply influence their learning process. That kind of interconnected setting was evident throughout the project as seeing how the teacher articulated social characteristics regarding the military profile and professional work of students with the environments where they were able at their level to reflect on and explicit a connection between context and language learning. As the evidence below shows, The students' capacity to relate their professional and personal experiences to their language learning process improved. For example, they started using their military experience to contextualize grammar and vocabulary, relating abstract language ideas to situations they faced in their work life.

Furthermore, the students' perspectives demonstrated how their professional and cultural identities influenced the way they approached learning. They were able to interact more fully with the content by incorporating their distinct viewpoints, which gave their studies a feeling of significance and direction.

Figure 13. Artifact evidence obtained from the virtual English session, micro-cycle (2)



Steinberg & Down (2020) also mentioned the importance of connecting students' contexts with educational content, allowing students to see themselves reflected in what they learn. This approach recognizes that knowledge is not neutral but is shaped by the experiences and realities

of students. In a virtual learning environment, this interconnection can be facilitated by offering content that is culturally relevant and responsive to the diverse realities of students.

In this sense, incorporating elements that connect with their everyday realities and social contexts enhances their sense of belonging and relevance in learning, creating a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Conclusions

The research identified a need for pedagogical practices that prioritized identity exploration, social justice values, and critical engagement within the virtual learning environment for military professionals in the Colombian Army. Existing gaps included an over-reliance on standardized metrics and a lack of focus on learners' personal and professional interests. Addressing these gaps empowered learners to challenge knowledge, transform their realities, and actively participate in shaping their world.

Emerging results from the implementation of Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) and Critical Language Assessment (CLA) in the Army context included a shift in the learning environment towards a space that allowed identity exploration and recognized individuals' identities. Learners began to challenge knowledge and problematize information, transforming power relationships within the learning environment. Assessment practices also evolved to respond to learners' personal and professional interests, with evaluations designed as digital projects, reflective journals, or problem-solving scenarios that mirrored real-life challenges.

Initial insights from the exploratory stage suggested that implementing CLP and CLA significantly enhanced bilingualism and fostered a more inclusive, reflective, and critical learning experience for military professionals in the Colombian Army. This approach showed promise in empowering learners to actively participate in shaping their world and transforming their realities, even at the beginner level. The alignment of assessment practices with learners' personal

and professional interests was particularly effective in promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Overall, the findings highlighted the transformative potential of CLP and CLA in addressing the identified needs and gaps in pedagogical practices, describing the emerging results of their implementation, and interpreting the initial insights for bilingualism enhancement in a group of beginners within the Army context.

- **Limitations**

While this study provides valuable insights into the implementation of Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) and Critical Language Assessment (CLA) in a virtual learning environment, several limitations should be acknowledged.

Critical language pedagogy needs to be articulated to specific language learning methodologies or approaches; otherwise, the learning process may take a multidirectional structure, diminishing its impact on the learning scenario. Additionally, some learners may not immediately recognize the relevance of critical pedagogy to their professional roles, potentially viewing it as an unnecessary deviation from technical language acquisition. This lack of recognition could affect their engagement and motivation.

Technological challenges, such as limited digital skills or unreliable internet access, may have hindered full engagement with virtual learning activities. Providing additional technological support and training could address this issue and ensure more equitable access.

The study's focus on a specific group within the Colombian Army may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should replicate the study in diverse educational contexts to validate the applicability and effectiveness of CLP and CLA.

The relatively short duration of the intervention (two months) may not have been sufficient to observe long-term impacts. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the sustained effects of these pedagogical approaches.

- **Further research**

To build upon the findings of this study and address the identified limitations, several avenues for further research are recommended. Longitudinal studies should assess the long-term impact of CLP and CLA on learners' language proficiency, critical thinking skills, and social justice awareness. Comparative analyses should evaluate the effectiveness of CLP and CLA in different learning contexts, such as face-to-face, blended, and fully online environments.

Developing and evaluating teacher training programs focused on integrating CLP and CLA into language education is crucial. Ensuring educators are equipped with the necessary skills will enhance the quality and impact of critical language pedagogy.

Investigating learners' perceptions of CLP and CLA is essential to identify factors influencing their engagement and motivation. Replicating this study in diverse educational contexts, including different age groups and cultural backgrounds, would validate the applicability and effectiveness of CLP and CLA across various learner demographics.

Within the scope for further research, it is suggested to explore more in-depth the articulation of critical language pedagogy and assessment, and the attributes or possibilities that could be explored in a virtual learning environment regarding artificial intelligence. This information is not uniformly available to all learners, teachers, or stakeholders.

Additionally, conducting another research project based on the findings of this study related to CLP and CLA would be very interesting. This could further validate and expand upon the current results, providing deeper insights and practical applications.

By addressing these limitations and pursuing the suggested avenues for further research, educators and researchers can continue to refine and optimize the implementation of CLP and CLA, fostering a more inclusive, reflective, and critical learning experience for all learners.

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Appendixes

- [Appendixes reflected in the analysis text](#)
- [Chart or matrix of pedagogical coherence.](#)
- [Observation Classes](#)
- [Class Recordings](#)
- [Student's Artifacts](#)
- [Lesson Plans](#)