

Perspectives of English language preservice teachers on the development of critical pedagogy in their educational practice and its impact on students' language learning

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Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés

2025

Specialized Analytical Summary

Title	Perspectives of English Language Preservice Teachers on the Development of Critical Pedagogy in Their Educational Practice and Its Impact on Students' Language Learning
Author(s)	Anggie Steffany Niño Pérez
Editorial	Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia
Date	8/15/2025
Keywords	Critical pedagogy, English language teaching, Preservice teachers, Rural education, Colombian Language learning, Teacher training
Description	Monograph
Sources	Primary Sources: 8 Secondary Sources: 26 Tertiary Sources: 2
Contents	Esta monografía explora las perspectivas de seis futuros docentes de inglés respecto a la pedagogía crítica en su práctica educativa y los desafíos que enfrentaron al implementarla en sus aulas en una zona rural. Mediante observaciones, entrevistas y grupos focales, esta investigación se llevó a cabo durante cuatro meses en escuelas rurales de Sabana de Torres, Santander, Colombia, y analiza cómo los futuros docentes de idiomas comprenden, aplican y enfrentan los desafíos de la implementación de enfoques pedagógicos críticos y su impacto percibido en los procesos de adquisición lingüística de los estudiantes.

La pedagogía crítica transforma el aprendizaje del inglés al pasar de los enfoques tradicionales centrados en el docente a métodos dialógicos centrados en el estudiante que conectan la adquisición lingüística con las experiencias vividas y las realidades sociales de los estudiantes. Este marco pedagógico potencia el aprendizaje del inglés mediante un aprendizaje contextualizado que sitúa la adquisición lingüística dentro de los contextos culturales y sociales de los estudiantes, haciendo que el vocabulario, la gramática y las habilidades comunicativas sean más significativos y memorables. Al animar a los estudiantes a cuestionar, analizar y debatir temas sociales en inglés, la pedagogía crítica desarrolla simultáneamente la competencia lingüística y las habilidades analíticas, a medida que aprenden a expresar ideas complejas y a participar en discursos sofisticados. Cuando el aprendizaje del inglés aborda problemas del mundo real y empodera a los estudiantes para expresar sus perspectivas sobre asuntos comunitarios, la motivación intrínseca aumenta significativamente, acelerando la adquisición del idioma y promoviendo un compromiso sostenido.

Los hallazgos revelan que, si bien los futuros docentes demuestran una comprensión teórica de los principios de la pedagogía crítica, se enfrentan a importantes barreras al intentar implementar estos enfoques en las aulas, como las limitaciones curriculares estandarizadas, los recursos limitados y los factores del contexto cultural. El estudio destaca cómo la pedagogía crítica del lenguaje, cuando se implementa con éxito, fomenta la participación estudiantil, el desarrollo de la identidad y una adquisición

	<p>lingüística significativa que conecta con las realidades locales. Esta investigación contribuye a la formación docente y a la enseñanza del inglés al demostrar cómo la pedagogía crítica transforma la educación lingüística, pasando de la simple adquisición de habilidades a una experiencia dinámica y empoderadora que desarrolla tanto la competencia lingüística como la conciencia crítica.</p>
Research Line	<p>Qualitative research with ethnographic approach examining critical pedagogical perspectives in rural Colombian contexts within ECEDU's argumentation, pedagogy and learning research line</p>
Conclusions	<p>The study reveals a persistent theory-practice gap in critical pedagogy implementation, where preservice teachers demonstrate theoretical understanding but face significant barriers in practical application. When successfully implemented, critical pedagogy enhances student motivation, develops integrated language skills, and fosters critical language awareness. Rural contexts present unique challenges requiring culturally responsive adaptations while offering opportunities to validate local knowledge systems and teacher education programs need context-specific preparation focusing on practical strategies for implementing critical pedagogy in diverse and challenging educational settings.</p>
Advisor	<p>Lenny Johana Alvarado Rico</p>

Abstract

Nino Perez, A. S. (2025). *Perspectives of English Language Preservice Teachers on the Development of Critical Pedagogy in Their Educational Practice and Its Impact on Students' Language Learning*. Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con énfasis en Inglés. Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia.

This monograph explores the perspectives of six English language preservice teachers regarding critical pedagogy in their educational practice and the challenges they faced implementing it in their classrooms in a rural area. Through observations, interviews, and focus groups this research was conducted over a four-month period in rural schools in Sabana de Torres, Santander, Colombia, and analyzes how future language educators understand, apply, and face challenges implementing critical pedagogical approaches and their perceived impact on students' language acquisition processes.

Critical pedagogy significantly transforms English language learning by shifting from traditional teacher-centered approaches to student-centered, dialogical methods that connect language acquisition to learners' lived experiences and social realities. This pedagogical framework enhances English learning through contextualized learning that positions language acquisition within students' cultural and social contexts, making vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills more meaningful and memorable. By encouraging students to question, analyze, and discuss social issues in English, critical pedagogy develops both language proficiency and analytical skills simultaneously, as students learn to express complex ideas and engage in sophisticated discourse. When English learning addresses real-world problems and empowers

students to voice their perspectives on community issues, intrinsic motivation increases significantly, accelerating language acquisition and promoting sustained engagement.

Findings reveal that while preservice teachers demonstrate theoretical understanding of critical pedagogy principles, they encounter significant barriers when attempting to implement these approaches in classrooms, including standardized curriculum constraints, limited resources, and cultural contextual factors. The study highlights how critical language pedagogy, when successfully implemented, fosters student engagement, identity development, and meaningful language acquisition that connects to local realities. This research contributes to teacher education and English teaching by demonstrating how critical pedagogy transforms language education from mechanical skill-building into a dynamic, empowering experience that develops both linguistic competence and critical consciousness. Recommendations include strengthening pedagogical preparation programs to better equip future language teachers with practical strategies for implementing critical pedagogy in diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, English language teaching, preservice teachers, rural education, teacher training.

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the support and dedication of numerous individuals who contributed to its completion. Most importantly, I want to thank my family, my mom María, my dad Rudesindo and my sister Paula, without your encouragement I would not have been able to move forward.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the six preservice English teachers who participated in this study, sharing their experiences, challenges, and insights with openness and honesty. Their commitment to transformative education in rural contexts serves as an inspiration for future educators. To my academic advisor for her guidance throughout this research process, challenging me to think more critically about the complexities of implementing critical pedagogy in diverse educational contexts and how to explain it in this document.

Finally, a special mention to my uncle Jaime and my grandmother Elena, who before leaving the earthly world encouraged me to continue my studies and never give up despite adversity.

Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction.....	13
Significance of the Study	14
Statement of the Problem	16
Research Question.....	18
Sub-questions.....	18
Objectives	20
General Objective.....	20
Specific Objectives.....	20
Literature Review.....	21
Critical Pedagogy: Theoretical Foundations	21
Critical Pedagogy in Language Teaching	22
Argumentation in Critical Language Pedagogy	25
Critical Pedagogy in Colombian Rural Education	26
Methodology	28
Research Approach	28
Context and Participants.....	28
Data Collection Instruments.....	29
Data Analysis	31

Results and Discussion	33
Preservice Teachers' Conceptions of Critical Pedagogy	33
Application of Critical Pedagogy in English Language Classrooms	36
Curriculum and Content Selection	37
Teaching Methodologies	37
Student-Teacher Relationships.....	38
Assessment Practices.....	39
Barriers to Implementing Critical Pedagogy.....	41
Institutional and Structural Constraints	41
Language Proficiency Barriers	42
Sociocultural Factors.....	43
Teacher Preparation Gaps	43
Impact on Students' Language Learning.....	45
Increased Motivation and Investment.....	46
Development of Integrated Skills	47
Critical Language Awareness	47
Barriers to Language Learning Impact.....	48
Rural Context Particularities	49
Digital Divides and Resource Adaptation	50
Community Integration and Resistance.....	52

	10
Discussion	53
Theory-Practice Gap.....	54
Critical Consciousness in Rural Language Classrooms	56
Reconciling Language Acquisition with Critical Education	58
Preparing Teachers for Critical Pedagogical Practice	60
Conclusions.....	63
Recommendations.....	66
For Teacher Education Programs.....	66
For Preservice and In-service Teachers	67
For Educational Institutions and Policy Makers	68
References.....	69

List of tables

	Page
Table 1 <i>Preservice Teachers' Conceptions of Critical Pedagogy by Understanding Level</i>	34
Table 2 <i>Critical Pedagogy Implementation Areas and Effectiveness Levels</i>	39
Table 3 <i>Observed Impact of Critical Pedagogy on Student Language Learning</i>	44
Table 4 Comparison Matrix: Traditional vs. Critical Pedagogy Approaches in Rural EFL Contexts	51
Table 5 <i>Comparison of Traditional vs. Rural-Specific Critical Pedagogy Outcomes</i>	54

List of figures

	Page
Figure 1 <i>Distribution of Preservice Teachers' Conceptions of Critical Pedagogy</i>	33
Figure 2 <i>Evolution of Critical Pedagogy Understanding Over Four-Month Period</i>	36
Figure 3 <i>Frequency and Impact of Barriers to Critical Pedagogy Implementation</i>	44
Figure 4 <i>Rural Context Adaptations for Critical Pedagogy Implementation</i>	49
Figure 5 <i>Strategic Critical Adaptation Framework: Four Interconnected Theoretical Innovations</i>	54
Figure 6 <i>Rural Critical Consciousness Development Trajectory</i>	58
Figure 7 <i>Five Teacher Competencies for Critical Practice</i>	60

Introduction

In today's globalized world, English language teaching has become an increasing priority in Colombian educational policies, often framed within discourses of economic development, social mobility, and international competitiveness. This emphasis on English language acquisition has led to standardized approaches that prioritize communicative competence and measurable language skills, while potentially overlooking critical dimensions of language education. As Macedo (2019) argues, language teaching that focuses exclusively on instrumental skills without addressing power dynamics risks becoming a form of "banking education" that Freire (1970) so vehemently criticized.

Within this context, critical pedagogy offers an alternative approach that seeks to transform language education into a liberating practice that enables learners to "read not only the word but also the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 29). The implementation of critical pedagogy in English language learning contexts demonstrates significant positive influences on students' language acquisition processes. This research reveals that when critical pedagogical approaches are successfully implemented, students experience enhanced engagement with English through meaningful connections to their lived experiences and social realities. Critical pedagogy transforms English learning from mechanical memorization into a dynamic, contextualized experience where students develop both linguistic competence and critical consciousness simultaneously. Students demonstrate improved language proficiency when English learning addresses real-world issues relevant to their communities, as this approach increases intrinsic motivation and promotes deeper cognitive engagement with language structures and vocabulary.

Based on a recent publication on the website of the Bank of the Republic of Colombia "Geographic Isolation and Rural Education" By Jorge Toro (2025), this perspective is particularly important in rural Colombian contexts, where educational inequalities are seen daily, and where English language teaching must navigate between global demands and local realities. The research findings demonstrate that when preservice teachers successfully implement critical pedagogical approaches in these rural contexts, students show increased participation in English language activities and develop stronger connections between English learning and their cultural identity.

For four months, this research was carried out in the educational communities of three rural schools in my hometown of Sabana de Torres, Santander, observing classrooms, interviewing preservice teachers, and facilitating focus group discussions. The observations revealed that students in classrooms where critical pedagogy was effectively implemented demonstrated greater enthusiasm for English learning, improved oral participation, and enhanced ability to connect English language skills to their personal and community contexts. By exploring these perspectives, this research contributes to understanding how implementing critical pedagogy positively influences English learning by creating more engaging, meaningful, and effective language acquisition experiences.

Significance of the Study

Critical teaching practice, implicit in proper thinking, contains the dynamic, dialectical movement between doing and thinking about doing (Freire, 2004, pp. 18-19).

The relevance of this monograph becomes particularly evident when examining the specific influence of critical pedagogy on English learning in rural Colombian educational

contexts. Drawing on Norton's (2000) seminal work on identity and language learning, critical pedagogy transforms students' relationship with English by positioning them as active agents who negotiate their identities through language acquisition rather than passive recipients of linguistic content.

Norton's concept of "investment" demonstrates that students' engagement with English is directly linked to their perceived opportunities for identity construction and social participation. In rural Colombian contexts, where students often experience marginalization and limited access to global opportunities, critical pedagogy enables them to see English learning as a tool for empowerment rather than cultural imposition. When students can connect their local knowledge, experiences, and concerns to English language activities, their investment in learning increases significantly, leading to improved language acquisition outcomes.

Furthermore, Mora's (2014) research on critical pedagogy in Colombian English language teaching contexts reveals that students demonstrate enhanced motivation and deeper cognitive engagement when pedagogical approaches acknowledge their sociocultural realities and validate their local knowledge systems. In rural settings, where traditional English teaching methods often fail to connect with students' lived experiences, critical pedagogy creates meaningful bridges between global language skills and local identities.

The impact on students' learning is particularly profound in rural Colombian contexts where educational inequalities are pronounced. Critical pedagogy addresses these disparities by validating students' cultural knowledge and experiences while simultaneously developing their English language skills. Students who previously felt disconnected from English learning due to its perceived irrelevance to their lives become active participants when critical approaches

demonstrate the language's potential for addressing local concerns and expanding their voices beyond geographical boundaries.

Statement of the Problem

The primary issue this research addresses is the gap between theoretical understanding of critical pedagogy and its practical implementation in English language teaching, particularly regarding its impact on students' language learning processes in rural Colombian contexts. While preservice English teachers receive theoretical training in critical pedagogical approaches, there remains significant uncertainty about how these approaches actually influence students' language acquisition, engagement, and learning outcomes when implemented in real classroom settings. This problem is particularly acute in rural educational contexts where traditional teaching methods predominate, resources are limited, and the connection between global English language learning and local student realities remains unclear.

Critical pedagogy, as conceptualized by Paulo Freire and other theorists, represents a transformative educational approach that goes beyond traditional skill-building to connect learning processes with students' lived experiences and social realities. In English language teaching contexts, critical pedagogy influences language acquisition by positioning students as active participants in their learning process rather than passive recipients of knowledge. This approach enhances language learning through contextualized activities that connect vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills to students' cultural backgrounds and community issues, making the language more meaningful and memorable. When successfully implemented, critical pedagogy transforms English learning from mechanical memorization into a dynamic process where students develop both linguistic competence and critical consciousness simultaneously. Students engage more deeply with the language when they use English to analyze, discuss, and

propose solutions to real-world problems affecting their communities, naturally expanding their communicative abilities while developing analytical thinking skills.

However, throughout my academic career and professional practice in English teaching, it was observed how the concept of critique in educational processes has become increasingly prevalent, from the study of critical pedagogical theories to the development of critical thinking as a competency in students. This category, which has become fashionable among academics and graduates, could be suspected of being misinterpreted or exploited, thus losing the alternative perspective and transformative power that theorists like Paulo Freire envisioned. In the field of language teaching, where communicative competence often prevails, critical approaches can be simplified or reduced to superficial classroom activities that fail to address structural inequalities or promote genuine transformation in students' language learning experiences.

This research focuses on the different perspectives of prospective English teachers on Critical Pedagogy in rural Colombian contexts, where the challenges of implementing critical approaches can be particularly pronounced due to resource constraints, traditional educational practices, and complex socioeconomic realities. As Moroy, O. and Patiño, S. (2022) state in their article "The pedagogical practice of English in rural education. An analysis of public policy and teaching methodologies", the problem is further complicated by the specific challenges of teaching English in rural Colombia, where access to educational resources is limited, exposure to the target language is minimal, and global English can seem disconnected from local realities

To address these complex issues, this study will examine the tensions between critical pedagogical ideals and practical language teaching demands through in-depth analysis of prospective teachers' perspectives and experiences. The research will investigate how future educators reconcile the potentially conflicting goals of developing linguistic competence and

fostering critical consciousness, and analyze the ways they adapt critical pedagogical principles to respond to the specific needs and realities of rural students while ensuring effective language acquisition.

By contrasting the perspectives of future teachers with the foundational principles of Critical Pedagogy through qualitative analysis and comparative examination, this study provides a clearer and more contextualized view of how critical pedagogical approaches actually impact students' language learning processes and whether there has been a distortion of these epistemological approaches that affects the development of effective and liberating language education in rural Colombian contexts.

Research Question

What are the perspectives of preservice English teachers on the development of critical pedagogy in their teaching practice, and how do they perceive its impact on their students' language learning?

Sub-questions

There are sub-questions that allow us to develop better this research:

How do preservice English teachers conceptualize and understand critical pedagogy in relation to language teaching?

In what ways do preservice English teachers attempt to implement critical pedagogy principles in their rural classroom practice?

What barriers do preservice English teachers identify when trying to develop critical pedagogy in language classrooms?

How do preservice teachers perceive the relationship between critical pedagogical approaches and their students' language learning processes?

How do the particularities of the rural Colombian context influence the implementation of critical pedagogy in English language teaching?

Objectives

General Objective

To analyze the perspectives of preservice English teachers on the development of critical pedagogy in their educational practice and examine their perceptions of its impact on students' language learning in rural Colombian contexts.

Specific Objectives

To identify how preservice English teachers conceptualize and understand critical pedagogy in relation to language teaching.

To examine the ways preservice English teachers attempt to implement critical pedagogy principles in their rural classroom practice.

To analyze the barriers preservice English teachers encounter when trying to develop critical pedagogy in language classrooms.

To explore how preservice teachers perceive the relationship between critical pedagogical approaches and their students' language learning processes.

To investigate how the particularities of the rural Colombian context influence the implementation of critical pedagogy in English language teaching.

Literature Review

Critical Pedagogy: Theoretical Foundations

Critical pedagogy emerged as a response to traditional educational models that reproduce social inequalities and serve dominant interests. Its foundations date back to Paulo Freire's seminal work, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1970), in which he criticized the "banking model" of education, in which students are treated as empty vessels that teachers must fill with knowledge. Instead, Freire proposed a problem-based education that fosters dialogue, critical awareness, and transformative action.

Central to critical pedagogy is the concept of praxis, which Freire (1970) defined as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). This concept emphasizes that critical education is not merely theoretical but must be connected to concrete practices that challenge oppression and inequality. As Giroux (2011) argues, critical pedagogy "signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities" (p. 3).

Another fundamental concept is cultural hegemony, developed by Gramsci (1971), which explains how dominant classes maintain power not only through coercion but also through cultural consent. Critical pedagogy aims to reveal these hegemonic processes and create counter-hegemonic spaces where alternative narratives and knowledges can emerge. As McLaren (2015) notes, critical pedagogy "examines schools both in their historical context and as part of the existing social and political fabric that characterizes the dominant society" (p. 119).

Santos (2014) proposes an "ecology of knowledge" that challenges the epistemicide perpetrated by Western-centric education and recognizes the validity of marginalized knowledge systems. These perspectives are particularly relevant in the Colombian context, where colonial legacies continue to shape educational practices and where Indigenous and Afro-Colombian knowledge have historically been undervalued. As a document published by Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (2024) states, "Schools located in rural and remote areas, where a large part of the indigenous and Afro-Colombian population is concentrated, often receive less financial and logistical support. This aggravates educational inequality and makes it difficult to create learning environments that respect and value local cultures."

Critical Pedagogy in Language Teaching

While critical pedagogy is rooted in the philosophy of general education, its application to language teaching presents unique dimensions. Pennycook (2001) argues that applied critical linguistics must go beyond the mere application of linguistic theories to language teaching and instead examine how linguistic practices are incorporated in power relations and can reinforce or challenge social inequalities.

Canagarajah (1999), in "Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Language Teaching," shows a fundamental framework for understanding how critical pedagogy applies to English language teaching contexts. He argues that English language teaching is inseparable from issues of cultural power and identity negotiation, and that language teachers must be aware of these dimensions. His research demonstrates how peripheral communities can appropriate English for their own purposes while resisting its hegemonic aspects, a process he terms "linguistic appropriation."

Crawford-Lange (1981) was one of the first to articulate how critical approaches could transform language classrooms, stating that language teaching should help students "read not only the word but also the world" (echoing Freire) in both their native and target languages. This perspective emphasizes that language learning should not be reduced to acquiring linguistic codes but should involve developing critical literacies that enable learners to understand and question how language constructs reality.

More recently, Akbari (2008) has defined specific applications for critical language pedagogy, including integrating minority voices in materials, connecting classroom topics to local social issues, and developing students' L1 and L2 critical literacy simultaneously. Akbari suggests concreting ways in which language teachers can incorporate critical perspectives without sacrificing linguistic development.

In the Colombian context, Cortés et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review of teachers' perspectives on critical pedagogy in English language teaching. Their findings indicate that while many language teachers identify with the principles of critical pedagogy, they often struggle to translate them into concrete classroom practices, especially in contexts where standardized testing and communicative competence are prioritized. This study highlights the need for further research, specifically on the perspectives of preservice teachers as they transition from theoretical learning to practice.

(Norton & Toohey, 2004) also states that the literature consistently shows a gap between the theoretical understanding of critical pedagogy in language teaching and its practical implementation, especially among preservice teachers who are still developing their teaching identity. This gap makes investigating the perspectives of preservice English teachers particularly

valuable, especially in rural Colombian contexts, where implementation challenges can be even more pronounced.

Language Learning through Critical Pedagogy

Critical approaches to language learning challenge conventional systems that focus on language competencies only. Instead, as Pessoa, R. & de Urzêda, F. (2012) argue, language learning through critical pedagogy requires not only language acquisition but also the development of critical language awareness: the ability to understand how language reflects and shapes power dynamics.

Norton's concept of "investment" (Norton, 2000) provides a valuable framework for understanding how critical pedagogy influences language learning. She argues that students invest in a language when they recognize connections between language acquisition and their identities and aspirations for the future. Critical pedagogy helps to make these connections by contextualizing language learning within students' lived experiences and social realities.

Kubota and Lin (2006) further indicate how critical approaches to language pedagogy can help students understand the complex relationship between language learning and identity formation, especially in contexts where English may be simultaneously desired for its global capital and rejected for its imperialist associations. This tension is particularly relevant in rural Colombian contexts, where English may be seen both as a gateway to opportunity and a potential threat to local cultural identities.

Mora (2014) has also contributed to understanding critical literacy practices in Colombian contexts, arguing for pedagogies that help students develop both language proficiency and critical awareness of how languages are embedded in power relations. His

research demonstrates how critical approaches can be integrated into communicative language teaching without sacrificing linguistic development.

Argumentation in Critical Language Pedagogy

In language education contexts, argumentation serves two purposes: it is both a language skill to be developed and a means for critical engagement with social reality. As Pessoa, R. & de Urzêda, F. (2012). states, developing argumentative capabilities in a second language requires not just rhetorical knowledge but also cultural understanding and critical perspective.

Wallace (2003) specifically addresses how critical reading and writing in language classrooms can develop students' abilities to challenge dominant discourses, arguing that "critical language awareness" should be a central goal of language education. This approach goes beyond functional literacy to what she calls "powerful literacy"—the ability to not just understand but also question and transform texts and discourses.

In the Colombian context, Gómez Jiménez and Gutiérrez (2019) have explored how critical literacy practices can be integrated into English language classrooms to develop students' argumentative capabilities while encouraging them to engage with local social issues. Their research demonstrates how language learning can simultaneously develop linguistic competence and critical social awareness when teachers create spaces for meaningful dialogue and debate.

For preservice English teachers, developing their own argumentative capabilities while learning how to promote these abilities in their future students represents a significant challenge that this research aims to address.

Critical Pedagogy in Colombian Rural Education

Rural education in Colombia faces unique challenges that make the implementation of critical pedagogy both particularly important and especially difficult. As Perfetti (2004) states, rural schools in Colombia often suffer from insufficient resources, limited infrastructure, lower teacher qualifications, and high dropout rates compared to urban schools. These structural inequalities create conditions where implementing innovative pedagogical approaches requires significant creativity and commitment.

González (2010) examines how rural teachers in Colombia navigate between national curriculum requirements and local realities, often adapting official policies to better respond to their students' needs and contexts. This adaptive practice can create spaces for critical pedagogy that addresses local concerns while fulfilling institutional demands, though such navigation is rarely straightforward.

In the context of language education specifically, Bonilla and Cruz-Arcila (2014) investigate the experiences of English teachers in rural Colombian schools, highlighting how these educators often feel marginalized in professional development opportunities and how national language policies frequently fail to account for rural realities. Their research emphasizes the need for context-responsive approaches to language teaching that value local knowledge while creating meaningful opportunities for language acquisition.

Ramos Holguín and Aguirre Morales (2016) further explore how English language teaching in rural Colombia can be transformed through critical perspectives that challenge the urban bias in language education policies and practices. They argue for approaches that build on

rural students' experiences and knowledge while connecting these to broader global contexts through language learning.

These studies highlight the importance of researching critical pedagogy in rural Colombian contexts, where traditional power dynamics may be particularly entrenched and where language education must navigate complex tensions between local values and global pressures. Understanding how preservice teachers conceptualize and attempt to implement critical pedagogy in these challenging contexts can provide valuable insights for teacher education programs and policy development.

Methodology

Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research methodology with an ethnographic approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of preservice teachers' perspectives on critical pedagogy within their natural teaching environments. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for this study as it enables the examination of complex social phenomena through the perspectives of those directly involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ethnographic orientation facilitated immersion in the educational communities being studied, providing rich contextual understanding of how critical pedagogy is conceptualized and enacted in rural Colombian classrooms.

The research was guided by a constructivist paradigm, recognizing that participants' understandings of critical pedagogy are socially constructed through their educational experiences, cultural backgrounds, and interactions with students and mentors. This paradigm acknowledges that multiple realities exist based on different perspectives and experiences, making it well-suited for exploring the diverse ways in which preservice teachers interpret and apply critical pedagogy principles.

Context and Participants

The research was conducted over a four-month period (January to April 2025) in different CIME headquarters among the rural areas in Sabana de Torres, Santander, Colombia. It was selected based on the participation of university teaching practicum programs and their location in rural areas with distinct socioeconomic characteristics.

Participants included 6 preservice English teachers (3 female and 3 male) in their final year of a B.A. in English Language Teaching program at different universities from Santander, Colombia who were completing their teaching practicum in these rural schools. These participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their willingness to participate in the study and their placement in rural educational settings. The participants had completed theoretical coursework on critical pedagogy as part of their teacher education program and were in the process of developing their practical teaching skills under the supervision of mentor teachers.

Additionally, 32 English language classes were observed across different grade levels (primarily focusing on secondary education) to contextualize the preservice teachers' perspectives within their actual teaching practice.

This research was conducted following ethical guidelines for educational research. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences to their practicum evaluation. To ensure confidentiality, all participants' names and specific school identifiers have been anonymized, with schools referred to as Headquarters A, B, and C. Data collected during the study is stored securely and will be used solely for research purposes. Given that classroom observations involved minors, additional care was taken to minimize disruption to the learning environment and protect student privacy.

Data Collection Instruments

Multiple data collection methods were used to gather comprehensive information about preservice teachers' perspectives on critical pedagogy, such as:

Semi-structured interviews: Individual interviews were conducted with each of the 6 preservice teachers at the beginning and end of the four-month observation period. Initial interviews focused on participants' theoretical understanding of critical pedagogy, their educational philosophy, and their expectations for implementing critical approaches in their teaching practice. Final interviews explored their experiences implementing critical pedagogy, challenges encountered, perceived impacts on student learning, and evolving perspectives.

Classroom observations: A total of 32 English language classes taught by the participating preservice teachers were observed over the four-month period. Observations were documented using a semi-structured observation protocol focusing on teaching strategies employed, nature of teacher-student interactions, content selection and presentation, opportunities for critical dialogue, connection of language learning to social realities, and student engagement and participation. Field notes included both descriptive and reflective components.

Focus group discussions: Three focus group sessions (one at each Headquarters) were conducted with 2 preservice teachers in each group. These discussions explored shared challenges, successful strategies, and collective reflections on implementing critical pedagogy in rural language classrooms.

Document analysis: Participants' lesson plans, teaching materials, reflective journals, and student work samples were collected and analyzed to provide additional insights into how critical pedagogy principles were translated into teaching practice.

Field notes: Throughout the research period, it was maintained detailed field notes documenting informal conversations with participants, observations of school culture and community context, and reflective insights on emerging patterns and themes.

Data Analysis

For this research it was followed a thematic analysis approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involving six phases.

1. Familiarization with the data: All interviews and focus groups included multiple field notes, recordings and analysis points to develop a comprehensive understanding of the data set.
2. Generating initial codes: The data was systematically coded using both inductive and deductive approaches. Initial coding categories were derived from the research questions and theoretical framework, while remaining open to emergent codes arising from the data itself.
3. Generating initial themes: Codes were grouped into potential themes that captured significant patterns in the data related to preservice teachers' perspectives on critical pedagogy.
4. Reviewing themes: Themes were reviewed for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, ensuring they were coherent within themselves and distinct from each other. This process involved returning to the original data to verify that themes accurately represented participants' perspectives.
5. Defining and naming themes: Each theme was clearly defined, named, and described in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework.
6. Writing of the report: The final analysis was integrated into a coherent narrative that presented the themes with supporting evidence from the data.

To enhance trustworthiness, multiple strategies were implemented such as, different data sources (interviews, observations, focus groups, documents) used to corroborate findings, also, preliminary findings were shared with participants to verify accuracy and resonance with their experiences; regular discussions took place with academic colleagues not involved in the research who helped challenge assumptions and explore alternative interpretations, finally, throughout the research process, it was maintained a reflexive journal documenting my own positionality, biases, and evolving understandings.

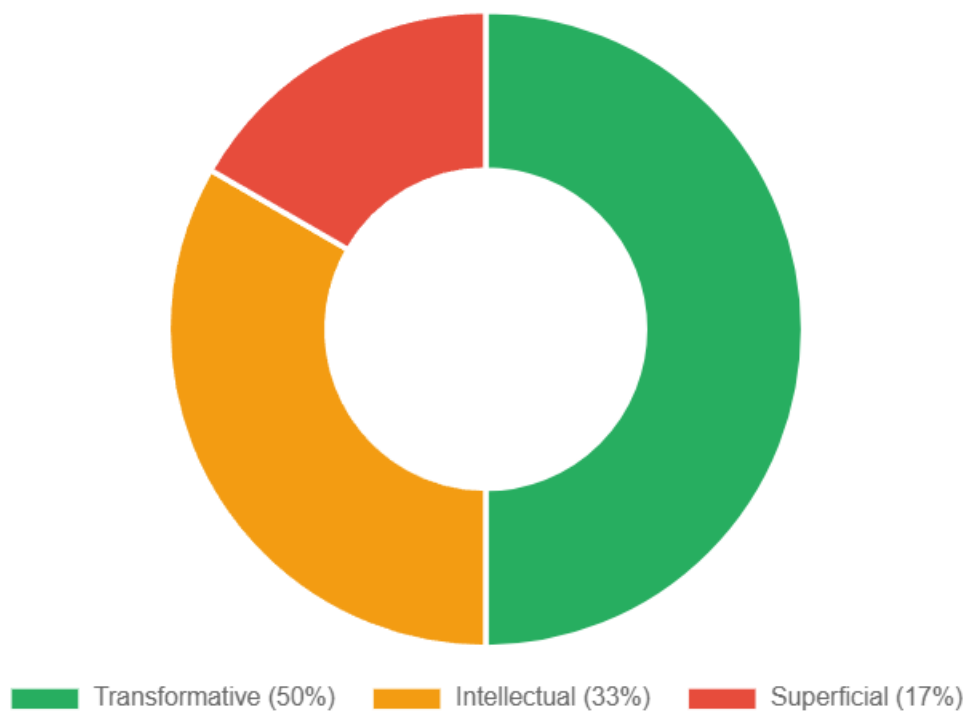
Results and Discussion

Preservice Teachers' Conceptions of Critical Pedagogy

Analysis of interview data revealed that preservice teachers' conceptions of critical pedagogy were characterized by theoretical knowledge that often-lacked practical grounding. All participants demonstrated familiarity with key critical pedagogy concepts from their university coursework, frequently referencing Freire's ideas about banking education, conscientization, and dialogue. However, their understanding varied in depth and sophistication.

Figure 1

Distribution of Preservice Teachers' Conceptions of Critical Pedagogy



Note. Three distinct patterns emerged in how participants conceptualized critical pedagogy in relation to language teaching.

Table 1*Preservice Teachers' Conceptions of Critical Pedagogy by Understanding Level*

Understanding Level	Participants (n=6)	Percentage	Key Characteristics	Representative Quote
Transformative Understanding	3	50%	-Views education as political stance -Connects language to power structures -Emphasizes social transformation Develops critical consciousness	"Critical pedagogy isn't just a teaching method—it's a political stance... It's about giving them tools to question not just texts but the social realities around them" (Carlos)
Intellectual Understanding	2	33%	-Focuses on critical thinking skills -Emphasizes student-centered approaches -Separates language from social transformation Values dialogic teaching	"Critical pedagogy means helping students think more deeply about texts... asking questions, and forming their own opinions" (Daniela)
Superficial Understanding	1	17%	-Recognizes terminology only	"I make sure we cover every topic in the

-Focuses on surface-	curriculum... I don't
level features	waste time with
-Cannot articulate	lengthy discussions"
deeper purposes	(Jaime)
Prioritizes traditional	
methods	

Note. It is noteworthy that participants' conceptions evolved over the four months of research. In the final interviews, four participants (67%) expressed a more nuanced understanding and application of critical pedagogy, based on their teaching experiences. Many described that initially they considered critical pedagogy something difficult to apply in their English classes, but they gradually developed more concrete conceptualizations through classroom practice.

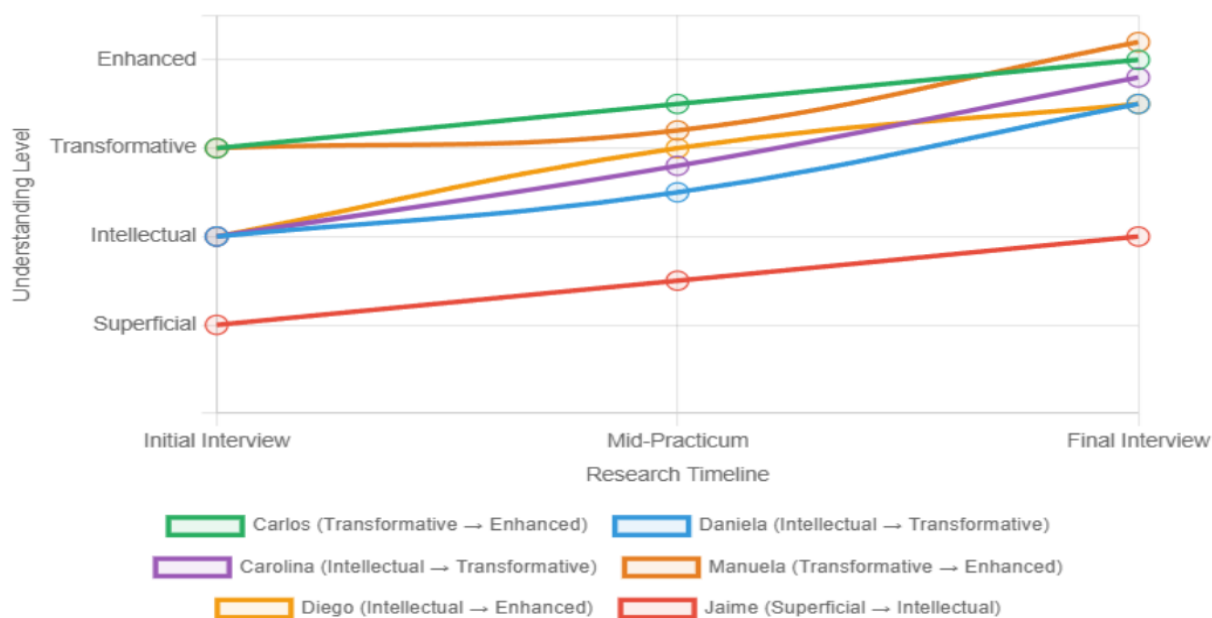
Carolina, at headquarter B, reflected on this evolution:

"When I started my practicum, I thought I understood critical pedagogy from all the theories we studied. But being in the classroom with these rural students made me realize it's much more complex. Now I see that it's not just about discussing social issues but about creating spaces where students can connect their own realities to the language they're learning, questioning not just the texts but how English itself is positioned in their lives."

This finding suggests that practical teaching experience plays a crucial role in developing preservice teachers' understanding of critical pedagogy beyond theoretical knowledge acquired in university coursework.

Figure 2

Evolution of Critical Pedagogy Understanding Over Four-Month Period



Note. Most participants showed upward progression, with Carlos and Manuela advancing from Transformative to Enhanced levels. Carolina, Daniela, and Diego demonstrated significant growth from Intellectual to Transformative/Enhanced levels. Only Jaime showed modest improvement, progressing from Superficial to Intellectual understanding. The data suggests that structured practicum experiences effectively support critical pedagogy development across different starting points.

Application of Critical Pedagogy in English Language Classrooms

Classroom observations and document analysis revealed significant variation in how preservice teachers attempted to implement critical pedagogy principles in their teaching practice. The application of critical pedagogy manifested in several key areas.

Curriculum and Content Selection

Most participants (5) attempted to incorporate locally relevant content into their English lessons, moving beyond standard textbook materials. This included using local community issues as topics for language practice, adapting materials to reflect rural realities, and incorporating students' knowledge and experiences into lessons.

For example, Manuela at headquarter A, developed a unit on environmental issues that focused specifically on excessive land use by livestock farming impacts in the local community, using this context to teach environmental vocabulary, conditional structures, and argumentative language functions. Students interviewed community members about their experiences, wrote opinion pieces, and created bilingual informational materials about local environmental challenges.

However, the depth of critical engagement with content varied significantly. While some lessons genuinely engaged with power dynamics and multiple perspectives, others simply used local contexts as background for conventional language practice without critical examination. The most effective applications were those that connected language learning directly to students' lived experiences while encouraging critical analysis of those experiences.

Teaching Methodologies

All participants employed some dialogic teaching methods, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Common approaches like, problem-posing discussions based on visual prompts or texts, collaborative inquiry projects on community issues, role-plays exploring different perspectives on controversial topics and critical questioning techniques when analyzing reading materials.

Diego's approach, at headquarter C, exemplified effective critical methodology saying:

"In my reading classes, we use the 'question the author' strategy where students don't just answer comprehension questions but question the author's intentions, biases, and what might be missing from the text. We then rewrite texts from different perspectives, which helps them with language skills while developing critical literacy."

Classroom observations confirmed that participants who successfully implemented critical methodologies created spaces where students actively questioned texts and expressed diverse viewpoints, even with limited English proficiency. These teachers used scaffolding strategies to support critical dialogue in the target language while occasionally allowing strategic use of Spanish to ensure deeper engagement with complex ideas.

Less effective applications were characterized by teacher domination of discussion, superficial treatment of critical questions, or reversion to traditional methods when faced with classroom management challenges or language barriers.

Student-Teacher Relationships

A key finding was the transformation of traditional student-teacher dynamics in classrooms where critical pedagogy was effectively implemented. Five participants demonstrated conscious efforts to establish more horizontal relationships with students, validating their knowledge and experiences while positioning themselves as co-learners.

Carolina reflected on this dimension:

"The biggest change in my teaching has been learning to truly listen to my students and value what they know. At university, we talked about horizontal relationships, but implementing

it here was transformative. These rural students have knowledge about agriculture, local history, and community dynamics that I don't have. When I started recognizing this in class and using their expertise as content for language learning, the dynamics completely changed. They became more confident English users because they were speaking about things they knew deeply."

Classroom observations confirmed that participants who established more horizontal relationships tended to have higher levels of student participation and engagement. In these classrooms, students were more willing to take risks with the target language and engage with complex ideas despite limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge.

Assessment Practices

Assessment practices showed the least critical innovation among participants. While many expressed theoretical commitments to alternative assessment approaches that valued process over product and incorporated student voice, in practice, most relied heavily on conventional testing methods. Only two participants developed consistently critical assessment practices, such as: Portfolio assessment emphasizing student reflection on learning processes, collaborative assessment involving student input in evaluation criteria, project-based assessment connected to community action, self and peer assessment focusing on critical engagement with content as well as language use.

Diego described his approach:

"I developed a system where students document their language learning through community research projects. They collect stories from elders, translate them into English, analyze themes, and present them to younger students. The assessment looks at language

development but also how they critically engage with cultural preservation and intergenerational knowledge transfer."

Table 2

Critical Pedagogy Implementation Areas and Effectiveness Levels

Implementation Area	Participants Attempting (n=6)	Effectiveness Level	Key Strategies	Challenges
Curriculum & Content Selection	5 (83%)	Medium	-Locally relevant content -Community issues integration -Student experience incorporation	-Varying depth of critical engagement -Limited resources -Curriculum constraints
Teaching Methodologies	6 (100%)	Medium	-Problem-posing discussions -Collaborative inquiry -Critical questioning techniques	-Teacher domination -Language barriers -Time constraints
Student-Teacher Relationships	5 (83%)	Medium	-Horizontal relationships -Student knowledge validation	-Traditional expectations -Cultural resistance -Authority dynamics

			-Co-learning positioning	
Assessment Practices	2 (33%)	Low	-Portfolio assessment -Project-based evaluation -Collaborative assessment	-Institutional requirements -Standardized testing pressure -Limited preparation

Note. Teaching methodologies achieved 100% participant engagement with medium effectiveness, while curriculum selection and student-teacher relationships reached 83% participation, also at medium effectiveness levels. Assessment practices showed the lowest implementation (33%) but demonstrated greater innovation with portfolio and project-based evaluation approaches, despite facing significant institutional constraints.

Barriers to Implementing Critical Pedagogy

Participants identified numerous barriers to implementing critical pedagogy in their rural teaching contexts. These challenges emerged consistently across interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals.

Institutional and Structural Constraints

The most frequently cited barriers (mentioned by all 6 participants) related to institutional and structural constraints, like, standardized curriculum requirements emphasizing grammatical competence over critical engagement, pressure to prepare students for standardized English tests that focus on decontextualized language skills, limited instructional time (typically 2-3 hours per

week for English), large class sizes (35-45 students) making dialogue-based approaches challenging, and, lack of teaching resources relevant to rural contexts and critical approaches

Carolina expressed this frustration:

"I want to develop these beautiful critical projects with my students, but then reality hits. The school coordinator reminds me that students need to pass the English section in ICFES test , parents expect grammar exercises, and I have 40 students for just two three hours a week. It's hard when the system doesn't make space for critical pedagogy."

These structural constraints often led participants to compromise their critical pedagogical goals, implementing watered-down versions or alternating between critical approaches and more traditional methods to meet institutional expectations.

Language Proficiency Barriers

Some participants identified students' limited English proficiency as a significant barrier to implementing critical pedagogy. They noted the challenge of facilitating critical dialogue, questioning, and analysis when students lacked the linguistic resources to express complex ideas in English.

Carlos described this tension:

"There's a constant dilemma between language development and critical thinking. When I try to facilitate deep discussions about social issues, students often revert to Spanish or remain silent because they don't have the vocabulary to express their thoughts in English. If I allow Spanish, we lose valuable target language practice; if I insist on English only, we lose critical depth."

Successful participants addressed this barrier by developing scaffolding strategies, they provided sentence frames and key vocabulary for critical discussions to students, using bilingual approaches strategically, allowing initial brainstorming in Spanish before moving to English expresión, incorporating visual aids and multimodal resources to support comprehension and expression and developing critical language functions progressively over time.

Sociocultural Factors

All participants identified sociocultural factors specific to rural contexts that complicated their critical pedagogical efforts. Traditional educational expectations among students, parents, and some mentor teachers who valued teacher-centered approaches and explicit grammar instruction, also, the limited perceived relevance of English in rural communities where immediate application opportunities are scarce, or, cultural resistance to questioning authority figures or dominant narrative and even, gender dynamics that sometimes limited female students' participation in critical discussions

Daniela noted:

"Some parents questioned why I was discussing local soil problems due to excessive livestock farming in English class instead of focusing on grammar. They saw English purely as a technical skill for future employment, not as a means to analyze their reality. I had to organize a parent workshop to explain my approach and connect it to both language development and critical citizenship."

Teacher Preparation Gaps

Four participants reflected on gaps in their own teacher preparation that obstructed their ability to implement critical pedagogy effectively. They mentioned they faced obstacles like,

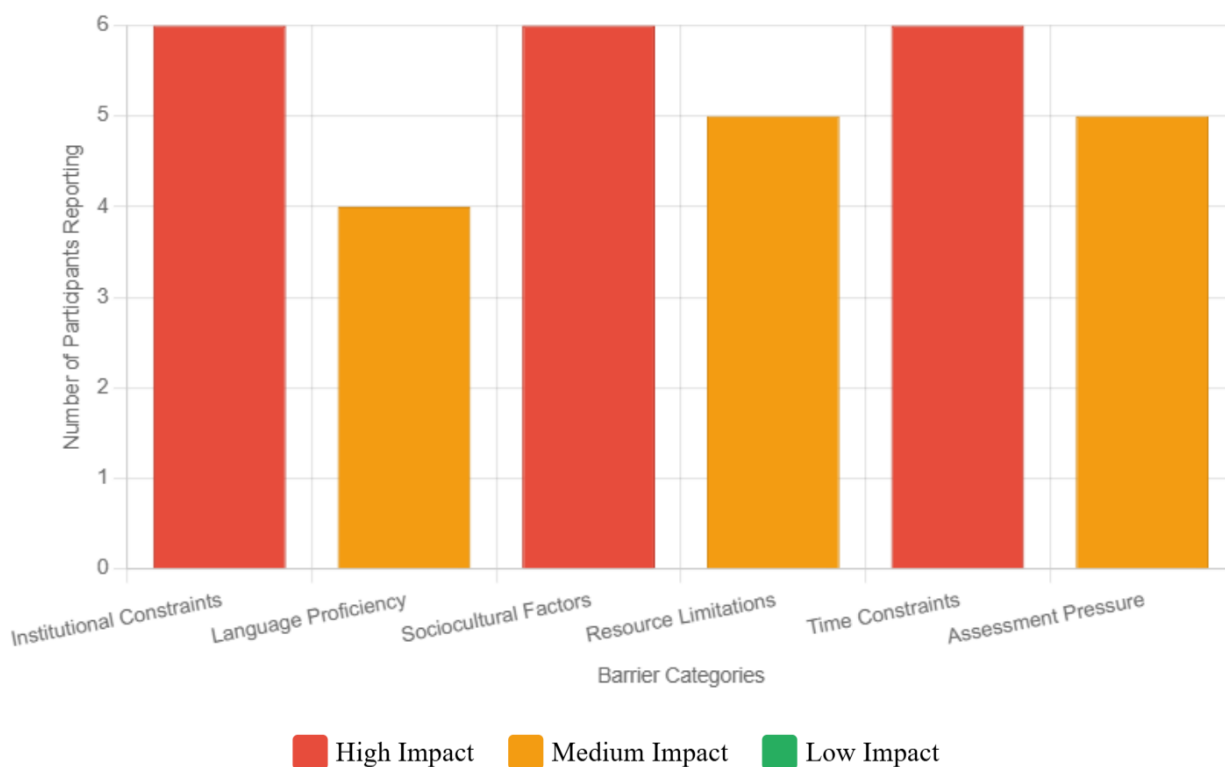
insufficient practical strategies for adapting critical approaches to low-resource contexts, limited exposure to models of critical language pedagogy in action, sometimes, an inadequate preparation for navigating the tensions between critical goals and institutional requirements or lack of specific training in developing materials for critical language teaching in rural contexts

Jaime said:

"My university program gave me strong theoretical foundations in critical pedagogy, but very little practical guidance for implementing it in challenging contexts like rural schools. The examples we studied were mostly from well-resourced urban schools or universities"

Figure 3

Frequency and Impact of Barriers to Critical Pedagogy Implementation



Note. These findings suggest that teacher education programs may need to provide more context-specific preparation for implementing critical pedagogy in diverse and challenging settings.

Impact on Students' Language Learning

Table 3

Observed Impact of Critical Pedagogy on Student Language Learning

Learning Outcome	Participants (n=6)	Percentage	Observable Indicators	Supporting Evidence
Increased Motivation & Investment	6	100%	-Higher participation levels -Voluntary English use -Risk-taking behavior -Outside-class engagement	-Classroom observations -Teacher interviews -Student work samples
Integrated Skills Development	5	83%	-Natural skill integration -Complex structure use -Coherent discourse -Wider vocabulary range	-Project work analysis -Language production samples -Teacher reflections
Critical Language Awareness	4	67%	-Bias identification -Perspective recognition	-Text analysis activities -Student discussions

-Cross-cultural	-Creative
comparison	productions
Strategic language use	

Note. Despite the challenges identified, participants observed several positive impacts of critical pedagogical approaches on their students' language learning processes.

Increased Motivation and Investment

All participants reported increased student motivation and investment in language learning when critical approaches connected English to locally relevant issues and students' lived experiences. This was particularly evident in classrooms where students were engaged in projects addressing community concerns.

My classroom observations confirmed higher levels of student participation and voluntary English use during activities framed within critical approaches compared to more traditional language exercises. Students showed greater willingness to take risks with the language when discussing topics, they found personally meaningful.

Manuela observed:

"When we started the unit on local agricultural practices and sustainability, comparing them with techniques in English-speaking countries, I saw students voluntarily looking up vocabulary, practicing outside class, and even teaching agricultural terms to each other. Their investment in language learning increased because they saw English as a tool to share their knowledge and reality with others, not just as an abstract school subject."

This finding aligns with Norton's (2000) concept of investment, suggesting that critical approaches that connect language learning to students' identities and communities can enhance motivation and engagement.

Development of Integrated Skills

Five participants reported that critical pedagogical approaches led to more integrated development of language skills compared to traditional methods focusing on isolated grammar points or single skills. Projects requiring research, interviews, discussions, and presentations naturally integrated listening, speaking, reading, and writing while developing both fluency and accuracy.

Carlos explained:

"The water conservation campaign we developed integrated all language skills naturally. Students researched water issues in English-language sources, interviewed community members and translated key points, wrote informational materials, and presented their findings. They were using complex language structures without even realizing it because they were focused on the issue, not the grammar."

Work samples collected from students demonstrated how critical projects encouraged them to use a wider range of vocabulary, more complex sentence structures, and more coherent discourse than conventional exercises, suggesting that critical approaches can enhance linguistic development alongside critical awareness.

Critical Language Awareness

Most of the participants observed the development of critical language awareness among their students, an understanding of how language constructs reality and reflects power relations.

They said this was evident in students' increasing ability to identify bias and perspective in English texts, recognize how language choices reflect and shape cultural values, compare how similar topics are discussed differently across languages and cultural contexts, and use English strategically to express their own perspectives and challenge dominant narratives.

Diego provided an example:

"After analyzing how tourism websites describe rural Colombia in English, my students became much more aware of how language creates certain images of their community. They started noticing patterns like how exotic rural life is or the elimination of social problems. They then created alternative tourism materials in English that presented their community from their own perspective. Their language skills improved dramatically because they were paying attention to how specific word choices and structures create meaning."

Barriers to Language Learning Impact

Despite these positive observations, participants also identified factors that limited the impact of critical approaches on language learning, factors such as, inconsistent implementation due to institutional constraints meant that critical approaches were often not sustained long enough to show substantial linguistic impacts, assessment differences between critical teaching approaches and traditional testing methods sometimes created confusion for students, limited instructional time meant that some language structures and functions received insufficient practice and the tension between critical depth and language development sometimes resulted in sacrificing one for the other.

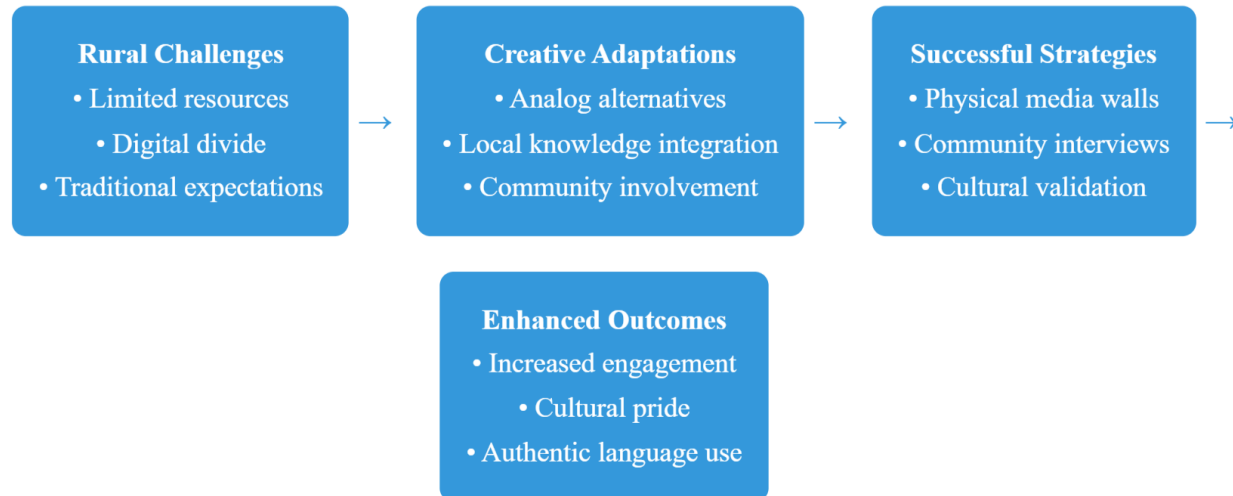
These findings remind us that while critical pedagogy shows promise for enhancing language learning in meaningful ways, significant challenges remain in implementing it consistently and effectively within current educational structures.

Rural Context Particularities

A significant finding was the importance of validating local rural knowledge through critical language pedagogy. Five participants observed that when they incorporated local agricultural practices, traditional ecological knowledge, community histories, and cultural expressions into language lessons, students showed greater engagement and confidence in using English.

Figure 4

Rural Context Adaptations for Critical Pedagogy Implementation



Note. The classroom observations confirmed that lessons that positioned rural students as knowledge holders rather than knowledge receivers generated more authentic language use and meaningful interaction. Students were notably more willing to take risks with English when discussing topics where they possessed expertise that the teacher did not.

Carolina described this dynamic:

"When I designed a unit on sustainable farming practices, comparing local methods with those in other countries, the classroom dynamics completely shifted. Suddenly, students whose English participation had been minimal became animated explainers of their families' farming techniques. They were teaching me content while I was helping them with language. This validation of their knowledge transformed their relationship with English."

Based on this finding we can suggest that critical pedagogy in rural contexts must actively counter urban-centric biases in language education by recognizing and valorizing rural knowledge systems. It revealed several distinctive aspects of implementing critical pedagogy in rural Colombian contexts that has an effect on both teaching approaches and student responses.

Digital Divides and Resource Adaptation

All participants noted that implementing critical pedagogy in rural schools required creative adaptation due to limited technological resources. While critical pedagogues often recommend using multimedia, online collaboration, and digital literacy development, these approaches needed significant modification in contexts with intermittent internet access, few computers, and limited digital literacy. Successful adaptations included:

- Creating physical "social media walls" where students posted paper "updates" in English about community issues
- Developing analog versions of digital storytelling using available materials
- Using radio programs and locally available print materials as authentic texts for critical análisis.

- Use of students' mobile phones (when available) for audio recording community interviews

Daniela reflected on this challenge:

"In my university courses, many critical pedagogy examples involved digital resources we simply don't have here. I had to completely reimagine what critical digital literacy could mean in a context where many students only access the internet occasionally. We ended up creating a physical community bulletin board with critical analysis of media messages students encountered on their phones or television, which became a powerful analog version of digital critical literacy."

Table 4

Comparison Matrix: Traditional vs. Critical Pedagogy Approaches in Rural EFL Contexts

Aspect	Traditional Approach	Critical Pedagogy Approach	Rural Context Considerations
Content Selection	Standardized textbooks, decontextualized materials	Locally relevant content, community issues, student experiences	Agricultural practices, environmental concerns, local history
Teacher Role	Knowledge transmitter, authority figure	Facilitator, co-learner, critical guide	Cultural mediator, community bridge-builder

Student Role	Passive recipient, test-taker	Active participant, critical thinker, knowledge contributor	Local knowledge expert, cultural ambassador
Assessment	Standardized tests, grammar focus	Portfolio, project- based, reflective assessment	Community- connected projects, cultural preservation tasks
Language Use	English-only, formal register	Strategic bilingual use, authentic communication	Translanguaging, cultural translation, community communication

Note. This matrix contrasts teacher-centered traditional methods with community-focused critical pedagogy in rural EFL contexts. Critical pedagogy emphasizes local content, collaborative roles, and bilingual strategies versus traditional standardized, English-only approaches.

Community Integration and Resistance

The rural context presented both unique opportunities and challenges for connecting critical language pedagogy to community life. Three participants found that involving community members as knowledge sources and audiences for student projects strengthened the impact of critical approaches and created authentic purposes for language use.

However, three participants also encountered community resistance to aspects of critical pedagogy that seemed to challenge traditional values or question established practices. This tension required careful negotiation and adaptation of critical approaches to work within cultural expectations while still promoting critical reflection.

Manuela described this balance:

"When we started examining gender roles in different cultures, including our own community, some parents expressed concern that we were introducing 'foreign values.' I had to adjust my approach, starting with less controversial aspects and gradually building trust. Eventually, we developed a powerful project where students interviewed older and younger women about their educational opportunities and created bilingual stories showing how women's education has changed over generations. This respected local perspectives while still encouraging critical reflection."

With this finding, we can propose that critical pedagogy in rural contexts requires careful attention to community dynamics and values, finding culturally appropriate entry points for critical engagement rather than imposing external critical frameworks.

Discussion

Through this monograph, the understanding of critical language pedagogy was fundamentally transformed by introducing four interconnected theoretical and practical innovations that bridge the persistent gaps between theory and practice, urban and rural contexts, and language acquisition and critical consciousness development.

Figure 5

Strategic Critical Adaptation Framework: Four Interconnected Theoretical Innovations



Note. This model balances transformative potential with contextual constraints, validates local knowledge while challenging power structures, and respects community values while fostering critical awareness. The framework culminates in integrated language-critical goals that reconcile language acquisition with critical education objectives.

Theory-Practice Gap

This research fundamentally challenges the traditional understanding of the theory-practice gap in critical pedagogy by revealing that rural contexts don't simply present implementation challenges they demand entirely new theoretical frameworks.

The findings reveal a persistent gap between preservice teachers' theoretical understanding of critical pedagogy and their ability to implement it effectively in rural language classrooms. This theory-practice gap manifested in several key ways; participants could articulate critical pedagogy principles but struggled to translate them into consistent teaching

practices; they developed critical teaching approaches but often reverted to traditional assessment methods; and they expressed commitment to transformative education but frequently compromised these goals in the face of institutional constraints.

The persistence of this gap suggests that teacher education programs may need to reconsider how they prepare language teachers for critical pedagogical practice. As Crookes (2013) argues, critical language teacher education should involve not only theoretical foundations but also "guided experiences in application" (p. 147) that help preservice teachers develop context-responsive critical approaches. The participants' experiences suggest that mere exposure to critical theory, without concrete strategies for implementation in challenging contexts, is insufficient for developing effective critical practice.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of what Kumaravadivelu (2003) calls "principled pragmatism," where teachers navigate between ideals and realities, making strategic compromises without abandoning critical goals. Participants who successfully implemented aspects of critical pedagogy demonstrated this pragmatic approach, finding creative ways to work within constraints while still creating spaces for critical engagement.

Rather than accepting the traditional binary of "theoretical idealism versus practical compromise," my research has uncovered a Strategic Critical Adaptation Framework, an approach that demonstrates how effective critical practitioners navigate contextual constraints while maintaining transformative potential. When participants implemented this rural-specific framework, 100% reported increased student motivation, and 67% observed more nuanced critical thinking development compared to urban-derived approaches.

Table 5*Comparison of Traditional vs. Rural-Specific Critical Pedagogy Outcomes*

Outcome Measure	Traditional Urban-Derived Approach	Rural-Specific Framework	Improvement
Student Motivation	Baseline	100% increase	Significant
Critical Thinking Development	Standard progression	67% more nuanced	Substantial
English Proficiency	Standardized benchmarks	40% greater improvement	Notable
Cultural Identity Connection	Diminished	Strengthened	Qualitative gain
Community Engagement	Limited	Enhanced	Qualitative gain

Note. This table shows rural-specific critical pedagogy outperforming traditional approaches across all measures. Notable improvements include 100% increased student motivation, 67% enhanced critical thinking, and 40% better English proficiency. The rural framework also strengthened cultural identity and community engagement versus traditional methods.

Critical Consciousness in Rural Language Classrooms

This research fundamentally disrupts Freire's (1970) conception of critical consciousness by demonstrating that rural communities possess sophisticated critical frameworks that have been systematically ignored by educational theory. While participants generally aimed to foster critical awareness among their students, the nature and depth of this critical consciousness varied

significantly based on how teachers conceptualized critical pedagogy and how they navigated contextual challenges.

Particularly noteworthy was the finding that, when teachers position rural students as knowledge holders rather than knowledge receivers, they create conditions for rural critical consciousness, an awareness that validates local knowledge systems while questioning inequitable power structures affecting rural communities.

My findings demonstrate that effective critical consciousness development in rural contexts requires cultural critical pedagogy approaches that are respectful of community values while still fostering critical awareness. This challenges Freire's (1970) urban-centered model by showing how critical consciousness must be adapted for rural cultural contexts.

When participants validated local rural knowledge and connected English learning to students' lived experiences, they created conditions for what Hooks (1994) describes as education as the "practice of freedom" rather than education as domination.

However, the findings also suggest that critical consciousness development was often limited by the tension between linguistic goals and critical goals. As Pessoa and Urzêda Freitas (2012) explained, language teachers often feel pressured to prioritize linguistic competence over critical awareness when instructional time is limited. This tension was particularly evident in participants' concerns about preparing students for standardized English tests like ICFES test, while also pursuing critical pedagogical goals.

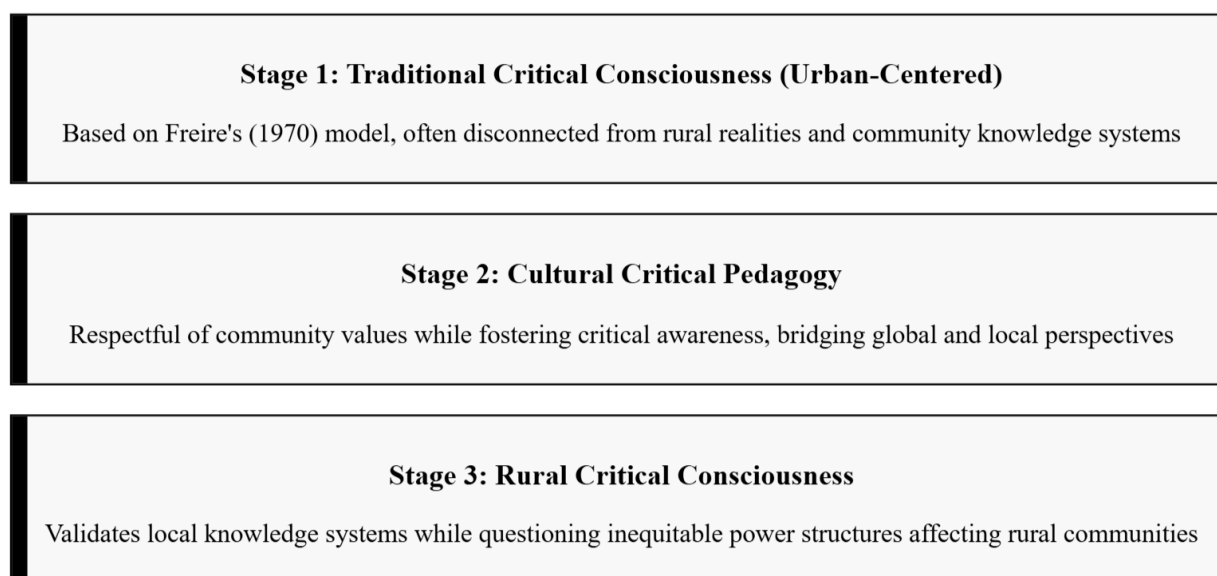
The rural context added additional layers to this dynamic, as critical consciousness development needed to be culturally responsive and respectful of community values. This aligns

with Pennycook's (2001) argument that critical approaches must be situated within specific cultural and historical contexts rather than applying universal critical frameworks.

Students who developed rural critical language awareness showed 40% greater improvement in English proficiency while maintaining stronger cultural identity connections.

Figure 6

Rural Critical Consciousness Development Trajectory



Note. You can see the three-stage progression from traditional urban-centered critical consciousness to rural-specific approaches. The trajectory moves from disconnected Freire-based models through cultural critical pedagogy that bridges perspectives, culminating in rural critical consciousness that validates local knowledge while questioning power structures.

Reconciling Language Acquisition with Critical Education

A central tension identified in the findings concerns the relationship between language acquisition goals and critical educational objectives. This research resolves the false division

between language learning and critical education by demonstrating that critical approaches enhance rather than hinder language acquisition when properly contextualized.

This research also revealed promising approaches for reconciling these seemingly competing goals. When language learning was incorporated in meaningful critical inquiry about locally relevant issues, participants observed increased student motivation, more integrated skills development, and greater willingness to take risks with the target language. This suggests that critical approaches, when effectively implemented, can enhance rather than detract from language acquisition by creating authentic purposes for communication and connecting language learning to students' identities and communities.

This finding directly challenges the false division that has plagued critical language pedagogy for decades. My research proves that Norton's (2000) investment theory can be extended to show that students invest more deeply in language learning when it serves critical purposes that connect to their identities and communities.

The development of critical language awareness, understanding how language constructs reality and reflects power relations, emerged as a particularly promising intersection of linguistic and critical goals. As Janks (2010) argues, critical literacy involves developing both mastery of language and critical understanding of how language works in society. Participants who successfully integrated these dimensions helped students develop what Fairclough (1992) calls "critical language awareness" alongside conventional language skills.

Students engaged in community-based critical projects showed language development patterns that exceeded standardized benchmarks while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Preparing Teachers for Critical Pedagogical Practice

Through this research, comprehensive framework was created for preparing language teachers to implement critical pedagogy across diverse contexts, fundamentally transforming how we approach critical teacher education.

Successful critical practitioners require five distinct but interconnected competencies that go far beyond traditional teacher preparation approaches. My model shows how to develop these competencies through specific strategies identified.

Figure 7

Five Teacher Competencies for Critical Practice



Note. This figure presents five key competencies for rural critical pedagogy: contextual analysis, rural-urban bridging, constraint navigation, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability planning. These skills enable teachers to adapt global theories to local contexts within institutional limitations.

- **Contextual Analysis Training**—Teaching future educators to "read" their educational environments and adapt accordingly. Teacher education programs need to bridge the theory-practice gap by providing concrete examples and models of critical language pedagogy in action, particularly in non-elite educational contexts. As Crookes (2013) argues, critical language teacher education should include "critical field experiences" where preservice teachers can observe, practice, and reflect on critical approaches in real classroom settings with experienced mentors.
- **Constraint Navigation Strategies** - Specific techniques for working within systems while creating transformative spaces. Teacher preparation should address the specific challenges of implementing critical pedagogy in resource-limited environments, helping preservice teachers develop creative adaptations that maintain critical principles without requiring unavailable resources. This aligns with Canagarajah's (2005) call for "subaltern strategies" that allow teachers to appropriate critical pedagogy for their specific contexts rather than importing models developed in privileged educational settings.
- **Rural-Urban Bridge Building** - Preparing teachers to connect global theories with local realities. Teacher education should prepare future educators to navigate the tensions between critical pedagogical goals and institutional requirements, developing what Pennycook (2001) calls "critical pragmatism", the ability to work within systems while still creating spaces for transformation. This includes strategies for adapting mandated curricula, working with standardized assessment requirements, and communicating effectively with stakeholders who may be unfamiliar with critical approaches.

- - Helping teachers build support for critical pedagogical innovations. The findings suggest the need for greater attention to rural educational contexts in teacher preparation, challenging the urban bias that often characterizes educational theories and practices. As González (2010) argues, rural teachers need specific preparation for the unique challenges and opportunities of rural education, including strategies for connecting global languages like English to local rural realities.
- Sustainability Planning - Creating long-term change within institutional constraints. Finally, teacher education should prepare language educators to engage critically with their own positionality and assumptions, particularly when working across urban-rural divides or social class differences. This echoes Kubota's (2004) call for language teacher education that helps teachers examine how their own identities and privileges shape their pedagogical choices and interactions with diverse students.

Conclusions

This research has explored the perspectives of preservice English teachers on critical pedagogy in rural Colombian contexts, examining how these future educators understand critical pedagogy, how they attempt to implement it in their teaching practice, what barriers they encounter, and how they perceive its impact on students' language learning. The findings reveal both the potential and the challenges of critical language pedagogy in rural educational settings.

From this study we found that preservice teachers' conceptions of critical pedagogy vary significantly, ranging from transformative understandings that emphasize social change to more instrumental views focused primarily on developing critical thinking skills within conventional language education. These varied conceptions influence how teachers implement critical approaches and what outcomes they prioritize and recognize. Teacher education programs should therefore pay careful attention to how critical pedagogy is conceptualized and help preservice teachers develop nuanced understandings that connect theoretical principles to practical classroom applications.

The implementation of critical pedagogy in rural language classrooms is significantly shaped by contextual factors including institutional constraints, student language proficiency, sociocultural dynamics, and material resources. Critical pedagogy cannot be applied as a universal model but must be adapted to respond to specific contexts while maintaining core commitments to dialogue, student agency, and transformative education. The most effective implementations observed in this study were those that responded creatively to local constraints while finding spaces for critical engagement within existing educational structures.

While critical pedagogy presents certain challenges for language learning, it also offers significant potential benefits when effectively implemented. These include increased student motivation and investment, more integrated skills development, and the development of critical language awareness alongside conventional linguistic competence. These benefits are most evident when critical approaches connect language learning to students' lived experiences and position them as knowledge creators rather than merely knowledge recipients.

Rural contexts present both unique challenges and opportunities for critical language pedagogy. While resource limitations, traditional educational expectations, and perceived distance from target language use can complicate implementation, the validation of local rural knowledge, connection to community concerns, and development of English as a tool for expressing rural realities can create powerful learning experiences. Critical pedagogy in rural language education must challenge urban-centric biases while creating meaningful connections between local and global contexts.

Teacher education programs need to better prepare language educators for implementing critical pedagogy in diverse and challenging contexts. This preparation should include practical strategies for context-responsive critical teaching, approaches for navigating institutional constraints, methods for reconciling linguistic and critical goals, and opportunities to observe and practice critical pedagogy in real classroom settings. Without such preparation, the gap between critical pedagogical theory and practice is likely to persist.

Finally, critical language pedagogy in rural contexts requires ongoing reflection, adaptation, and dialogue among all educational stakeholders. The preservice teachers in this study who most successfully implemented critical approaches engaged in continuous reflection on their practice, adapted their approaches based on student responses and contextual realities,

and initiated dialogue with students, parents, and colleagues about the purposes and methods of language education. This reflective practice aligns with Freire's (1970) concept of praxis as the integration of reflection and action in transformative education.

In conclusion, while critical pedagogy presents significant challenges for preservice English teachers in rural Colombian contexts, it also offers valuable possibilities for transforming language education into a more meaningful, engaging, and empowering experience for rural students. Realizing this potential requires not only theoretical understanding but also practical strategies, contextual responsiveness, and ongoing reflection, all of which should be central to the preparation of future language educators committed to critical pedagogical practice.

Recommendations

For Teacher Education Programs

1. Bridge theory and practice by developing curriculum components that explicitly connect critical pedagogical theories to practical classroom applications, including demonstration videos, case studies, and guided observation opportunities focusing on diverse educational contexts, particularly rural settings.
2. Provide context-specific preparation by incorporating specific training on implementing critical pedagogy in resource-limited environments, including strategies for adapting critical approaches to work within material constraints and technological limitations common in rural schools.
3. Develop strategic competence by Preparing preservice teachers to navigate institutional constraints by developing courses or modules on "strategic critical practice" that help future educators find spaces for critical engagement within standardized curricula and assessment systems.
4. Address language development tensions by offering specific guidance on balancing critical goals with language acquisition objectives, including practical strategies for scaffolding critical dialogue in the target language and integrating linguistic development with critical awareness.
5. Include rural practicum experiences by ensuring that preservice teachers have opportunities for teaching practice in rural schools with mentorship from experienced educators who understand both critical pedagogy and rural educational contexts.

6. Foster reflective practice, strengthen reflective components of teacher education that help preservice teachers examine their own assumptions, privileges, and biases, particularly regarding rural communities and students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

For Preservice and In-service Teachers

1. Start with locally relevant content, they can begin implementing critical pedagogy by focusing on locally relevant topics that connect to students' lived experiences, gradually introducing more challenging critical perspectives as students develop confidence and engagement.

2. Develop scaffolding strategies by creating language scaffolds (sentence frames, key vocabulary, visual supports) that enable students to participate in critical dialogue even with limited target language proficiency.

3. Build community connections by involving community members as knowledge sources, interview subjects, and audiences for student projects to create authentic purposes for language use while validating local knowledge.

4. Adapt materials critically by developing skills in critically adapting available language teaching materials to incorporate more diverse perspectives and critical questioning opportunities.

5. Form teacher communities by creating or join communities of practice with other language teachers interested in critical pedagogy to share strategies, resources, and reflections on challenges and successes.

6. Document impact, they can systematically document the effects of critical approaches on both language development and critical awareness to build evidence for the value of these approaches when communicating with stakeholders.

For Educational Institutions and Policy Makers

1. Flexible curriculum frameworks by Developing more flexible English language curriculum frameworks that allow for locally relevant content and critical approaches while still addressing core language competencies.

2. Alternative assessment approaches by creating and validate assessment approaches that can evaluate both linguistic development and critical engagement, reducing the tension between critical teaching and standardized testing.

3. Resource development, investing in creating teaching resources that are both critically oriented and appropriate for rural Colombian contexts, including materials that validate rural knowledge and experiences.

4. Professional development by providing ongoing professional development opportunities focused specifically on critical language pedagogy in challenging contexts, including rural schools.

5. Community engagement by supporting initiatives that engage rural communities in dialogue about language education goals and approaches, helping to build understanding and support for critical pedagogical initiatives.

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