

Literature from a critical intercultural lens: toward a decolonial perspective in the English language classroom

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2026.04.03>

Rosa Ascensión Espinoza Cid

Escuela Normal Superior, plantel Hermosillo, México; ensh.respinoza@creson.edu.mx

Abstract

This study examines the pedagogical potential of a literary corpus selected for a Literature course in an undergraduate English Language Teaching program at a public university in northwest Mexico. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study employed close reading informed by a critical intercultural lens to analyze the texts' potential to contribute to a decolonial perspective in English language education. The literary texts were purposively selected according to criteria addressing linguistic and pedagogical suitability, critical intercultural potential, decolonial relevance, and connections with students' social realities and broader contexts. This analysis focused on three dimensions: cultural representations, social tensions, and symbolic elements. Findings revealed recurring issues related to identity, inequality, social class, racialization, migration, historical memory, and power across the corpus. Collectively, the selected works diversify cultural representation, destabilize hegemonic interpretations of literature, and provide a basis for moving beyond linguistic decoding toward critical interpretation and reflection. These findings subsequently informed the design of a didactic sequence for the intended educational context. However, the present study is limited to corpus selection and textual analysis and does not evaluate classroom implementation or its effects on students. The study highlights the pedagogical and political significance of deliberate literary selection and the potential of examining literature through a critical intercultural lens as a means of contributing to a decolonial perspective in English Language Teaching.

Keywords: *critical interculturality, decolonial perspective, literature, English Language Teaching (ELT), close reading*

Introduction

Literature has long been recognized as a valuable medium to teach culture in the foreign language classroom (Babae & Wan, 2014). Nevertheless, from a critical intercultural perspective, it is necessary to recognize that literature can also reproduce dominant ideologies, reinforce stereotypes, and perpetuate colonial views of culture (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). For this reason, promoting critical intercultural practices becomes essential to fostering equity and justice within the English language classroom (Gutiérrez, 2022).

Iddings and associates (2025) provide empirical support for the relevance of critical interculturality in teacher education. Their study with migrant families and teachers in the United States and Chile found that engaging with families' knowledge and experiences fostered critical thinking among teachers, strengthened their respect for diverse values and aspirations, and contributed to the recognition of knowledge and educational resources within immigrant households. From a critical intercultural perspective, their work further emphasizes the need to move beyond superficial understandings of cultural diversity by questioning the structural, colonial, and racial dynamics that perpetuate inequalities and marginalize alternative forms of knowledge and worldviews. Applied to the teaching of literature, this perspective provides a basis for moving beyond traditional comprehension tasks and approaching literary texts as spaces for dialogue and critical reflection on cultural assumptions, power relations, and alternative worldviews.

Building on these perspectives, the present study examines the pedagogical potential of a selected corpus of literary texts for integrating critical intercultural and decolonial perspectives into an undergraduate Literature course for pre-service English teachers. The corpus was compiled according to the texts' potential to engage with

cultural difference, inequality, resistance, and other issues relevant to critical interculturality and decoloniality. Through a close reading of the selected works, the study examines how cultural representations, social tensions, and symbolic elements provide opportunities for critical engagement with issues of identity, inequality, and power. The findings from this analysis subsequently informed the design of a didactic sequence incorporating reading comprehension activities oriented toward critical questioning, comparative analysis, and reflection. However, the present study is limited to the selection and textual analysis of the literary corpus and does not examine the classroom implementation or evaluation of the didactic sequence.

Ultimately, the contribution of the study lies in centering literary selection itself as a pedagogical and political decision in English language education. Instead of treating literature entirely as a linguistic resource or as a vehicle for transmitting fixed cultural representations, the study approaches literary narratives as cultural and political texts whose meanings can be interrogated from multiple perspectives. By bringing canonical and non-canonical works into dialogue, the selected corpus illustrates how literary selection can broaden the range of voices, experiences, and social issues represented in the Literature classroom and create possibilities for questioning dominant narratives and relations of power.

Theoretical background

Critical interculturality in foreign language education

Interculturality has often been presented as a progressive and inclusive project associated with modernity; however, this discourse also conceals its colonial foundations. The use of interculturality in the name of modernity reveals “its darkest side in the form of colonialism” (Aman, 2014: 7); particularly through what it is described as the appropriation of the other by assimilation (Aman, 2014). Under this logic, the other is not recognized as a legitimate subject of knowledge, language, or history, but is instead reduced to a condition of non-existence, justified by the promise of integration into a supposedly superior cultural order. Such an understanding of interculturality operates as a mechanism of symbolic and epistemic domination, limiting the possibility of genuine dialogue.

From this perspective, a critical interculturality “from below” becomes necessary to challenge the colonial matrix of power, being, and knowledge. Maldonado, Reyes & del Valle (2015) explain that mainstream approaches to interculturality have promoted integration projects that ignore internal conflicts, historical relations of domination, and the coloniality embedded in socio-cultural structures. As a consequence, hierarchical classifications are reproduced, positioning the other as inferior or invisible within their own territories. Therefore, a merely relational view of interculturality is insufficient to address these deeply rooted inequalities.

In this respect, Walsh (2010) warns that interculturality can function as a tool of colonization when minority groups are forced to assimilate dominant customs, values, and behaviors in order to be accepted. This process is sustained by institutional systems of rules and beliefs that legitimize functional inclusion while simultaneously demanding cultural renunciation. In this sense, individuals abandon their own cultural frameworks to adopt those imposed by hegemonic projects of modernity disguised as inclusion.

Critical interculturality, in contrast, must address cultural processes as inherently intersubjective and dialogical, where interactions are potentially enriching for all participants. Byram (2021) states that intercultural competence involves the ability to combine communicative and social skills with empathy, particularly in situations of conflict. Within this framework, he refers to the intercultural speaker as a 'cultural mediator,' arguing that they are not a passive tourist, but an active agent who utilizes these communicative and empathetic skills to mediate conflicts and value misunderstandings. In line with this view, Byram, Holmes & Savvides (2013) emphasize that language teachers play a fundamental role in developing linguistic skills and in fostering intercultural values, awareness, and attitudes among language learners.

Foreign language teaching, therefore, cannot be separated from its cultural and social dimensions. Language and culture are inseparable, and their relationship contributes to the construction of community and identity. Communication extends beyond grammar and vocabulary to include meanings, worldviews, and power relations. Consequently, language learning must be approached holistically and from a transdisciplinary perspective that incorporates decolonial thinking as a guiding curricular principle (Meighan, 2023).

From this standpoint, the decolonial approach should not be considered an optional addition, but a fundamental ingredient of the curriculum. Integrating decoloniality into intercultural education allows language teaching to move beyond functional communication and toward the critical examination of cultural representations, epistemic hierarchies, and historical inequalities. In this way, critical interculturality becomes a pedagogical pathway for questioning colonial legacies and for constructing more just, plural, and situated forms of knowledge in the English language classroom.

In the present study, therefore, critical interculturality is understood as the pedagogical and analytical lens through which literary texts are selected and examined, to examine their potential to contribute to the development of a decolonial perspective in English language education.

Decolonial perspective in language teaching

The relevance of developing didactic processes grounded in a decolonial perspective lies in their potential to foster critical reflection and learner autonomy in relation to social and cultural diversity. From this view, education is not limited to the transmission of dominant knowledge, but becomes a space for recognizing silenced voices and for constructing alternative ways of understanding the world. Decoloniality promotes what have been termed “other epistemologies” (SEP, 2024), which challenge the colonial logic that seeks to preserve asymmetrical and vertical relations of power and knowledge.

This colonial logic is sustained by what Quijano (2001) conceptualized as the colonial matrix, a structure that organizes social classifications and legitimizes hierarchical relations through race, culture, language, and knowledge. Mignolo (2014) expands this notion by explaining that the colonial matrix operates as a network of beliefs that guides actions, allowing individuals to rationalize their privileges or marginalization within the system. From a decolonial perspective, questioning this matrix becomes essential in order to destabilize the epistemic and cultural hierarchies that continue to shape educational practices. A decolonial pedagogy, implies valuing diverse cultural expressions and pedagogical practices, recognizing the necessity of intercultural exchange in knowledge production. Education is conceived as a privileged space for encounters among beings and knowledges, where dialogue is not only possible but necessary. Such dialogue, however, must be understood from a critical intercultural stance that acknowledges colonial wounds as starting points for generating alternative epistemic practices. In this sense, decoloniality does not seek to erase difference, it also promotes to transform it into a source of epistemic and cultural richness.

Teaching from a decolonial perspective requires addressing the intrinsic relationship between language and culture. Language is not a neutral instrument; it is a social and historical construction that shapes how reality is named, interpreted, and experienced. Consequently, foreign language education must go beyond instrumental communication and incorporate critical reflections on how words, narratives, and discourses contextualize social realities. Although global markets and transnational exchanges are undeniable, these dynamics should be approached as opportunities for dialogue between the Global North and the Global South, not as mechanisms for reinforcing epistemic domination. Within this framework, foreign language teaching seeks to break with “the dynamics imposed on teaching practices, in both feeling and action, where educators display colonial behaviors, turning students into mere recipients of knowledge, memorized words, and pronunciation patterns determined by external interests” (Sarmiento & Perales, 2022: 31). Instead, a decolonial approach positions students as active subjects capable of questioning, interpreting, and resignifying linguistic and cultural content. In this sense, the

decolonial approach becomes a fundamental component of a critical intercultural curriculum aimed at fostering more just, plural, and situated forms of knowledge in the English language classroom.

The pedagogical potential of literature for decolonial reflection

Literature plays a central role in processes of cultural and epistemic decolonization since it enables the critical examination of the narratives through which colonial domination has historically been legitimized. Postcolonial literary theory seeks to unveil how Western literary traditions have often masked colonial violence under apparently humanistic and civilizing discourses. Bartiza & Zrizi (2022) explain that colonial literature functioned as a symbolic mechanism that represented colonized peoples as passive, inferior, and dependent; thus, justifying imperial power relations. From this perspective, colonialism extends beyond the territorial and political spheres to the literary and discursive domains since it systematically excluded the voices, experiences, and worldviews of colonized subjects.

In response to this silencing, postcolonial and decolonial literatures emerge as spaces of resistance and identity reconstruction. Literary texts written from formerly colonized contexts operate as alternative histories that challenge Eurocentric narratives and recover stories erased from official historiography (Bartiza & Zrizi, 2022). Through the act of “writing back,” authors transform literature into a political and cultural tool that questions Western epistemologies while affirming the value of local knowledges, memories, and identities (Bartiza & Zrizi, 2022). In this sense, literature allows writers and readers to move from being objects of colonial discourse to becoming subjects who generate their own narratives, meanings, and forms of resistance. Such processes are fundamental for the construction of a decolonial identity grounded in agency, dignity, and epistemic autonomy.

From a pedagogical standpoint, critical decolonial interculturality offers a framework for integrating literature into curricula in ways that challenge Eurocentric canons and educational inequalities. Walsh, Oliveira, and Candau (2018, as cited in da Silva, 2025) argue that educational practices must confront the structures that reproduce discrimination and exclusion within dominant curricular models. This implies recognizing cultural diversity and actively questioning and transforming the power relations that sustain inequality between peoples and cultures (Candau, 2008, as cited in da Silva, 2025). Consequently, curricular designs should include authors and works that represent traditionally marginalized knowledges and experiences, fostering inclusive spaces for intercultural dialogue and critical reflection (da Silva, 2025). Through literature, education can contribute to a radical reconfiguration of social, cultural, and institutional relationships oriented toward equity and democratic coexistence.

In the context of English language teaching, the decolonization of materials becomes a key strategy to counter cultural imposition and learner alienation. Charry et al. (2024) observe that EFL instruction has frequently prioritized foreign cultural models while neglecting students’ local realities, interests, and life experiences. In contrast with this, a decolonial approach advocates for materials that reflect diverse cultural perspectives, recover marginalized pedagogies, and incorporate local narratives, histories, and artistic expressions into the learning process (Charry et al., 2024). When literature is selected and used from this standpoint, it enables an intercultural interaction that allows students to learn English and to value, share, and legitimize their own cultural identities (Charry et al., 2024). In this way, literature becomes a powerful pedagogical tool for fostering a decolonial identity in the English language classroom.

Methodology

Research design

This study was conducted from a qualitative research perspective, given its focus on the interpretation of literary texts as opposed to the numerical measurement of variables or learning outcomes. Hernández Sampieri, Fernández Collado and Baptista Lucio (2014) explain that qualitative research involves the collection and interpretation of non-numerical data and allows research questions and interpretations to be refined throughout

the research process. This approach was suitable for this study because it allowed for an examination of how meanings related to culture, identity, inequality, and power are represented and developed in literary works. Accordingly, the selected literary texts constituted the primary objects of analysis.

Close reading served as the central analytical method. This well-established practice has a long disciplinary tradition in literary studies and involves sustained attention to the textual features through which meaning is constructed. Guillory (2025) describes close reading as a reading practice that transformed literary studies and helped define literary criticism as a distinct field. Although there have been attempts to formulate specific procedures characterizing close reading, the method does not follow a fixed standardized sequence of steps, which allows for flexibility in its application to literary research (Guillory, 2025). This flexibility suited the present study because the analysis was guided by critical intercultural lens, without a predetermined coding procedure.

From a methodological perspective, close reading offers a disciplined research practice that structures the examination of texts to develop systematic and theoretically informed interpretations (Brummett, 2019). It can be used deductively when examining a text through an existing theoretical framework, or inductively when interpretations are developed from detailed observations of textual features (Brummett, 2019). In this study, close reading was primarily informed by critical interculturality, which provided the theoretical lens for examining the literary texts and their potential to contribute to a decolonial perspective in English language education. The criteria used to select the texts, along with the specific analytical dimensions employed in the close reading process, are described in the following sections.

Intended educational context

The literary texts were chosen for the development of a didactic sequence for a Literature course offered in the third semester of a bachelor's program in English Language Teaching at a public university in northwest Mexico. The main purpose of the course is to develop students' reading comprehension skills through literary texts; however, the program offers enough curricular autonomy to integrate additional pedagogical perspectives. Therefore, critical interculturality was incorporated as a lens for selecting texts with the potential to contribute to a decolonial perspective, expanding the course beyond linguistic and literary comprehension toward critical engagement with issues of culture, identity, inequality, and power.

At the stage of text selection, the course was expected to include a group of ten students who would take the course during the fall semester of 2025. Information available from previous courses indicated that the students had a strong command of English in both comprehension and production. Although Spanish was their first language, their English proficiency was considered when assessing the linguistic accessibility and pedagogical suitability of potential literary texts.

Approximately 18 effective 100-minute class sessions were anticipated after accounting for teaching practicum periods and other interruptions in the academic calendar. The available instructional time therefore influenced the number and length of texts to be included in the corpus. For longer canonical works, graded-reader adaptations were chosen because they were more suitable than the original unabridged versions, considering the time available.

Corpus selection criteria

Five criteria derived from the critical intercultural lens underpinning the study and its orientation toward a decolonial perspective in English language education and from the characteristics of the educational context. Although all texts included in the final corpus met these criteria, their relevance to each criterion varied across the literary works.

The first criterion was linguistic accessibility and suitability, based on the learner's English proficiency and their ability to engage with the texts in an undergraduate Literature course. For longer canonical works, graded-reader

adaptations were selected when original texts were considered too complex or extensive for the students' level and the time available in the course. This was the case for *Les Misérables* (The Miserables), *Frankenstein*, and *A Christmas Carol*. The second criterion was critical intercultural potential, conceptualized as the capacity of the texts to provide opportunities for questioning cultural representations and engaging with different cultural and social perspectives. The third criterion was decolonial relevance, focusing on whether the texts addressed inequality, power relations, hegemonic representations, resistance, and historically marginalized perspectives. The fourth criterion pertained to the relevance of the themes to students' social realities, including issues such as inequality, identity, migration, social class, social injustice, and intercultural understanding. The fifth criterion considered the potential to connect literary narratives with students' lived experiences, local contexts, and broader global issues. This last criterion was important for relating the social and cultural issues represented in the texts to contexts beyond the literary narratives themselves.

These criteria were applied in relation to the educational context, with consideration of how each literary work would function within that context. Consequently, the resulting corpus brought together texts from different geographical, cultural, social, and historical contexts. Alecia McKenzie's "Private School" was chosen for its engagement with social class, inequality, discrimination, aspiration, merit, privilege, and access to educational opportunities. Yukio Tsuchiya's *Faithful Elephants* approaches different perspectives through its representation of war, suffering, ethical responsibility, and the consequences of human conflict. Hao Jingfang's *Folding Beijing* presents a speculative representation of social inequality and class stratification, providing opportunities to question ideas of meritocracy and connect fictional social divisions with contemporary inequalities.

These texts also incorporated works that address experiences of racialization, linguistic heterogeneity, migration, and border identities. Gloria Anzaldúa's "La Prieta" (The Dark One) and *Borderlands* were included for their exploration with identity, cultural heritage, racism, belonging, language, and border epistemologies. Their multilingual writing and engagement with border identities were particularly relevant to the critical intercultural lens guiding the selection of the corpus because they highlight the connections among language, identity, culture, racialization, and power and provide opportunities for examining these relationships from a decolonial perspective. The presence of Spanish alongside English was considered an important aspect of the texts' linguistic diversity and critical value, not a limitation within an English language classroom. Bao Phi's "Revolution Shuffle" addressed similar concerns through its engagement with migration, displacement, historical memory, and experiences shaped by broader social and political forces.

Canonical literary works were also deliberately included in the corpus. Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* allowed for the examination of class struggle, oppression, inequality, and collective resistance, whereas Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was considered in relation to gender and the patriarchal historical context surrounding Shelley's life and writing. Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* offered a different perspective on social class and inequality through its critique of wealth, poverty, and social responsibility. As noted above, complete graded-reader adaptations of these three works were used instead of the original unabridged versions. The inclusion of canonical literature was not meant to reproduce an exclusively traditional literary canon, but to explore the possibilities of rereading these works through a critical intercultural lens that incorporates attention to gender, social class, historical context, and relations of power.

Finally, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's "Aschenputtel" (Cinderella) was chosen to introduce a comparative dimension into the corpus. The tale offers opportunities to examine how cultural narratives are transformed, adapted, and potentially sanitized as they circulate across historical and cultural contexts, particularly through dominant cultural industries. This inclusion complements the other texts by focusing on the processes through which cultural representations themselves are constructed, modified, and transmitted.

Table 1 extends information on the specific editions and sources used for the textual analysis, including relevant information concerning language, translation, and adaptation. All texts were analyzed in their entirety as presented in the editions used for this study.

Table 1: Texts information.

Author	Literary work	Edition/source used	Publisher/source	Language/translation or adaptation
Alecia McKenzie	Private School	The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories, edited by Stewart Brown and John Wickham (2001), pp. 442–446	Oxford University Press	English
Yukio Tsuchiya	Faithful Elephants	English-language edition (1988)	Houghton Mifflin	Translated from Japanese into English by Tomoko Tsuchiya Dykes
Hao Jingfang	Folding Beijing	English edition (2016)	Tor Books	Translated from Chinese into English by Ken Liu
Gloria Anzaldúa	La Prieta (The Dark One)	This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, 2nd ed. (1983), pp. 198-209	Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press	Multilingual writing (predominantly English, with Spanish)
Gloria Anzaldúa	Borderlands	4th ed. (2012)	Aunt Lute Books	Multilingual writing (predominantly English, with Spanish)
Victor Hugo	Les Misérables (The Miserables)	Penguin Readers, Level 6 (2008)	Penguin	Graded-reader adaptation; retold in English by Chris Rice
Mary Shelley	Frankenstein	Macmillan Readers, Elementary Level (2005)	Macmillan Heinemann ELT	Graded-reader adaptation; retold in English by Margaret Tarner
Charles Dickens	A Christmas Carol	Oxford Bookworms Library (2000)	Oxford University Press	Graded-reader adaptation; retold in English by Clare West
Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm	“Aschenputtel” (Cinderella)	Jack Zipes translation in The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm (1987), pp. 121-126	Bantam	Translated from German into English by Jack Zipes
Bao Phi	“Revolution Shuffle”	Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements, edited by Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown (2015), pp. 7-14	AK Press	English

In general terms, the selected works met the five criteria through different literary, cultural, historical, and linguistic configurations. The purpose of constructing a diverse selection of texts was therefore not to identify a single type of “decolonial literature”, but to bring together works that could be examined through a critical

intercultural lens to explore their potential to contribute to a decolonial perspective in different ways. The manifestations of this potential were then examined through the close reading method described in the following section.

Analytical procedure

Once the literary works meeting the five selection criteria had been identified, the selected texts were analyzed using a qualitative close reading process informed by critical interculturality and oriented toward examining the texts' potential to contribute to a decolonial perspective. All texts were examined in their entirety as presented in the editions and adaptations listed in Table 1. The analysis did not aim to determine whether the texts met the selection criteria, but rather to examine how their critical intercultural potential was manifested within the literary works and how it could contribute to a decolonial perspective.

The analysis focused on three dimensions: cultural representations, social tensions, and symbolic elements. Cultural representations focused on the ways identities, social groups, cultural experiences, and differences were portrayed within the narratives. Social tensions were identified through representations of inequality, exclusion, discrimination, class relations, migration, racialization, gender, conflict, social injustice, and other manifestations of unequal power relations. Symbolic elements were examined according to how particular images, spaces, characters, events, or narrative elements conveyed meanings related to identity, oppression, resistance, belonging, and social justice.

The close reading also examined how these dimensions intersected within and across the selected texts. Attention was paid to recurring issues such as inequality, identity, migration, social class, racialization, historical memory, cultural difference, and relations of power. This cross-textual examination helped identify both recurring patterns and differences in how the literary works engaged with critical intercultural concerns, particularly those related to cultural representation, inequality, identity, and power.

The findings from this analytical process were used to design the reading activities and exercises for the didactic sequence. However, the pedagogical activities themselves, their classroom implementation, and their evaluation fall outside the scope of this manuscript. Therefore, the following results concern the textual analysis of the selected literary works and do not address students' engagement with or responses to the subsequent didactic sequence.

Results

As mention previously, the analysis of the selected literary texts showed diverse possibilities for critical intercultural reflection from a decolonial perspective. The close reading focused on three dimensions: cultural representations, social tensions, and symbolic elements. Across these dimensions, recurring issues such as identity, inequality, class, racialization, migration, historical memory, and power. These issues were manifested in different ways across the literary works.

Regarding cultural representations, the corpus brought together different cultural, social, geographical, and historical perspectives. Gloria Anzaldúa's *La Prieta* and *Borderlands*, for example, addressed racialized identities, heritage, belonging, and border epistemologies. *Private School* represents experiences of social class, discrimination, and aspiration, whereas *Aschenputtel* allows for comparison for examining how traditional narratives may be transformed or sanitized through their adaptations by dominant cultural industries. Therefore, the selected texts show different ways in which identities and cultural experiences are represented and negotiated across literary contexts.

In relation to social tensions, *Private School* and *Folding Beijing* both address social class and meritocracy, questioning ideas that attribute poverty and social position primarily to individual responsibility. *Faithful Elephants* and *Revolution Shuffle* expand these issues to include collective suffering, historical memory, war, migration, and displacement. Anzaldúa's *La Prieta* and *Borderlands* introduce racialization and conflict

surrounding Chicano heritage and belonging. Social tensions are also present in canonical works. *Les Misérables* focuses on class struggle, oppression, and collective resistance; *Frankenstein* can be read in relation to gender and the patriarchal conditions surrounding its production; and *A Christmas Carol* presents class inequality and social critique. In general, these findings indicate that the selected texts approach interculturality beyond cultural difference, incorporating issues of unequal social relations, conflict, and power.

Symbolic elements also help express the articulation of these cultural representations and social tensions. In *Private School*, for example, the tombstone associated with safety creates a contradiction between common ideas of security and the protagonist's lived reality. In *Folding Beijing*, the spatial division of the city serves as an allegory for social stratification and unequal access to resources. Similarly, the border in Anzaldúa's work goes beyond a geographical boundary and raises similar questions about identity, belonging, cultural conflict, and power. These elements offer additional layers through which social inequalities and cultural experiences can be critically interpreted.

Across these three analytical dimensions, the corpus serves three broader purposes. First, it broadens cultural representation by incorporating voices and experiences from different geopolitical, social, and historical contexts. Second, it destabilizes hegemonic interpretations of literature by highlighting marginalized perspectives and allowing canonical works to be reconsidered through a critical intercultural lens that incorporates attention to gender, social class, historical context, and relations of power. Third, the textual features identified through the analysis support a shift for moving beyond linguistic decoding toward critical interpretation and ethical reflection. These findings were later used to inform the design of reading comprehension activities for the didactic sequence; however, the activities themselves and their classroom implementation are not analyzed in the present study. The pedagogical potential of the corpus extends beyond the individual themes addressed by each literary work to the possibilities that emerge from their deliberate combination within a critical intercultural framework, particularly for questioning dominant representations, inequalities, and relations of power.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the selection of literary texts is not a neutral curricular decision since it carries pedagogical and political implications. The cultural representations, social tensions, and symbolic elements identified across the corpus illustrate how literary selection can influence which identities, experiences, conflicts, and relations of power become visible within the English language classroom. From a critical intercultural perspective, this becomes relevant because engaging with cultural difference requires moving beyond the representation of diversity toward the examination of the structural conditions through which difference, inequality, and exclusion are produced. In this sense, the findings are consistent with perspectives on critical interculturality that emphasize the need to question colonial and racial structures, hegemonic knowledge, and unequal relations of power, moving beyond the view of interculturality as the mere coexistence of different cultures. (Iddings, Lamas, Rojas & Vasquez, 2025; Walsh, 2010).

The analysis suggests as well that critical interculturality can be approached through the tensions and contradictions represented in literary narratives. Across the texts, issues of class, racialization, migration, gender, historical memory, belonging, and cultural representation intersect with broader relations of privilege and marginalization. Consequently, intercultural engagement is not presented as a harmonious encounter among cultures, but as a space in which identities and cultural meanings are formed through conflict, negotiation, and resistance. This interpretation resonates with the decolonial orientation of the study, particularly with the understanding that language and education are shaped by historical and epistemic structures of power. From this perspective, literary texts can provide opportunities to make visible experiences and forms of knowledge that have traditionally been marginalized within dominant educational narratives.

One important implication of the findings is that reading literature through a critical intercultural lens to contribute to a decolonial perspective does not have to be limited to contemporary, postcolonial, or explicitly marginalized works. The inclusion of *Frankenstein*, *Les Misérables*, and *A Christmas Carol* indicates that canonical texts can also be read through a critical intercultural lens, with attention to gender, social class, historical context, and relations of power that may receive less attention in traditional literary instruction. At the same time, the inclusion of works such as Anzaldúa's "La Prieta" and *Borderlands* broadens the selection by incorporating perspectives associated with racialization, border identities, linguistic heterogeneity, and historically marginalized experiences. Thus, the decolonial orientation of the corpus is reflected both in the texts included and in how they are selected, brought together, and interpreted. This orientation is consistent with decolonial perspectives that call for questioning dominant epistemologies and creating space for alternative ways of knowing and representing experience (Mignolo, 2014; Quijano, 2001; Walsh, 2010).

Considered collectively, the three broader functions, diversifying cultural representation, destabilizing hegemonic interpretations, and providing a basis for moving beyond linguistic decoding toward critical interpretation, highlight the pedagogical value of carefully selecting literary texts in English Language Teaching. The analysis suggests moving beyond the use of literary texts primarily as resources for language practice or cultural transmission and approaching them as cultural and political texts through which questions of identity, inequality, representation, and power can be examined. This does not imply that the selected works automatically produce critical or decolonial learning. Their pedagogical value also depends on how the works are framed, contextualized, and discussed through questioning and reflection.

The findings from the close reading were soon after used to design pedagogical activities focused on critical questioning, comparative analysis, and reflection. These activities were designed to encourage discussion of cultural representations and relations of power without imposing predetermined interpretations of literary texts. Although the resulting didactic sequence was later implemented, its classroom implementation and students' responses to the activities are not examined in this study and are therefore not presented as evidence of pedagogical effectiveness. For this reason, the study addresses only the critical intercultural potential identified through the textual analysis of the selected works and its possible contribution to a decolonial perspective.

Conclusions

This study examined the pedagogical potential of selecting and analyzing literary texts through a critical intercultural lens for an undergraduate Literature course in English language teacher education, with particular attention to their potential to contribute to a decolonial perspective. The close reading showed that the selected works provide multiple opportunities to critically engage with questions of identity, inequality, and power across diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts. Taken together, the corpus broadens cultural representations, challenges hegemonic interpretations of literature, and provides a basis for moving beyond linguistic decoding toward critical interpretation and reflection.

The main contribution of the study is to highlight the pedagogical and political significance of literary text selection in English language education. Instead of treating literature solely as a resource for language development or cultural transmission, the analysis suggests that a carefully selected group of texts can provide a foundation for pedagogical practices that address questions of representation, inequality, and power. This potential is not limited to texts explicitly associated with marginalized or decolonial perspectives, canonical literary works may also be revisited critically through different interpretive lenses. In this sense, the study emphasizes that a decolonial orientation involves attention to both the texts included in the curriculum and the ways in which they are selected, contextualized, combined, and interpreted.

This study is limited to the selection and textual analysis of the literary corpus and the pedagogical possibilities identified through the analysis. Although the findings subsequently were later used in the design and classroom implementation of a didactic sequence, the implementation itself and students' responses to the activities are not

analyzed or reported in this manuscript. Therefore, the study does not make claims about the effectiveness of the sequence or its effects on students' decolonial learning, perspective transformation, or other learning outcomes. Future research could examine how a critical intercultural approach to literature may contribute to the development of a decolonial perspective among pre-service English teachers, including how they engage with the selected texts, interpret questions of identity and power, and respond to the possibilities and tensions that emerge from these pedagogical practices.

References

- Aman, R. (2014). *Impossible interculturality? Education and the colonial difference in a multicultural world*. Linköping University Press.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1983). La Prieta. In C. Moraga & G. Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color* (2nd ed., pp. 198-209). Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.
- Anzaldúa, G. (2012). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The new mestiza* (4th ed.). Aunt Lute Books.
- Babae, R., Wan, Y. (2014). Significance of literature in foreign language teaching. *International Education Studies*, 7(4), 80-85. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1069281>
- Bartiza, S., Zrizi, H. (2022). Postcolonialism: Literary applications of a decolonizing tool. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 5(12), 69-75. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijlt.2022.5.12.9>
- Brummett, B. (2019). *Techniques of close reading* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Byram, M. (2021). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence: Revisited* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M., Holmes, P., Savvides, N. (2013). Intercultural communicative competence in foreign language education: Questions of theory, practice, and research. *Language Learning Journal*, 41(3), 251-253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2013.836343>
- Charry, V., Laguna Pulido, J. F., Felipe Campos, C., Linares Velasquez, K. V., Rodríguez Granados, I. J. (2024). Descolonizar materiales de inglés: Una estrategia para enseñar inglés a los niños y fomentar su competencia comunicativa intercultural. *Ciencia Latina Revista Científica Multidisciplinar*, 8(2), 6773-6796. https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v8i2.11093
- Da Silva, L. R. (2025). Critical decolonial interculturality as an analytical lens for the Espaço de Bitita. *Educação e Pesquisa*, 51, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634202551291294por>
- Dickens, C. (2000). *A Christmas carol* (C. West, retold by). Oxford University Press.
- Grimm, J., & Grimm, W. (1987). Aschenputtel [Cinderella]. In J. Zipes (Trans.), *The complete fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm* (pp. 121-126). Bantam.
- Guillory, J. (2025). *On close reading*. University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226837444>
- Gutiérrez, C. P. (2022). Learning English from a critical, intercultural perspective: The journey of preservice language teachers. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 24(2), 265-279. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v24n2.97040>
- Halualani, R., Nakayama, T. (2010). Critical intercultural communication studies: At a crossroads. In T. Nakayama & R. Halualani (Eds.), *The handbook of critical intercultural communication* (pp. 1-16). Blackwell Publishing.
- Hao, J. (2016). *Folding Beijing* (K. Liu, Trans.). Tor Books.
- Hernández Sampieri, R., Fernández Collado, C., Baptista Lucio, P. (2014). *Metodología de la investigación* (6th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Hugo, V. (2008). *Les Misérables* (C. Rice, retold by). Penguin.
- Iddings, A. C. D. S., Lamas, M., Rojas, C. L. A., Vasquez, K. M. (2025). Educating teachers toward immigrant empowerment and liberation in the United States and Chile: A funds of knowledge perspective. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 75(3-4), 462-474. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12797>

- Maldonado, C., Reyes, C., del Valle, C. (2015). Emergencia indígena, comunicación-otra y Buen Vivir. Pensar la socio-praxis comunicativa de los pueblos indígenas en Chasqui. *Chasqui. Revista Latinoamericana de Comunicación*, (128), 165-182. <https://revistachasqui.org/index.php/chasqui/article/view/1609>
- McKenzie, A. (2001). Private School. In S. Brown & J. Wickham (Eds.), *The Oxford book of Caribbean short stories* (pp. 442-446). Oxford University Press.
- Meighan, P. J. (2023). Decolonizing language education. In *Encyclopedia of applied linguistics*.
- Mignolo, W. (2014). *Desobediencia epistémica: Retórica de la modernidad, lógica de la colonialidad y gramática de la descolonialidad*. Del Signo.
- Phi, B. (2015). Revolution Shuffle. In W. Imarisha & a. m. brown (Eds.), *Octavia's brood: Science fiction stories from social justice movements* (pp. 7-14). AK Press.
- Quijano, A. (2001). Colonialidad del poder, cultura y conocimiento en América Latina. In W. Mignolo (Comp.), *Capitalismo y geopolítica del conocimiento: El eurocentrismo y la filosofía de la liberación en el debate intelectual contemporáneo*. Del Signo.
- Sarmiento, J., Perales, E. (2022). De la colonialidad del lenguaje a la descolonización del pensar, sentir y actuar de los docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera. *Revista de Filosofía*, 39(101), 455-466. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6785580>
- Secretaría de Educación Pública [SEP]. (2024). *Un libro sin recetas para la maestra y el maestro: Fase 6*. SEP.
- Shelley, M. (2005). *Frankenstein* (M. Tarner, retold by). Macmillan Heinemann ELT.
- Tsuchiya, Y. (1988). *Faithful elephants: A true story of animals, people, and war* (T. T. Dykes, Trans.). Houghton Mifflin.
- Walsh, C. (2010). Estudios (inter)culturales en clave de-colonial. *Tabula Rasa*, (12), 209-227. <https://doi.org/10.25058/20112742.393>