

## Challenging EFL Students' Views of Culture: An Experience With Multimodal Pedagogies

Desafiando las visiones de cultura de estudiantes de inglés: una experiencia con pedagogías multimodales

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This article reports a mixed-methods action research study that explored the impact of multimodal pedagogies on 20 students' conceptions of culture and intercultural relationships throughout an English course. Data were gathered through questionnaires, students' multimodal productions, and interviews. Findings indicate that, after the intervention, students moved from stereotypical, monolithic conceptions of culture to a dynamic, multidimensional, and complex view of it. Learners recognized how culture operates in their everyday lives and the role of negotiation/mediation in intercultural interactions. This experience suggests that multimodal pedagogies promote intercultural and critical views in language teaching/learning.

**Keywords:** English language teaching, intercultural awareness, intercultural language teaching, multimodality, multimodal pedagogies

Este artículo reporta un estudio mixto de investigación-acción que exploró el impacto de las pedagogías multimodales en las concepciones de cultura y relaciones interculturales de veinte estudiantes en un curso de inglés. Los datos se recopilaban mediante cuestionarios, producciones multimodales de estudiantes y grupos focales. Los resultados indican que, después de la intervención, los estudiantes pasaron de concepciones estereotipadas y monolíticas de la cultura a una visión dinámica, multidimensional y compleja. Los aprendices reconocieron cómo opera la cultura en su vida cotidiana y el papel de la negociación/mediación en las interacciones interculturales. Esta experiencia sugiere que las pedagogías multimodales promueven visiones interculturales y críticas en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de lenguas.

**Palabras clave:** conciencia intercultural, enseñanza intercultural de lenguas, enseñanza del inglés, multimodalidad, pedagogías multimodales

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## Introduction

The evolution of means of communication and global interactions has posed challenges for English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers (Álvarez Valencia, 2018). Virtual intercultural communication (Godwin-Jones, 2019; O'Dowd, 2021) and the visual turn on meaning-making (Álvarez Valencia, 2016a; Kress, 1998, 2010) have switched the emphasis from writing to graphic modes of communication. These changes challenge teachers to recognize, interpret, and examine the nature and behavior of semiotic resources and modes of communication (Álvarez Valencia, 2016b, 2021; Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005). Despite the presence of multimodal elements in communication, EFL practices remain tied to verbocentric views of communication (language-centered approaches to English language teaching [ELT]; Álvarez Valencia & Michelson, 2022; Poyatos, 2002) or culturalist positions (monolithic/stereotypical perspectives of culture in EFL; Rico-Troncoso, 2021).

Another challenge is the absence of studies on multimodal pedagogies or approaches in EFL and on the discovery of pedagogical alternatives that integrate multimodal pedagogies to develop intercultural skills. This lack hinders the promotion of intercultural/critical stances and broader views of communication. Some studies have focused on the affordances of multimodal pedagogies in the development of multiliteracies (Angay-Crowder et al., 2013; Veliz & Hossein, 2020; Vinogradova et al., 2011), academic skills (Archer, 2008; Prince & Archer, 2014), reading/writing in L1/L2 (Bell, 2016; Huang & Archer, 2017; Thesen, 2014), and the text-image relationship (Archer, 2011; Unsworth, 2006; van Leeuwen & Humphrey, 1996). Nonetheless, scarce research connects multimodal pedagogies with EFL learners' intercultural manifestations (Ajayi, 2008; Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006; Stein, 2004).

Newfield and Maungedzo (2006) explore the use of multimodal poetry in an EFL classroom in South Africa to discuss how a multimodal conception of

communication shapes learners' understanding of texts and their connections to their own cultures/lifestyles. This experience urges EFL practitioners to engage with multiple modes of communication to understand learners' own cultural practices.

Stein (2004) shows how using multimodal pedagogies in English-as-a-second-language classrooms in Johannesburg connects learners' local worldviews and sociocultural contexts with their academic demands. Through multimodal representations of the self, students portrayed their cultural heritage, addressed lingering post-apartheid tensions, understood their differences, and discussed the role of educational policies in shaping multiple diversities.

Ajayi (2008) discusses how multimodal meaning-making at the high school level enhances learners' interpretation and critical inquiry of multimodal documents through the analysis of local political multimodal products. After implementing learning activities integrating multimodal analysis/interpretation, students used multimodal resources to discuss their social identities. This experience foregrounds the potential of a multimodally-based curriculum in developing critical skills.

Latin American authors have addressed multimodality and visuals in EFL practices. Brazilian researchers have proposed alternatives to address multimodal communication in language learning and teaching (Bezerra, 2012; Heberle, 2010), others explored the implementation of multimodal practices with EFL high school students (Almeida & Souza, 2017), and preservice EFL teachers and teacher educators (Heberle et al., 2022; Zacchi, 2016). In Chile, Rojas Suazo (2017) examined the affordances of multimodal literacies (digital storytelling) in EFL high school and Farías and Véliz (2019) reported that despite participants' familiarity with multimodal texts (teachers used them in their reading/writing lessons, and preservice teachers, for non-academic purposes) they are limited by constraints of resources, instruction and time for teaching

and learning. The authors stress the discrepancies of using multimodal documents between educators and preservice teachers.

Though these and similar studies have examined multimodal practices and pedagogies in EFL, few have empirically explored the integration of multimodality in Colombia (Aguilar-Cruz, 2018; Aldana Gutiérrez et al., 2012; Álvarez Valencia, 2021; Gómez-Giraldo, 2022; Rincón & Clavijo-Olarte, 2016). For example, Álvarez Valencia's (2021) study addresses multimodal pedagogies. His research explored how multimodal pedagogies with an intercultural orientation benefit preservice EFL teachers. The author highlights the role of multimodal pedagogies in boosting learners' agentive design and identity construction; interaction, collaboration, and negotiation; and understanding of the connections among language, communication, and culture.

Although previous studies have explored multimodal approaches in EFL, promoting multimodal pedagogical practices to develop intercultural skills warrants greater attention. Hence, three research gaps are revealed: (a) the role of multimodal communication in EFL, (b) addressing the inclusion of multimodal pedagogies in language teaching, and (c) using multimodal pedagogies to develop intercultural skills in EFL. These gaps stress the need to design pedagogical proposals to promote intercultural skills in ELT.

Therefore, this study explored the impact of multimodal pedagogies on the development of intercultural awareness of a group of students enrolled in an English course. Three areas of intercultural awareness were addressed: the concept of culture and intercultural relationships; the role of respect, equality, acceptance, and openness; and the heterogeneous nature of social groups. Due to space limitations, this paper focuses on the first of these areas and answers the following research question: "What are the changes in the students' conceptions of culture and intercultural relationships resulting from a multimodal pedagogical experience?"

## Multimodal Pedagogies in ELT

Emerging from a multimodal perspective (Jewitt, 2006; Kress, 2014; van Leeuwen, 2006), where communication is seen as the enactment of varied modes of communication beyond the linguistic realm (The New London Group, 1996), multimodal pedagogies are a set of teaching/learning approaches that encompass "curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices which focus on mode as a defining feature of communication in learning environments" (Stein & Newfield, 2006, p. 9).

Stein (2004) proposed a set of basic assumptions for multimodal pedagogies:

*Assumption 1:* Pedagogy is a semiotic activity framed within relations of culture, history, and power. Multimodal products are constructed in the classroom and emerge within specific social, political, cultural, historical, and power conditions that define their meanings.

*Assumption 2:* Meaning-making is bodily, sensory, and semiotic. Using the body as a source of semiotic resources enables meaning construction. Meaning happens through and with the body, which is at the center of semiotic construction and interpretation.

*Assumption 3:* Meaning-making is multimodal. It is based on the interpretation of modes of communication emerging from social interactions. Modes of communication are defined as "a fully semiotically articulated means of representation and communication" (Stein, 2004, p. 104). The New London Group (1996) classifies these modes into five categories: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial.

*Assumption 4:* Meaning-making is an interested action. Individuals make meaning from the range of available choices, the conditions of their interactions, their interests, and their identities.

*Assumption 5:* Language is limited. Since communication is multimodal, language alone is not enough to recount or interpret all human experiences and perspectives.

*Assumption 6:* Meaning-making is transformation, creativity, and design.

Meaning-making resorts to individuals' full ensemble of semiotic resources. Meanings produced by individuals result from semiotic adaptation, transformation, and shaping under specific conditions.

### **Intersections Between Multimodal Pedagogies and Intercultural Awareness**

Multimodal pedagogies have a sociocultural nature. Cultural, social, historical, and power relationships are pivotal in the creation, transformation, and use of meanings (Kress, 2012; Stein, 2008). Semiotic resources are socially created and shaped through cultural action (Álvarez Valencia, 2021; Kress, 2010) and the ways individuals use, design, deploy, and connect multimodal meanings with their cultural context, heritage, and identities (Kress, 2010; Newfield, 2014; Stein, 2008).

Culture is crucial in multimodal pedagogies. Stein (2008) and Álvarez Valencia (2021) highlight the role of culture in multimodal pedagogies and how cultural relationships shape multimodal communication and the curricular inclusion of multimodal pedagogies. Álvarez Valencia (2021) defines culture as “an open and dynamic repertoire of semiotic resources (material bodily originated or artifacts, and non-material discourses, ideologies, ideas, beliefs), produced, embodied, enacted, and reshaped in social interaction and communication” (p. 46).

Multimodal pedagogies focus on interpreting culturally created meanings. Conceiving culture as a set of semiotic resources emanating from social communication implies that multimodal pedagogies are engaged with the work of culture and its meanings. Therefore, multimodal pedagogies critically address learners' semiotic resources, placing multimodal designs at the center of pedagogical action. The classroom becomes a place for critical/cultural engagement where learners

creatively manifest their identities (Álvarez Valencia & Valencia, 2023; Stein, 2004, 2008).

Multimodal pedagogies are linked to critical interculturality since they acknowledge the multiplicity of meanings emerging from cultural relationships. Of paramount importance is recognizing social issues and multiple perspectives on events and meanings. Integrating diverse viewpoints, agency, and critical perspectives through multimodal pedagogies promotes the interpretation, negotiation, and mediation of multimodal discourses (Álvarez Valencia, 2021; Stein, 2004), thereby connecting multimodal pedagogies with a critical intercultural perspective in ELT (Walsh, 2009). Multimodal pedagogies imply a critical comprehension of power relations and learners' cultural contexts (Archer, 2008; Harrop-Allin, 2011; Stein & Newfield, 2006; Thesen, 2001).

The connections between multimodal pedagogies and intercultural language teaching assign a major role to intercultural awareness, understood as “a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices, and frames of understanding can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication” (Baker, 2012, p. 66). There are three levels of intercultural awareness:

- Basic: elemental comprehension of the learners' communicative contexts in their L1 mainly.
- Advanced: deeper understanding of the relationship between language and culture.
- Intercultural awareness: the “fluid, hybrid, and emergent understanding of cultures and languages in intercultural communication needed for English used in global settings” (Baker, 2012, p. 67).

Here, the learners' conceptions of culture and intercultural relationships are discussed in light of the cognitive and pragmatic manifestations featured in the intercultural awareness levels.

Given the intercultural nature of multimodal pedagogies; the intercultural awareness affordances to understand multimodal forms, practices, and frames; and the importance of meaning-making and intercultural awareness in social interactions; we can argue that adopting multimodal pedagogies in the EFL classroom promotes intercultural awareness. Hence, this study focuses on the use of multimodal pedagogies as an alternative to promote intercultural awareness in an EFL class through the discussion of learners' changes in their conceptions of culture and intercultural relationships.

### Task-Based Learning Approach

This research adopts the tenets of task-based learning (TBL), focusing on task completion to develop communicative skills (Ellis, 2003). Task is conceived as a purposeful, tangible set of activities in which language is used to make meaning in authentic-like scenarios (Bygate et al., 2001). TBL is learner-centered and pursues meaning-making through situations that facilitate the emergence of language structures and functions (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Willis, 1996). TBL was used due to its potential to integrate multimodal activities, its connection with real situations, and its focus on meaning-making.

### Method

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative procedures and data to describe and interpret participants' views and experiences in the intervention (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). An action-research design was followed to explore alternatives to transform teaching practices and implement better strategies through subjects' participation (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014; Yuni & Urbano, 2005). This study embodies an attempt to change the contextual conditions that contribute to the neglect of intercultural awareness and multimodal pedagogies in the EFL classroom and to the lack of

spaces to promote learners' critical perspectives. By implementing a pedagogical intervention, this research highlights the enhancement of pedagogical practice through teachers' and students' agency.

### Context and Participants

This study was conducted at Universidad del Valle (Colombia) in the framework of an 18-week English course for general and academic purposes. The participants were 20 students (16 men and 4 women, ages 17–28) from low- to middle-socioeconomic backgrounds enrolled in diverse academic programs. The students and an under-18's guardian signed a consent form after being informed about the nature, scope, procedures, and purpose of the study. Ethical guidelines, anonymity, confidentiality, and learners' rights were always respected.

### Data Collection

One questionnaire, administered before and after the pedagogical intervention, was used to identify students' beliefs and practices related to intercultural awareness. The questionnaire consisted of 32 closed-ended questions (27 Likert-scale and five multiple-selection questions) divided into three sections: (a) conception of culture and intercultural relations; (b) the role of respect, acceptance, equality, and openness; and (c) nuances in various social groups. Each section was subdivided into two dimensions:

- cognitive: focused on students' ideas about intercultural awareness
- pragmatic: the behaviors that students felt they were able to perform

Only the questions related to the first section are examined here (five multiple-selection questions from the cognitive dimension and six Likert-scale questions from the pragmatic dimension).

This instrument was validated through experts' review and a pilot stage with 22 students from another English class. The pilot results showed that Cronbach's

alpha was obtained for sections two to six (over 0.7, the minimum value for validity). Cronbach's alpha was not applicable to Section 1 because it did not have a valuation scale. The questionnaire was delivered online and in Spanish to facilitate learners' understanding (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009).

The participants' multimodal products displayed their ideas, perceptions, and reflections throughout the pedagogical intervention. These productions were part of the course, and they were collected in English (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Activities From Pedagogical Intervention

Activity	Area	Type of production
Reading workshop	Culture and intercultural relationships	Written
Workshop video 1		Audio/written/visual
Drawing about culture		Visual/spatial
Memes about culture		Written/visual

After the pedagogical intervention, a focus group was implemented to gather the students' reflections, perceptions, and changes in ideas. The focus group protocol had 14 questions in Spanish, divided into the same three sections as in the questionnaire. This protocol's validity was established through peer review by two scholars and piloting with nine students from the same course in the previous academic period. Nine students voluntarily participated in four focus group sessions (total recording time: 3 hr 43 min).

### Data Analysis

Using the software JASP, data from the two instances of the questionnaire implementation were compared and analyzed through descriptive statistics

to find the frequency distribution (mean/standard deviation/median). A scale (Table 2) was designed to determine the approximate learners' intercultural awareness level. Although 20 participants were in the study, only 13 completed the two instances of the questionnaire.

Thematic analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was used for qualitative data (multimodal products and focus group transcriptions). A matrix of students' expected cognitive and pragmatic outcomes, based on Baker's (2012) model, was designed to identify manifestations of intercultural awareness. Elo et al.'s (2014) process was followed:

- preparation phase
- organization phase
- reporting phase

**Table 2.** Intercultural Awareness (IA) Scale

Area	Dimension	Scale
Conception of culture and intercultural relationships	Cognitive	1 = Low IA
		2 = Basic IA
		3 = High IA
	Pragmatic	1-2 = Low IA
		3-4 = Basic IA
		5-6 = High IA



After organizing and classifying qualitative data, students' voices were placed in the matrix (by instrument, participant, and task) according to Baker's intercultural awareness descriptors. Then, general trends in manifestations of intercultural awareness were identified.

A multimodal analysis, drawing on elements of Álvarez Valencia's (2016a) proposal and Kress's (2012) view of multimodal products, was developed to examine the connections between students' multimodal products and their semiotic meanings.

1. Semiotic resources and modes of communication were identified.
2. The visual elements of the students' products were examined (semiotic resources, modes of communication, type of image, visual content, position, color, etc.), along with their spatial distribution (text-image) within the multimodal composition, and the relationships (function, connection, purpose, intersemiotic) between the students' written answers and the visual elements in each multimodal product.
3. The students' salient ideas of culture and intercultural relationships were examined and compared with the theory.

After running these analyses, triangulation was carried out. The manifestations of intercultural awareness dimensions in the qualitative data were compared with the quantitative data, and the text-image connection in the students' multimodal productions was examined. Repeated cross-instrument reference and continuous revision were used to validate the analysis.

### Pedagogical Intervention

The pedagogical intervention lasted 16 weeks and aimed at developing learners' intercultural awareness through the analysis and design of multimodal products. Three areas of intercultural awareness were addressed, but due to the scope of this article, only the first section

(i.e., concept of culture and intercultural relationships) of the pedagogical intervention is described. This section (lasting four weeks) revolved around culture as a dynamic, multidimensional, and multimodal phenomenon (Baker, 2012). The topics of this unit were:

- concept of culture
- diverse views of culture
- presence of culture in our routines
- personal/multimodal representations of culture
- areas of cultural manifestations

These topics were integrated into the syllabus and addressed through the exploration of videos, readings, visits to some campus spaces, analysis of local cultural behaviors, and class discussions. Following a TBL approach, students examined their views of culture through the completion of tasks (see Table 1):

*Reading workshop:* Learners read a text on the concept, nature, and manifestations of culture; analyzed their everyday behaviors rooted in their cultural milieu; and wrote their answers after a class discussion.

*Workshop video 1:* Students watched a video about a situation of discrimination. They examined the video, identified some cultural elements and social issues, and took a stance regarding the issue discussed.

*Drawing about culture:* After prior activities and class discussions, learners draw their concept of culture.

*Memes about culture:* Students designed a meme that combined visual and linguistic elements to represent their academic-cultural contexts. They selected common college/everyday activities to portray their views on culture, using humor and satire.

These tasks incorporated hybrid use of modes of communication, transmodal processes (Álvarez Valencia, 2021), a focus on culture, meaning creation, and a critical approach to analyzing cultural phenomena. These tasks followed Stein's (2004) multimodal pedagogies assumptions and were compatible with Álvarez Valencia's (2021) proposal.

## Results and Discussion

This section depicts changes in students' conceptions of culture and intercultural relations before, during, and after the intervention based on multimodal pedagogies.

### Before the Pedagogical Intervention

Data from the initial administration of the questionnaire, at cognitive ( $N = 13$ ,  $M = 2.723$ ,  $SD = 0.265$ ) and pragmatic ( $N = 13$ ,  $M = 5.354$ ,  $SD = 0.623$ ) levels revealed that students had prior understanding about the multidimensional, dynamic, and complex nature of culture and intercultural relations. In the pragmatic dimension, learners recognized that cultures can be diverse, changing, and encompass several dimensions, and identified elements that facilitate intercultural relations.

In the cognitive dimension, the mean reveals a trend towards a high intercultural awareness level, which indicates that, from the beginning, students were aware of certain intercultural elements. At the pragmatic level, the mean showed a high intercultural awareness level. Initial consciousness of intercultural phenomena facilitated knowledge acquisition, identification of deeper cultural manifestations at the local level, and development of reference frameworks to examine intercultural elements. These results echo the learners' products.

### During the Pedagogical Intervention

Although the preliminary values from the questionnaire show high understanding of intercultural phenomena, it was through the pedagogical intervention that students found spaces for deeper understanding and debate about intercultural phenomena. Students discussed, read, and pondered the nature of culture in order to construct some definitions based on their own experiences:

Culture is customs, *a way of life that depends on the social group where you were born, grew, and developed.*  
Culture forms the being and the way in which others

perceive you; therefore, the diversity of culture makes us understand that there is much to learn, know, and respect in and outside our environment. A daily example in our Colombian culture, and especially in Cali, is listening to the person who sells *mazamorra* and *champús* in the streets, even if you don't buy it, you recognize it and, consciously or unconsciously, becomes part of the culture [sic]. (Student 2, Reading workshop)

Culture is the union of family, social, and national patterns, *it is also the set of educational and traditional knowledge that identifies us personally or in groups* and that manifests in action. A very simple example of Colombian culture is that we greet people without knowing them; can be the neighbor or when [you] enter a place or simply if someone looks at us, we respond with a greeting [sic]. (Student 5, Reading workshop)

Students reported their personal definitions of culture (Task 1), stressing its social/multidimensional nature. When Student 1 and 5 list cultural elements related to people's social identity (emphasis in the excerpts), they highlight the role of culture as a reference frame emerging from social interactions (Fernández Benavides et al., 2024; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) and the interpretation of cultural manifestations (traditions, behaviors, lifestyles) which turn into semiotic resources (Álvarez Valencia, 2021, 2022). Here, culture refers to practices such as traditions and behaviors (family, society, nation) that shape students' lives and identities. These answers explain how culture shapes individuals' behaviors by stressing how it transforms people's perceptions of others and influences their actions.

At the pragmatic level, Student 1 and 5 offer examples of cultural manifestations in their social contexts. They mention two dimensions of culture: products (*mazamorra*) and practices (greeting people; Moran, 2001). Interpreting these cultural semiotic resources (Álvarez Valencia & Valencia, 2023) is important because they shape people's identities when communities adopt them (consciously/unconsciously) to interact



and interpret the world. The sounds used by traditional drinks' sellers of *mazamorra* or *champús*, constitute cultural semiotic resources that, from a multimodal perspective, contribute to making meaning beyond the verbal dimension and symbolize a cultural notion of foods.

From a critical perspective, stressing the cultural role of traditional street food and its consumption from street sellers ("even if you don't buy it, you recognize it and, consciously or unconsciously, becomes part of the culture [*sic*]") reflects a political act and an instance of cultural resistance showing a tacit routinary preference to consume street food outside large market chains. This is highlighted when Student 2 suggests that buying these foods from street sellers instead of big markets is part of her own culture. Subjects assign value to cultural semiotic resources (*mazamorra* sellers' sounds) that motivate people to buy food from street sellers and become key to uniting individuals around their communities.

Parallel to the concept of culture, students recognized the complex nature of intercultural relations and the need for mediation and negotiation:

I worked at . . . a famous and expensive hotel. . . . The manager was from Cali, . . . she was proactive and smart for business, but as a human, she was a monster. One time, she called [me and] my boss and said [to me], "I need to talk to you, I don't want to make you uncomfortable, but you have to change your accent." . . . The [manager] said that my Nariño<sup>1</sup> accent didn't sound nice or serious, so I needed to change my accent or try to speak without accent [*sic*]. . . . I was young and I was forced to do that and of course I didn't know that this situation was discrimination and labor abuse. (Video workshop/Student 2).

Student 2 reported an experience of discrimination similar to the one analyzed in the video from Task 2, in

which an Afrodescendant girl felt rejected due to her physical features. Adding to the disrespect for diverse linguistic/regional varieties, the manager failed to negotiate or mediate, leading to administrative and cultural discrimination. Student 2 identifies that language is one of the manifestations of regional culture and how intercultural relations handled without mediation and negotiation lead to discrimination and abuse. Understanding the complexities of intercultural relations is part of intercultural awareness, and it implies learners' recognition of social issues and discrimination. Multimodal pedagogies encourage students to take critical stances and agency towards social phenomena (Álvarez Valencia, 2022; Stein, 2008). Through the analysis of multimodal documents, transmodal processes, and with the support of visual elements, students interpreted situations in multimodal L2 documents, related them to their own lives, and took a critical position. These actions manifest intercultural awareness (Baker, 2012), revealing the potential of multimodal pedagogies to go beyond culturalist, unquestionable, and unproblematic views of culture that challenge stereotyped notions of social relationships. This example shows that multimodal pedagogies drive understanding of the nature of unequal relationships and a critical position on social issues.

At the beginning of the intervention, learners drew their concept of culture (Figures 1 and 2). Following Álvarez Valencia's (2016a) analysis proposal, both drawings employ diverse cultural semiotic resources (symbols, flags, people, animals, words) organized in modes of communication: linguistic, visual, and spatial (see Table 3). These elements' intersemiotic relationship reflects semiotic cohesion by presenting culture as a multidimensional phenomenon. Figures 1 and 2 display several items representing students' cultural identity (people from diverse ethnic, racial, and national origins) and elements symbolizing cultural manifestations (objects, symbols) related to everyday behaviors or products (music, dance, national features).

<sup>1</sup> One of the departments of Colombia, located in the southwest of the country.

**Figure 1. Drawing About Culture (Student 10)**



**Figure 2. Drawing About Culture (Student 6)**



Although the students' idea of culture in their drawings still reflects a monolithic/culturalist perspective linked to national attributes and surface elements (cultural semiotic resources; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), learners interpret how culture goes beyond one single manifestation. Students understood that culture is a living entity that is experienced through everyday actions, cultural semiotic resources, and multimodal products, which shape people's views. These ideas are a major

achievement in Baker's (2012) proposal. Implementing multimodal pedagogies through the interpretation of cultural semiotic resources and using transmodalization to represent a concept led learners to consider the nature, embodiment, and composition of culture. Despite the students' limited views of culture, focused mainly on tangible elements and products, their perspectives evolved to critically explore other expressions through multimodal products (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Meme About Culture (Group 1)



Figure 3 is a meme designed by some students representing their own culture and focuses on a cultural phenomenon on campus. Figure 3 foregrounds some recent processes of revitalization of native languages/cultures. Using the template of a popular meme featuring two women on the left (one arguing and the other appeasing her) and a cat on the right (mocking the yelling woman), students humorously reported that cultural revitalization takes center stage in Cali. In the meme, the woman says, "You said we would get engaged," and the cat replies, "to recover our own language: *Achichucas* here in Cali." This meme shows the

growing interest among Indigenous communities in Cali, particularly within the university, in socially/linguistically highlighting their own cultural features. The meme conveys the intention of reviving Indigenous languages: the expression *achichucas* (an interjection coming from Quechua that denotes hot temperature), which highlights Cali's hot weather. Figure 3 illustrates how recovering or integrating elements from Indigenous languages (or other Colombian regions) might look (*Achichucas* here in Cali = It's so hot here in Cali!). Using visual-cultural semiotic resources, linguistic elements, and an interjection from Nariño, the students

**Table 3.** Multimodal Elements in Figures 1, 2, and 3

Multimodal product	Semiotic resources	Mode of communication
Figure 1	Word culture	Linguistic
	Planet Earth	Visual
	People	
	Flags	
	Animals	
	Plants/mountains	
	Objects	
	Symbols	
	Background colors	Visual/spatial
	Distribution	Spatial
Figure 2	Word culture	Linguistic
	People	Visual
	Pre-colonial craftwork	
	Background colors	Visual/spatial
	Distribution	Spatial
Figure 3	Ladies' picture and gestures	Visual
	Cat's picture and background	
	Text on left panel	Linguistic
	Text on right panel	
	Distribution	Spatial

analyzed how cultural/linguistic representations are changing in Cali, the importance of diverse linguistic expressions, and the role of recovering or maintaining one's own heritage through everyday actions. This representation aligns with Stein's (2008) assumptions, showing that meaning making relies on learners' sociocultural conditions, is multimodal, action-driven,

and expressed in terms of transformation, creativity, and design. Portraying these assumptions is linked to manifestations of intercultural awareness, including the recognition of cultural symbolic patterns and the ways they are represented; how learners see different geographical voices in Colombia; the multiple cultural identities beyond national terms; and the awareness of



communicative practices and reference frameworks related to cultures.

Figure 3 exemplifies how learners achieved Levels 2 and 3 in Baker's (2012) model through a multimodal product, combining foreign mainstream elements with their own views and experiences at college. Recent research shows that Indigenous groups within Universidad del Valle are leading actions to achieve socio-academic integration through the recognition of their cultural heritage and participation in various university contexts (Álvarez Valencia, 2022; Álvarez Valencia & Miranda, 2022). This finding resonates with national research that stresses the need to adopt policies that account for Colombia's complex cultural spectrum (Miranda & Valencia Giraldo, 2023; Valdiri Vinasco et al., 2024).

### After the Pedagogical Intervention

The final administration of the questionnaire showed stability in the mean values of intercultural awareness: cognitive level ( $N = 13$ ,  $M = 2.800$ ,  $SD = 0.245$ ); pragmatic level ( $N = 13$ ,  $M = 5.462$ ,  $SD = 0.450$ ). There was no decrease in the mean at the cognitive (2.8) and pragmatic (5.4) levels, indicating that students maintained high intercultural awareness levels after the intervention. The values before and after the pedagogical intervention do not imply that students' understanding of intercultural phenomena during the course stagnated. Although these results could cast doubt on the intervention's impact due to the low variation in questionnaire results (before/after), qualitative data provide a more nuanced understanding of the intercultural dimension and its practical manifestations.

During the focus groups, students were asked whether they agreed that culture is static and defined by the country in which someone lives. Student 3 replied:

For me culture is not static, . . . you can see right now the thing about bullfights. People thought, "that was part

of the culture," . . . and now there are many people who don't agree. Let's say you no longer include that within your culture . . . that's why I say culture is not static. And I don't think it's defined by the country we live in. It contributes to something, . . . like we are Colombians; we go abroad, and by the way we express ourselves and behave, [people] will say: "These are Colombians!" But it is not necessary, because we can [live] a long time in another country and . . . we continue with our culture.

Students were also asked whether they considered culture to consist of a single element or more, and which elements they considered. For Student 11, "culture is represented by several components: communication, religion, ways of expressing themselves, gastronomy. Everything is intrinsically related to culture and where we come from." As for the role of mediation and negotiation when interacting with people from different cultures, this same student replied:

I think they are fundamental in intercultural relations . . . [for example,] smiling at people who greet you; or simply for cordiality, you always show something like a kind of smile. But in other cultures, that is not well seen, even the handshake or the cheek kiss. Then I think the most important thing is to first set boundaries through mediation and negotiation to establish what things [should] be done.

These examples reveal how students explored the dynamic nature of culture, as reflected in the situations they discussed. Student 3 notes that culture is not static and cites the example of bullfights, which went from being a prestigious cultural practice to being rejected in Cali. Student 3 examines culture as a phenomenon beyond the notions of nation-state and how, although there is a sociocultural force behind the configuration of countries, they do not completely determine people's cultural identity because culture is dynamic, and it adapts to the various manifestations, interactions, and relationships among people, bringing their

individual experiences and identity traits. This shows how intercultural awareness appears in the students' discourse, as advanced cultural awareness implies "cultural understanding as provisional and open to revision" (Baker, 2012, p. 66).

This recognition at the cognitive/pragmatic levels is enriched by Student 11's response regarding culture, which embraces many elements, such as practices (communication, expressions), perspectives (religion), and products (gastronomy). Baker (2012) mentions that basic cultural awareness requires seeing "culture as a set of shared behaviours, beliefs, and values" (p. 66).

Student 11 identifies the connection between these cultural dimensions and their localized origin in the community, explaining that mediation and negotiation are necessary to establish intercultural relations. He describes how everyday cultural behaviors (smiling, shaking hands, kissing on the cheek) can be inappropriate in other contexts. Student 11 interprets mediation as a behavior that goes hand in hand with limits and norms for intercultural understanding.

Recognizing these realities in students' voices indicates a deep level of analysis and understanding of intercultural phenomena. For Baker (2012), awareness of these factors ("culturally based frames of reference, forms, and communicative practices," p. 66) is paramount for achieving intercultural awareness through connection with diverse cultures, given their emergent and hybrid nature. Intercultural awareness manifestations were identified at the cognitive and pragmatic levels through the explicit description of ideas and perceptions, the explanation of examples of cultural change, the recognition of diverse cultural dimensions, and the establishment of boundaries in intercultural relations.

## Conclusions

This study attempted to counter the omission of the roles that intercultural awareness and multimodal pedagogies play in EFL. It addressed the lack of spaces to promote learners' critical perspectives. After a peda-

gogical intervention based on multimodal pedagogies, data revealed that learners changed their ideas about culture and intercultural relationships throughout the pedagogical experience and showed how integrating multimodal pedagogies and intercultural awareness fosters the development of intercultural skills and critical views in language teaching/learning.

Before the intervention, the initial administration of the questionnaire showed learners' high cognitive and pragmatic levels of intercultural awareness. This promoted the development of more complex and nuanced understandings of intercultural phenomena.

During the intervention, learners represented their ideas about the concept of culture and examined some cultural behaviors from their college life. Multimodal products revealed that although learners associated the concept of culture with culturalist and monolithic views in their drawings, they identified its multidimensional nature. The discussion of experiences and the recognition of social issues were major features of students' voices and of the need to adopt critical stances towards inequality and discrimination. These ideas evolved when learners designed a meme portraying a complex cultural phenomenon, such as the revitalization of Colombian Indigenous languages and cultures. Students performed a critical and nuanced perspective of culture as a social and multimodal entity.

After the intervention, although the results coming from the two instances of the questionnaire did not show a meaningful difference, qualitative data illustrated the students' reflections and how their conceptions and interpretations of culture and intercultural phenomena became more complex by identifying the dynamic, multifaceted, and relative nature of culture and how its manifestations go beyond the realm of national or geographical representations. Finally, students discussed the roles of mediation and negotiation in facilitating intercultural relationships.

Findings reflected the impact of a multimodal approach in EFL. Results echoed Stein's (2004) assump-



tions of multimodal pedagogies and showed how the multimodal dimension in EFL promotes intercultural skills. This study discusses how multimodal pedagogies and intercultural language teaching facilitate the adoption of critical views of social phenomena and bring social realities closer to the language classroom. There are still several inquiry areas to address, such as the integration of multimodal approaches in ELT curricula, the development of frameworks for multimodal pedagogies at higher education, and the analysis of pedagogical proposals integrating multimodal pedagogies to enhance intercultural language teaching.

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