

VISUAL LITERACY IN EFL TEXTBOOKS IN COLOMBIA
PERCEPTIONS OF PRESERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS ON CONTEXTUALIZED AND
NON-CONTEXTUALIZED VISUAL MATERIALS

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**Perceptions of Preservice English Teachers on Contextualized and Non-Contextualized
Visual Materials**

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Dedicatoria

A nuestros padres,

Rocío Torres y Juan Fonnegra, Rafael Muñoz y Alba Molina.

Por ser el pilar silencioso detrás de cada paso que dimos. Esta tesis es también fruto de su amor incondicional, de los sacrificios que hicieron sin pedir nada a cambio, y de la fuerza que nos transmitieron con su ejemplo. Gracias por enseñarnos, cada uno desde su historia y su manera, que el esfuerzo, la constancia y el cariño son las verdaderas herramientas para alcanzar nuestros sueños. Este logro es tan nuestro como suyo.

Con todo nuestro amor y gratitud,

Valeria y Kevin.

Dedicatory

To our parents,

Rocío Torres and Juan Fonnegra, Rafael Muñoz and Alba Molina.

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Resumen

Esta investigación explora las percepciones de un grupo de futuros docentes de inglés de la Universidad La Gran Colombia frente al uso de materiales visuales contextualizados y no contextualizados en el aula de ILE (inglés como lengua extranjera). A través del análisis de diarios reflexivos, entrevistas y artefactos elaborados durante una intervención pedagógica, se identificaron cuatro categorías principales: la motivación generada por los materiales contextualizados, una alfabetización visual mayormente descriptiva, un enfoque centrado en lo lingüístico y una visión superficial de la interculturalidad. Los resultados evidencian que los materiales visuales contextualizados generan mayor conexión emocional, participación activa y relevancia pedagógica. Sin embargo, también se observa una necesidad urgente de fortalecer la alfabetización visual crítica en la formación docente, con el fin de promover la interpretación, el cuestionamiento y el entendimiento cultural más allá del contenido lingüístico.

Palabras clave: alfabetización visual, materiales contextualizados, enseñanza del inglés, formación docente, interculturalidad, EFL, multimodalidad.

Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of a group of EFL preservice teachers at Universidad La Gran Colombia regarding the use of contextualized and non-contextualized visual materials in EFL classrooms. Through the analysis of reflective journals, interviews, and artifacts collected during a pedagogical intervention, four main categories emerged: the motivational impact of contextualized materials, a predominantly descriptive visual literacy, a linguistically centered approach, and a superficial view of interculturality. Findings reveal that contextualized visual material fosters emotional connection with the learning process, besides, it activates engagement, and as a result, learners invest more in their English learning process. However, the study also highlights the urgent need to strengthen critical visual literacy within teacher education to promote interpretation, questioning, and deeper cultural understanding beyond language content.

Keywords: visual literacy, contextualized materials, English teaching, teacher education, interculturality, EFL, multimodality.

Introduction

In Colombian EFL classrooms, textbooks are used as the primary didactic material in elementary schools, with 99.1% of schools relying on them (INEE, 2009, as cited in Fernandez & Caballero, 2017). However, the visual content within these materials is often disconnected from learners' sociocultural contexts. This disconnection can affect language acquisition, as visuals lacking cultural relevance fail to engage students meaningfully or enhance their comprehension. Therefore, the previous mismatch not only diminishes the potential of visual literacy as a pedagogical tool but also raises concerns about the efficacy of these textbooks in fostering a meaningful and culturally responsive learning experience. Pre-service teachers, who are expected to teach English as a foreign language using contextualized materials, might find challenges due to this lack of alignment between textbook visuals and the cultural realities of their students.

Although the Ministry of Education of Colombia (MEN, 2022) advocates for the integration of interculturality as a key approach for educational development, significant challenges persist in the education of the country and its internal cultures. These challenges include insufficient teacher preparation on intercultural themes and a lack of autonomy for teachers to fully implement culturally rich content in the classroom. Consequently, a gap exists in both the development of intercultural competencies and the creation of culturally relevant educational materials in Colombian classrooms. Furthermore, research indicates that a good number of EFL textbooks present cultural elements superficially, often privileging knowledge from native English-speaking countries while neglecting local cultural contexts (Oviedo-Gómez, 2024). This raises concerns about the effectiveness of visual literacy in these materials, particularly in fostering critical intercultural competencies among learners.

Despite the recognized importance of contextualized visual literacy in enhancing understanding and engagement, there is a lack of research exploring the perceptions of preservice English teachers regarding the impact of contextualized versus non-contextualized visual literacy in EFL textbooks. Hence, this research will address the perceptions from a group of pre-service teachers about contextualized and not contextualized materials by implementing EFL workshops. Therefore, they can compare and might reflect about the contextualized and not contextualized materials, as a result they can draw the benefits and drawbacks about them. Probably, it can enrich their professional development as future English teachers.

In conclusion, the lack of contextualized visual resources in textbooks and the low emphasis on intercultural development in classrooms present a significant barrier to improving linguistic and intercultural competences in teaching English as a foreign language in Colombia. Textbooks and their visual aids are often not connected to students' reality, which can limit the potential for visual and cultural learning. Furthermore, students' cultural backgrounds promote the development of linguistic competences that allow for reflective intercultural-educational collaboration between teachers and students. Finally, it is essential to consider students' native literacy and cultural backgrounds as valuable resources rather than barriers (Schwarzer et al., 2003) in order to enrich, innovate, and promote language teaching in educational settings. These previous concepts and concerns will be discussed and developed along with this project.

This document is organized into six chapters. Chapter one introduces the problem and includes the justification and objectives that guide the study; chapter two presents an overview of previous studies and key concepts in which the project is oriented, chapter three presents the methodology on which this research is based and contributes to achieve the objectives, chapter four describes the interventions in detailed, chapter five

analyzes the data collected during the intervention. Finally, chapter six concludes the study with a reflection on the results and offers recommendations for future research.

Justification

Despite the diversity of resources available today, the textbook continues as one of the main resources for teachers and students (Nuñez ,2028). The textbook plays an important role as a mediator in the English learning processes, as stated by Amaya and Fajardo (2022). According to Núñez and Téllez (2009), English textbooks must be adaptive and have a purpose that addresses students' understanding, motivation, and familiarity needs. Furthermore, Duarte and Escobar (2008) argue that adaptive or contextualized material fosters creativity in language use, increases interest in topics, enhances comfort in speaking and problem-solving skills, among other benefits. Therefore, contextualized textbooks enhance students' engagement in education.

In addition to the importance of textbooks, Visual Literacy (VL) is another competency that education must foster in this century due to the vast number of visual stimuli people encounter. Debes and Fransecky (1972) define visual literacy as a group of visual competencies essential for human learning, which allow learners to better understand their environment and communication. Burmark (2002) shared that any concept, word, or thought associated with an image is stored directly into long-term memory, where significant learning endures.

Moreover, Intercultural competence is a critical area for language teachers. Holguin et.al (2012) defines interculturality as the relationship between different cultures, which should be analyzed and considered from multiple perspectives. This competence is essential for fostering mutual respect and understanding between cultures, enriching the

teaching and learning process. Thus, developing intercultural competence and visual literacy are a need in this century, in the EFL field.

Serafini (2014) indicates that visual literacy not only involves the ability to interpret images but also includes an understanding of the cultural and social context in which these images are produced and used. Consequently, through the use of visual educational material, students are exposed to a variety of cultural contexts and perspectives, facilitating a deeper understanding of other cultures. This enhances their intercultural competence while fostering empathy and respect for diversity.

In this sense, EFL preservice teachers and in-service teachers must be aware of the relevance of contextualized and non-contextualized visual material and its connection with interculturality. This project aimed to analyze the perceptions of a group of preservice English teachers regarding contextualized and non-contextualized visual materials. The results of this study could benefit the participants as they prepare to become English teachers. Engaging in this research would help them become more aware of the educational resources available for their teaching practices. As emphasized by Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), future teachers need to develop a variety of skills that allow them to innovate and enhance their teaching processes (Díaz, 2021).

In short, this research is relevant because it contributes to the BA of Modern Languages from Universidad La Gran Colombia, especially, the research line about interculturality by reflecting that contextualized or adaptive materials can influence the improvement of intercultural competences by means of visual literacy skills. In addition, the findings of this research would not only inform the current understanding of UGC preservice teachers about materials (contextualized and not contextualized visual material) but would also indicate alternatives to foster intercultural awareness in EFL classrooms.

Research Question

The main research question guiding this investigation project is: What are the perceptions from a group of preservice English teachers at UGC about contextualized and not contextualized visual literacy EFL worksheets in Colombia?

Objectives***General Objective***

To analyze the perceptions from a group of preservice English teachers about contextualized and not contextualized visual materials.

Specific Objectives

- To examine the perceptions of preservice English teachers using contextualized and not contextualized visual materials by means of interviews.
- To compare the participants' visions about contextualized and non-contextualized materials in EFL.
- To describe the participants' opinions about visual literacy in regard to intercultural images.

Chapter 1: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Theoretical framework

This research is based on three concepts: visual literacy, interculturality, and contextualized materials. Each concept is important for understanding how pre-service teachers perceive EFL materials. These constructs will be presented in the following lines.

Visual Literacy

According to Serafini (2014) Visual literacy (VL) is part of the multimodal sets of communication, in the category of visual images such as photography, painting, drawing, among other visual tools. Likewise, Fransecky and Debes (1972) indicate that VL is understood as "the group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning"(p.9). Furthermore, VL involves interpreting, examining the content of the images that impact the audience, discussing the purpose, value and objective for effective understanding (Bamford, 2003 as cited in Serafini, 2014). In summary, VL is a group of competencies that allows people to understand and interpret the images that are around them; therefore, people can be aware of what they see and overtake a critical position towards hidden communicative intentions that are presented throughout images.

Moreover, González and García (2022) carried out a project which aimed at examining how future early childhood education teachers develop critical visual literacy through the analysis of urban art. The study revealed that while many participants struggled to identify the ideological intent behind images; some students were able to recognize relevant social content from different perspectives. This suggests that although participants started to have a critical awareness about reading images, there is still a need

to guide students in critically evaluating both the cultural and ideological messages present in visual materials.

Additionally, Holguín and Castaño (2024) carried out a research project to explore the integration of an intercultural perspective in teaching as an additional language; in the study, the researchers emphasized the development of critical visual literacy through image analysis in the classroom. The authors argue that in today's saturation of media society, it is essential for students not only to view images but also to critically interpret them; thus, people can examine their social and cultural context. The researchers applied an epistemological and didactic approach that incorporates classroom activities designed to foster reflective thinking about visual content. The findings indicate that students increase their awareness of cultural and social context, recognizing that images often reflect and reinforce dominant ideologies and cultural assumptions. The author highlights that engaging learners in these critical visual literacy practices fostered significant intercultural development; encouraging analytical reflection and a critical attitude towards the visual messages that surround learners.

Interculturality

Zimmerman (1997) indicated that interculturality is a descriptive and pedagogical concept that critically analyzes the encounter between more cultures that may or may not be conflicting. Likewise, according to Walsh (2023), interculturality can be analyzed from different perspectives. One vision from interculturality is the relational, which is the exchange of cultures, values, practices, knowledge, among other cultural-social aspects or recognition aspects that deal with recognizing cultural diversity. Therefore, interculturality in this research will be understood as the space of common or unequal relationships between two or more cultures in order to understand, identify and analyze in a respectful, critical and educational way.

The integration of interculturality in English language teaching highlights the need to move beyond purely linguistic goals toward fostering students' awareness of cultural diversity, mutual respect, and identity preservation. Flores et al. (2022) argue that English teachers act as cultural mediators and role models, helping students explore and contrast cultures through strategies such as literature, cooperative work, and discussions of deep cultural topics. Despite these efforts, teachers face significant challenges, including the prevalence of stereotypes, the lack of intercultural content in textbooks and insufficient teacher training. Finally, they argue that a truly intercultural approach must be promoting inclusive classrooms and institutional support that foster a democratic and diverse educational environment.

Contextualized Materials

First, it is worth mentioning that the concept of contextualized materials will be divided into two components: contextualization and materials. For one thing, contextualization in education refers to the integration of tools that present active content, which holds relevance in the students' learning process, along with various familiar strategies designed for specific moments in teaching (Mazzeo, 2003). On the other hand, according to Tomlinson (2011), materials are defined as anything which is used to help language learners to learn, such as magazines, photos, song lyrics, among other resources.

In this context, contextualized materials are understood as teaching resources that align with students' cultural and social realities. These materials create opportunities for learners to build meaningful connections with the content, fostering not only linguistic development but also socio-cultural awareness. As Amaya and Fajardo (2022) highlight, such materials promote a deeper understanding of the subject, encourage interest in

socio-cultural learning, and contribute to increased participation, meaningful learning experiences, and improved classroom dynamics.

Studies Related to Visual Literacy

This section presents a review of studies connected to visual literacy, highlighting its relevance to English as a Foreign Language (EFL). According to recent investigations, visual literacy plays a key role in developing learners' critical thinking and intercultural competences, which are essential for navigating today's culturally diverse world. However, these studies also reveal significant deficiencies in the design and use of teaching materials, particularly in contexts such as the Colombian one, where visual content is often limited or disconnected from learners' realities, but as well in international context where visual literacy has started to be implemented.

First, Moreira and Moreira (2020) conducted a qualitative study in Brazil; the main objective of this project was to promote critical reading by encouraging university students to question advertising messages. The methodology used was the pedagogy of seeing. The results indicate that students were able to develop critical reading skills. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of such research in today's world, where the use of images is increasing daily due to technology. Therefore, society must work on developing visual literacy (VL).

Secondly, Suriati (2019) implemented a qualitative project in the United States with the aim of developing visual literacy skills in a group of university students through the analysis of a photograph depicting the war in Palestine. The research was conducted in three phases: the exposure phase, the participation phase, and the reflection phase. Ultimately, the author argued that visual literacy is crucial in education, as it helps individuals better interpret the world by allowing students to understand both distant and nearby realities.

Besides, Matusiak et al. (2019) conducted a consensual qualitative study aimed at exploring the skills of 15 university students regarding the visual content they used in their academic work. Data collection was based on questionnaire responses, students' assignments, presentations, and interviews. The results indicate that students use visual aids in their work without being fully aware of why they do so. In conclusion, the researchers suggest that despite living in a visual world, students need more training in selecting, evaluating, and interpreting visual materials.

Studies Related to English Language Textbooks

In these lines, the reader will find some research articles about English language textbooks. Regarding the national context, Núñez (2022) conducted a socio-critical study in Colombia, where there was the analysis of six English language textbooks. The researcher used interviews with textbook authors and rubrics to evaluate the materials. The findings reveal that the textbooks contain colonialist themes related to gender, race, sexual orientation, and social class. The researcher encourages teachers to develop English teaching materials that are more sensitive to cultural diversity.

Likewise, Henao and Murcia (2019) carried out an exploratory mixed-methods study (qualitative-quantitative) in Bogotá. The researchers observed and analyzed the English, Please, textbook. The authors focused on whether it helped students develop intercultural awareness, which is essential in foreign language learning. To analyze the textbooks, they used a model adapted from Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007). The results indicate that while the series shows progress compared to other materials in terms of intercultural awareness, there is still room for improvement. The English textbook, Please! exhibits instrumentalist characteristics concerning intercultural competence.

In regard to international research about visual literacy in textbooks, Vu and Febrianti (2018) conducted a qualitative study in Asia, aiming to explore the role of visual

resources in English language textbooks. Additionally, the study sought to examine teachers' reflections on the use of visual aids in these textbooks. To achieve these objectives, the researchers used interviews with participating teachers and an analysis of visual resources based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) visual grammar theory. The results confirm the importance of visual resources in teaching practice, while also highlighting the limitations of some images as learning tools.

Finally, the above-mentioned studies provide an overview of how visual literacy has been addressed both locally and internationally. As visual literacy is still an emerging topic in the field of English language teaching, particularly in Colombia, there is a noticeable gap in local research on the subject. International studies, meanwhile, emphasize its potential to help students critically interpret the world around them, though they also reveal limitations in current teaching materials. At the international level, visual literacy in English textbooks has received direct attention, as seen in Vu and Febrianti (2018) study. Their research highlights the importance of visual content in enhancing language instruction while also revealing shortcomings in how images are integrated. Specifically, while visuals are present, they often serve a decorative or superficial function, without actively fostering students' critical analysis or intercultural understanding. This suggests the need for a more international incorporation of visual literacy principles in textbook design, ensuring that images become meaningful tools for developing both interpretive skills and cultural awareness.

Chapter 2: Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

This research project aims to explore the perceptions of preservice English teachers at UGC about the use of contextualized and non-contextualized visual literacy material in EFL classrooms. This study is guided by qualitative research since it allows an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions and experiences. Thus, this research design ensures a comprehensive exploration of the main topics while maintaining a focus on the contextual realities and experiences of EFL pre-service teachers. In the following lines, it will explain the type of research, participants and data collection methods which guide this study.

Methodology

A case study methodology is applied, providing a detailed examination of a specific group. According to Yin (2014) case studies offer contextual insights about a subject or object of study. This research collected data by using interviews, surveys and focus groups, allowing participants to articulate their thoughts openly and in depth. These methods follow the recommendations of Busetto et al. (2020) for gathering meaningful data in qualitative research and enable a comprehensive exploration of how participants view the role of visual literacy and intercultural elements in language teaching. Additionally, an analysis of a selected EFL worksheet activity was conducted aligned with the Bowen (2009) method for systematically reviewing texts to evaluate the visual and contextualized materials.

To preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the individuals who participated in this study, all participants have been assigned initials as a form of pseudonyms. These initials are A.G, I.V and L.M. They are used consistently throughout the study to reference

each individual while protecting their identity. This aligns with the ethical guidelines for qualitative research outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA,2020) which emphasize the researcher's responsibility to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

Type of Research

This study was based on a qualitative research design, guided by the principles outlined by Busseto, Wick, and Gumbinger (2020), which emphasize the suitability of qualitative methods for exploring context-dependent phenomena. Through qualitative inquiry, the study aimed to capture the perspectives of participants, making this research design particularly appropriate for examining their perceptions about the use of contextualized visual materials in EFL classrooms and its impact in critical interculturality.

Participants

The participants for this study are EFL pre- service who study at the Universidad La Gran Colombia (UGC); it is a private university located in the downtown of Bogotá. The students are currently in different semesters of their undergraduate program, ranging from the sixth to the eighth semester, and their ages range from 20 to 23 years old. All participants have diverse social and cultural backgrounds, and they were purposefully selected based on their commitment to the field of English as a foreign Language (EFL), as well as their exposure to a variety of teaching materials and experiences during their academic training.

To protect the identity and privacy of the individuals involved in this study, all participants have been assigned initials as a form of pseudonyms; the participants will be referred to as A.G, I.V and L.M. These acronyms do not correspond to their real names but are used to maintain clarity and consistency in the analysis. This approach follows standard ethical research practices, particularly in qualitative studies, where the anonymity

of participants is a key concern. According to the American Psychological Association (APA,2020) guidelines on research ethics, researchers are responsible for safeguarding participants' confidentiality. The group consists of two female participants and one male participant.

The first participant, A.G, is a 20-year-old student from the department of Cundinamarca. He is currently in his sixth semester of the Modern Languages program. Although his primary interest lies in learning other languages rather than pursuing a teaching career, he has participated in multiple pedagogical courses as part of the curriculum. His perspective as a language learner rather than a future teacher adds a valuable contrast to the study, especially when analyzing the appeal and comprehension of visual materials from a non-teaching-oriented point of view.

The second participant, I.V, is a 21-year-old student from Tolima, also in her sixth semester. She has taken language courses at private academies before attending university, which has expanded her exposure to different types of instructional materials beyond those used in formal university settings. Although she remains undecided about becoming a teacher, she has a strong academic inclination, particularly in grammar and language structure. Her approach to learning is methodical and rigorous, and she tends to be critical of the quality and relevance of the materials provided in her class. In addition, she works as an occasional waitress and offers private tutoring English lessons, which gives her additional insights into different learning contexts. Her contributions are especially relevant to this study, as she represents the perspective of a preservice teacher who is both a student and an occasional educator.

The final participant, L.M is a 23-year-old student in her eighth semester. She has teaching experience as a tutor for adult learners enrolled in night schools' programs, and she is fully committed to becoming a teacher. She is particularly interested in teaching young learners and often reflects on how to make her teaching strategies clearer and more

accessible, something that she describes as “breaking things down” for her students. Her experience working with different age groups and learning settings gives her a multifaceted view of teaching materials and how they should be adapted to suit the needs of diverse learners. Like the other female participant, she also works as a waitress part time.

As participants were eager to participate in the research process, they offered a broad and diverse range of perspectives, based on their educational experiences, professional aspirations, and engagement with language learning. Their feedback provided critical insights into how visual literacy is understood and applied in real classroom settings.

Instruments to collect data

This research was guided by a qualitative method, and it analyzed the perception of a group of preservice English teachers about contextualized visual material; thus, to collect qualitative data, this project implemented surveys, interviews, and diaries as key research instruments. These instruments offered wide reflections of each participant and enriched comprehension of their perceptions.

Surveys

A survey is a tool for collecting data through open, closed, multiple choice questions, among other questions, these must be designed for a specific group with something in common (Oppenheim, A. N. 1992). According to Jain (2021), surveys enable researchers to analyze and understand people's opinions and interests. In this research, the surveys were used to obtain the perceptions and experiences of preservice English teachers on the use of contextualized or non-contextualized visual material. These surveys included open and closed questions, and they were used before and after some sections to obtain any information or changes in the views of participants.

Diary(journals)

A diary is a tool and a strategy in education for researching and obtaining authentic information or perceptions from participants in a determined period, according to Bautista (2007) a teacher's diary enhances comprehension of the students and classrooms dynamics, and it serves as an authentic material to analyze students' perceptions in detail. In fact, in this project researchers used teacher dairy strategy to record observations and reflections about the perceptions, reactions, comments and ideas of the preservice English teachers using the contextualized and non-contextualized visual material during this investigation and sessions.

Interviews

Interviews are tools that allow the researchers to gather information about participants' thoughts, perceptions, and experiences. According to Kvale (1996), semi-structured interviews are effective in understanding broad topics because they offer a balance of structured questions and allow participants freedom of response; thus, they can explore their ideas. In this pedagogical intervention, semi-structured interviews were used to enable preservice English teachers to express and share their perceptions of contextualized or not contextualized visual materials. Additionally, the interviews had open-ended questions allowing participants to discuss everything about the material and the sessions. concluding with a collection of data for a general understanding of their perspectives.

Students' artifacts

Students' artifacts are all those instruments carried out in educational activities that are utilized for data collection, such as records, workshops, journals, student portfolios, or the material specifically developed for our investigation. According to Holly, Arhar, and

Kasten (2004), preserving samples of work produced over time can be beneficial to interpret and present participant evidence. Furthermore, Stringer (2014) asserts that students' artifacts facilitate the understanding and acquisition of valuable insights related to educational challenges in schools. In summary, for this research, students' artifacts serve as tools that enable the review and identification of increasingly pertinent information regarding the perceptions of our pre-service English teachers. Thus, in this research, they were convenient to triangulate the information manifested by the participants in the journals, recording interviews that encourage

Chapter 3: Pedagogical Intervention

Intervention

This section explains the activities the authors developed in the research project, considering the overall objective: to analyze the perceptions of a group of pre-service English teachers regarding contextualized and non-contextualized visual materials in EFL resources. To achieve this objective, researchers held four meetings with the group of pre-service English teachers at La Gran Colombia University. Initially, this project had 12 candidates; however, only 3 became the final participants due to personal troubles,

unmanaged time correctly and change of thought at the beginning of the first intervention. Each session had a specific purpose related to the exploration and analysis of visual materials in the classroom. The intervention took place over four weeks, between February and March 2025, at the university (UGC).

The four meetings were designed to explore the topic progressively, from gathering initial perceptions to fostering critical reflection. Each session focused on a different aspect of visual materials in EFL instruction. In the first meeting, authors collected participants' baseline understandings and expectations regarding visual literacy. The second meeting introduced non-contextualized material to examine how students interpret generic content. The third meeting focused on the experience of engaging with contextualized materials that reflected their cultural environment. Finally, the fourth session allowed participants to compare both types of materials and reflect critically on their effectiveness and relevance. The four meetings were titled as follows: "A Survey, Dear Colleagues" "Blue Material Resource" "Red Material resource" "Comparison of Red and Blue Materials"

First Intervention: "A Survey, Dear Colleagues"

This first session took place on February 25th, 2025, and aimed to explore participants' initial experiences, knowledge, and perceptions related to visual materials in the EFL classroom, both contextualized and non-contextualized. Researchers applied a questionnaire with 14 open-ended questions, focusing on visual literacy, contextualized materials, and the use of visuals in English teaching. Additionally, they carried out semi-structured interviews with the same participants to enrich and deepen their responses and perspectives.

According to Kvale (1996) semi-structured interviews are appropriate when aiming to understand perceptions, ideas, and personal experiences, as they allow for more flexible and in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives. For this reason,

investigators used the interviews not only to complement the information gathered from the surveys but also to obtain deeper insights that emerged from conversational reflection. The full details of this first intervention are presented in Annex A.

Development

The intervention began with an introduction explaining the purpose of the session and the instructions for completing the survey. Participants were encouraged to express their ideas either in English or Spanish, ensuring that language would not be a barrier to their thoughts. A quiet space and ample time were provided for them to respond individually. Finally, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews, allowing us to further explore some of the participants' responses and gather a deeper understanding of their initial perceptions and previous knowledge. This intervention took approximately two hours.

Second Intervention “Blue Material resource”

The second session of the intervention was conducted on March 7th, 2025. The main objective of this meeting was to explore and analyze the participants' perceptions of non-contextualized visual materials used in EFL classrooms, specifically in relation to visual literacy.

Serafini (2014) states that visual literacy involves interpreting and making meaning from images within specific social and cultural contexts. However, when the images lack cultural connection, learners may struggle to engage with the content. For this reason, it is essential to explore how learners respond to such materials.

To examine this, examiners selected two pages from the textbook *Navigate A2 Elementary* (Oxford University Press): page 16, which emphasizes listening and grammar skills, and page 42, focused on speaking and writing activities (see Appendix 1). They

chose these pages for their generic, globally neutral content and minimal cultural references, making them representative of non-contextualized teaching materials. Finally, researchers referred to this resource as the “blue material” due to the predominant blue color palette used in its design. The full details of this first intervention are presented in Annex B.

Development:

The authors introduced the task and invited participants to explore the blue material. They encouraged participants to annotate, underline, draw, and write comments directly on the pages. Afterward, they completed a student journal with five open-ended questions (See Appendix 2), designed to collect their reflections on the non-contextualized material. To close the session, semi-structured interviews were conducted to further understand their responses and experiences with the resource.

Third Intervention: “Red Material resource”

The third session of the intervention took place on March 14th, 2025. Its main objective was to explore the participants’ perceptions of contextualized visual materials used in English language classrooms, especially in relation to how these materials connect with learners’ cultural backgrounds and everyday realities. According to Amaya and Fajardo (2022) contextualized materials increase motivation, foster creativity, and improve participation, since learners relate more easily to the topics presented. Based on this, we created a culturally contextualized resource-referred to as the red material due to its visual design specifically for this research project. The material included culturally relevant visuals, settings, and topics that reflected the Colombian context and the lived experiences of the learners. The full details of this first intervention are presented in Annex C.

Development

The session began with an explanation of the activity. Each participant received a printed version of the red material and was invited to interact with it by reading, annotating, underlining, and drawing directly on it. After this, participants completed a five-question student journal designed to encourage reflection on the material's cultural relevance, visual impact, and effectiveness for language learning.

To complement the journals, researchers conducted brief semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to elaborate on their written responses and share deeper insights about their experiences with the contextualized material. These responses offered perspectives on the role of culture and visual literacy in EFL instruction.

Fourth Intervention: "Comparison of Red and Blue Materials"

The fourth and final session of the intervention was conducted on March 28th, 2025, to compare contextualized (red) and non-contextualized (blue) visual materials used in the previous meetings. Tomlinson (2011) argues that the effectiveness of learning materials depends largely on their relevance to learners' lives. Comparing contextualized and non-contextualized materials helps reveal how relevance and cultural connection influence student engagement and understanding thus this session focused on gathering the participants' final reflections and perceptions regarding both resources to understand how each one influenced their views on visual literacy and intercultural learning in the EFL context. The full details of this first intervention are presented in Annex D.

Development

To begin the session, participants were given back both the red and blue materials they had worked with previously, including their annotations, drawings, and comments. The objective was for them to analyze and compare both materials critically, considering

aspects such as design, cultural relevance, language input, and the overall impact on their learning experience.

Participants were then asked to complete a final student journal, which included open-ended questions encouraging them to reflect deeply on the similarities and differences between the two materials, and to share which one they believed was more effective and the reasons behind it. Finally, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview in a conversational format, where participants were invited to elaborate on their written reflections and express their final perceptions, conclusions, and learnings about using visual materials in the EFL classroom. On the following Table. 1, there is a brief description of each of the meetings.

Table 1 Description of the intervention

Intervention chart			
Meeting	Aim	Activities	Instruments
1	To collect initial information of the Pre-service EFL teachers about their prior knowledge and perceptions regarding visual literacy by means of a survey.	Researchers will give a brief introduction to the purpose of the survey. Researchers will explain the instructions to carry out the survey. Participants will freely complete the survey.	A survey with a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Here is the survey's link: https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/1aL2vkZrqfAzyHsLuhWk53BeoTIM1UUZs1_M9fXiqjk0/mobilebasic

Intervention chart			
Meeting	Aim	Activities	Instruments
2	To explore non-contextualized material that enhances visual literacy by means of workshops. To gather the participants' opinions about non contextualized visual literacy material by means of students' journals.	Researchers will present the contextualized materials. Participants will use the material in a simulated classroom. Participants will have an open discussion by means of a journal (guided questions).	Contextualized material (workshop) Here is the English material: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KUmSdNukTVMdhpHN7bK55R8bdFLImp1P/view?usp=sharing Students' journal. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HbrUGldBN2EBE-DWBW9F9JvhTdG4s75h1BonDrA5Zdo/edit?usp=sharing
3	To explore contextualized material that is used in English teaching classrooms by means of workshops. To gather the participants' perceptions about	Researchers will present the non-contextualized materials. Participants will use the material in a simulated classroom. Participants will have an open discussion by means of a journal (guided questions).	Non-contextualized material Here is the English material: Students' journal: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Pyn7TO1_q9STZ0OoDWaBG8U2svKS1RsDxj91XNwHILU/edit?usp=drive_link

Intervention chart			
Meeting	Aim	Activities	Instruments
	contextualized visual literacy material by means of students' journals.		
4	To compare Contextualized and non-contextualized materials used in EFL teaching. To assemble final participants' comparison and perceptions on English materials used in previous interventions.	Research will present both materials contextualized and non-contextualized. Participants will compare both materials and share their perceptions by means of a journal.	The non-contextualized and contextualized visual literacy materials. The final students' journal. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gLMEKu2LqIAZbilab_a9rPZMYyCBBRZt1_wsqC9Cs/edit?usp=sharing

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Data Analysis

This chapter analyzes the data collected during the investigation process and guides the reader in answering the research question: *What are the perceptions from a group of preservice English teachers at UGC about contextualized and not contextualized visual literacy EFL worksheets?* The research team used methodological triangulation as a method to understand and reveal the data. They read and interpreted the data using the triangulation approach proposed by Denzin (2017), who argues that this technique allows researchers to observe the phenomenon from multiple perspectives, which enriches the understanding of the topic and reinforces the validity of the analysis.

During the triangulation process, the researchers applied the color-coding technique proposed by Saldaña (2016), which allowed them to organize and categorize the data according to frequency, intensity, and thematic relationship. This strategy was essential for identifying the study's emerging categories, understood as conceptual constructs that emerge from inductive analysis and reflect the voices and experiences of the participants.

Findings

In this section, we present the findings and interpretations that emerged from analyzing the pedagogical and research intervention. The reader will find the answer to the research question that guided this study: What are the perceptions of a group of preservice English teachers at UGC about contextualized and non-contextualized visual literacy EFL worksheets in Colombia? After examining data collected through diaries, interviews, and the artifacts of the participants, The researchers identified recurring patterns in participants' responses. Through a process of inductive and methodological analysis using color coding, each pattern was grouped into four main categories, which offer insights into

how participants interacted with and perceived the contextualized and non-contextualized visual materials. In the following table 2, it is presented that the four categories emerged by means of a detailed interpretation.

Table 2 Categories Emerged

What are the perceptions from a group of preservice English teachers at UGC about contextualized and not contextualized visual literacy EFL worksheets in Colombia?	
Categories	Description
Contextualized visual materials as attractive and motivating resources	Preservice English teachers perceived contextualized visual materials as more engaging and relatable.
Descriptive and non-critical visual literacy	Visual literacy remains literal, lacking interpretation.
Use of materials with a linguistic focus	Contextualized and non-contextualized materials are designed to enhance language skills rather than to promote deeper analytical skills
Superficial or stereotypical interculturality	Materials portray cultures in a simplistic manner

Contextualized visual materials as attractive and motivating resources

This category explores how preservice English teachers perceived contextualized visual materials as more engaging and meaningful than non-contextualized ones.

Throughout the pedagogical intervention, participants responded more positively when visuals reflected familiar cultural and social contexts. This perception was consistently documented across journals, interviews, and student artifacts, reinforcing the idea that relevance and identification are key to learner motivation and participation.

During the third session, in which the red material (contextualized material) was used, participants described a stronger emotional and cognitive connection to the visuals and content. In Journal 3, participants expressed similar and frequent perceptions such as:

“The material is much more interesting as it reflects our realities, making it much more interactive, and I like that a lot.” the participant adds, *“The entire material is quite interesting and striking.”* (Participant A.G, March 14th, 2025)

“I think this material is way more catchy and more interesting, it’s not boring and new... also I will use this material in class because it has some things that students may relate more to.” (Participant I.V, March 14th, 2025)

“This material is very friendly and cool; I would use it because of the way it shows our culture.” (Participant L.M, March 14th, 2025)

These responses show that contextualized visual materials were perceived as more engaging and useful. Participants describe visual resources as "striking" and "interesting", highlighting how they are embedded in cultural realities. The familiarity of the materials not only captures attention but also facilitates language learning, as the materials feel closer to their everyday lives. These findings reinforce the view of Tomlinson (2011) that contextualized materials enhance language development by connecting with students' interests, identities, and lived experiences.

Beyond their role as learners, participants also reflected on how these materials could benefit their future practice as teachers, as they perceived the created materials as a meaningful resource that reflects their environment and facilitates connection with learners. This perspective aligns with Amaya and Fajardo's (2022) argument that contextualized materials promote motivation, relevance, and creativity in the classroom. When participants recognize their own culture and environment in what they teach or learn, their engagement deepens emotionally and in terms of classroom dynamics and pedagogical planning.

In contrast, participants reported a lack of motivation and connection when working with the blue material (non-contextualized) during the second session. Several comments reflected their perception of the content as disengaging or irrelevant:

“Depending on the activities, the material can be used; it may be out of line with what interests us, and it could be more interactive.” (Participant A.G, March 7th, 2025)

“I did the exercises, but the images didn't help. They were too neutral and boring; they seemed out of context. I'll change some images.” (Participant L.M, March 7th, 2025)

“Overall, it's a bit boring, but it depends on the person; who knows? It could be improved by making it more interactive.” (Participant I.V, March 7th, 2025)

“In most cases, the content isn't relevant.” (Participant L.M, March 7th, 2025)

As we observed in the second section, participants shared similar perceptions, describing the material as “distant” and “irrelevant”, which can be interpreted as unappealing learning materials. Furthermore, the lack of connection between the contextualization of content and culture results in the learning experience being perceived as mechanical and the visual aids as decorative rather than meaningful. Serafini (2014) reminds us that visual materials should function as multimodal access points for interpretation and understanding, not as mere ornamental elements. This contrast between the meaningful and superficial use of visual aids became evident when comparing

participants' interaction with the red (contextualized) and blue (non-contextualized) materials.

Likewise, student artifacts confirmed what was mentioned previously; worksheets related to the red material showed more thoughtful annotations, including symbols, emotive responses, and personal associations. Students often linked the visuals to their own lives, thereby enriching their language output. In contrast, work on the blue material was minimal and mainly focused on completing grammar tasks, with little evidence of interpretation or emotional response.

During the final session, where both materials were compared, all participants agreed that the contextualized visual material (the red one) was more engaging and catchier. They mentioned that the real-life situations, images, and themes made it more attractive and easier to work with. For participants, the red material was more effective for language teaching because it helped generate motivation and engagement. On the other hand, the blue material was described as out of context, less visually appealing, and too focused on grammar, making it boring and less useful. These results are similar to those found by Amaya and Fajardo (2022) in their study, where they explain that contextualized materials increase interest, improve classroom interaction, and support learning by connecting with students' real-life environments.

The following table, table 3 illustrates how participants perceived the differences between the two materials:

Table 3 Comparative perceptions of contextualized and non-contextualized materials

Contextualized Visual Material	Non-Contextualized Visual Material
--------------------------------	------------------------------------

<i>“I will choose the red one. This will appeal more to students, is more attractive, and is useful in real-life situations.”</i> (Participant A.G, March 28th, 2025)	<i>“The blue one lacks real-life events and traditional styles; it can be boring.”</i> (Participant A.G, March 28th, 2025)
<i>“The material can make it more engaging simply by adding interesting images.”</i> (Participant A.G, March 28th, 2025)	<i>“The material in blue focuses too much on grammar, which might not capture students' attention.”</i> (Participant I.V, March 28th, 2025)
<i>“The material in red is more connected to Colombian reality and is more entertaining; it's not boring.”</i> (Participant I.V, March 28th, 2025)	<i>“I don't know... the content and images wouldn't be used because they don't attract attention or relate to the topic.”</i> (Participant L.M, March 28th, 2025)
<i>“All the information captures attention much more. It's not boring to read. The material in red makes you think.”</i> (Participant I.V, March 28th, 2025)	<i>“The map in the blue one is really confuse, I think it won't call any attention”</i> (Participant L.M, March 28th, 2025)

These responses confirmed that participants valued the contextualized materials primarily for their visual appeal and connection to familiar cultural elements. For them, visual elements that reflect students' reality made the activities more relatable and enjoyable. However, although they preferred the material in red and found it more motivating, most of their reflections remained descriptive. Participants' comments focused on engagement and usefulness rather than analyzing deeper meanings or messages in the images. This supports Holguín and Arques's (2024) assertion about the importance of using culturally relevant visual elements to foster emotional and cognitive engagement. At the same time, as Serafini (2014) emphasizes, developing true visual literacy also requires guiding students to critically interpret and question what they see, not just to enjoy it.

On the other hand, these comparative perceptions also allude to how future English teachers perceive the teaching and learning of a foreign language, in this case EFL. According to Tudor (2001), students and teachers have different visions of language and learning, which can modify interactions with materials and active development in classes. These visions are influenced by personal goals, cultural experiences, and expectations or beliefs about how the language should be used or taught. With this in mind, it can be observed how the participants of this study interpret contextualized materials from a culturally attractive and dynamic perspective. Their perceptions show how they value contextualized materials not only for their linguistic content, but also for their cultural content. This could suggest that their understanding of language learning through materials should foster attractiveness and entertainment themes.

In conclusion, the data collected during the pedagogical intervention show that preservice English teachers perceived contextualized visual materials as more attractive, motivating, and useful for language learning. These materials allowed them to connect with real-life situations and familiar cultural elements, which helped create interest and participation during the activities. Participants highlighted that the red material felt closer to

students' experiences, making the lessons more engaging and enjoyable. In contrast, the blue material was often described as boring, disconnected, and too focused on grammar.

Although participants preferred the contextualized material and appreciated its relevance, most of their reflections stayed at a descriptive level. They focused on how relatable or entertaining the materials were, but they did not always go beyond that to analyze the deeper meanings of the images. This confirms what Holguín and Arques (2024) suggest about the need to foster emotional and cognitive engagement through culturally relevant visuals. At the same time, Serafini (2014) reminds us that developing visual literacy requires helping students move from description to interpretation. Overall, this category shows that using contextualized materials not only increases motivation but also opens possibilities to explore culture and identity in the EFL classroom.

Descriptive and non-critical visual literacy

This category emerged from the observation that, although visual materials were present and even contextualized in some cases, participants' interpretations remained mostly literal, surface-level, and emotionally neutral. As in other studies on visual literacy, this reflects that even though students live in a highly visual and digital world, they are not yet skilled in interpreting and using visual resources critically (Matusiak et al., 2019). Their comments, actions, and journal entries revealed that their engagement with images was often descriptive rather than critical-analytical, and that they did not explore the deeper cultural or communicative meanings embedded in visuals. This indicates a gap in the development of critical visual literacy.

Serafini (2014) emphasizes that visual literacy skills go beyond identifying what is in an image; it includes understanding the cultural, social, and communicative dimensions of the image. However, many participants demonstrated limited visual literacy skills beyond a descriptive method. In the second section, which used the diary and semi-structured

interview, little development of visual literacy is evident when analyzing the uncontextualized material. As presented in the following excerpts:

"I only focused on the instructions and vocabulary. I didn't notice that the images should be changed according to the theme" (Participant IV, March 7th, 2025)

"The images are pretty, although somewhat boring, especially the map; it is very ordinary and basic for teaching directions." (Participant L.M., March 7th, 2025)

"The map with the women is confusing; it has many streets and signs that the students don't know" (Participant A.G., March 7th, 2025)

These responses reflect a utilitarian and superficial interaction with the visual content, suggesting that the images were perceived as support rather than as something fundamental to developing deeper thinking. However, one participant attempted to analyze the image in depth. A critically supervised student:

"I don't understand why, if we're talking about everyday actions, the images show penguins and Antarctica; that's not everyday life in Colombia. It doesn't make sense to focus on everyday actions and show me a scientific day in Antarctica with penguins" (Participant I.V., March 7th, 2025). This is an example of visual literacy in practice: questioning the coherence between the image and the context and beginning to evaluate representational reliability (Holguín and Castaño Arques, 2024).

Even when culturally rich visuals were introduced in the third intervention (red material), participants did not shift toward a critical stance. In Journal 3, a participant wrote: *"It shows a family with candles. but the next image that should be deleted is a burned hand. It's strong for students."* No mention was made of the cultural or social elements reflected in the image, nor was exploration of what the image could convey beyond its surface content. In her interview, Participant 2 stated: *"I liked the colors and drawings, here they enjoy different moments in Christmas."*

Even when culturally rich visual elements were introduced in the third intervention (red material), the critical stance adopted by participants was shallow. In Journal 3, participants expressed:

“It’s a good material and useful for a class, although there is an image that couldn’t be there, it’s explicit.” (Participant L.M., March 14th, 2025)

“Avoid only the burned hand, but the majority of images and text are interesting.” (Participant I.V, March 14th, 2025)

“I like that the images teach you different ways to celebrate Christmas; it motivates learning.” (Participant A.G., March 14th, 2025)

“Images are more entertaining; the burned hand can be shocking for students.” (Participant L.M., March 14th, 2025)

The cultural or social elements reflected in the image were not mentioned, nor was there any exploration of what it might convey beyond its superficial content. Although the questions in the contextualized material guided the development of critical thinking about the images, participants took a more narrative and speculative stance. According to Debes (1969), visual literacy requires interpreting and extracting meaning from visual elements, a skill that participants have not yet fully developed. Holguín and Arques (2024) assert that critical visual literacy connects with identity and reflection and can be developed through pedagogical practices that encourage critical observation. However, without this scaffolding, students tend to reproduce superficial interpretations. Sarmiento (2010, cited in Díaz Peláez 2021) argues that teachers should guide students to interpret images from a cultural perspective, helping them move toward symbolic understanding and analytical thinking.

The artifacts also confirmed this tendency. Most participants underlined vocabulary, drew arrows, or matched words with images, but very few added analytical notes or asked reflective questions about what they saw. For example, one worksheet showed a circled

picture of a map labeled simply “confused,” yet the participant did not question its design or relevance, despite the image being potentially confusing or ambiguous. No further annotation or interpretation was present.

In the final journal, when prompted to compare the materials, a participant noted: *“The second [red] material was nice, but I didn’t write too much about the image, just the words and the content, I really enjoy what it was about”* (Participant I.V, March 28th, 2025). This illustrates a lack of pedagogical expectations or explicit training in critical analysis. As Amaya and Fajardo (2022) remind us, the presence of contextualized images alone is not enough; teachers must intentionally promote guided interpretation strategies that activate reflective thinking, even within the questions in the tasks that enforce and emphasize visual literacy development participants recognized the images as a visual tool to speak about the topic red material has.

Furthermore, Walsh (2013) further emphasizes that intercultural and visual education require structured reflection and dialogue. Without this, visuals remain static and symbolic, disconnected from broader pedagogical goals. In this study, it was observed that while participants appreciated visuals and even found them emotionally appealing, they struggled to move beyond description toward critical analysis, rarely questioning representation, power, or sociocultural implications.

In conclusion, although visual materials were appreciated and even enjoyed by participants, their literacy skills were predominantly descriptive and non-critical. This reveals a key pedagogical gap in pre-service teacher education: learners must be taught how to analyze and reflect on images critically, not just identify surface elements. Without this, visual resources, even when contextualized, remain underutilized as tools for intercultural understanding and critical thinking.

Use of Materials with a Linguistic Focus

This category refers to the perception that both contextualized and non-contextualized visual materials were often used primarily to support grammar, vocabulary, and basic language functions, rather than to promote deeper cultural understanding or visual interpretation. Across the different sessions, participants frequently interpreted materials as language exercises rather than multimodal texts, demonstrating a linguistic-centered approach.

Across sessions, participants frequently interpreted the materials as language exercises rather than multimodal texts, demonstrating a linguistic-focused approach. This pattern was most evident during the second intervention with the non-contextualized blue material. While it was designed to practice listening, grammar, and writing, participants engaged with the material purely through grammatical instruction or through the use of activities for certain lessons. In the participant section, they expressed:

"I just followed the instructions and responded. The image didn't change the activities." (Participant IV, March 7th, 2025)

"The images were there, but the activity dealt with everyday actions and vocabulary." (Participant L.M., March 7th, 2025)

"I feel the content is important; activities can be used to teach them grammar and vocabulary." (Participant A.G., March 7th, 2025)

These responses suggest that students perceived visual content as secondary, rather than part of meaning-making.

During the interviews, this tendency was reinforced. One participant explained, *"I'm used to working with grammar with this type of material and content. I don't think the images make much of a difference."* (Participant L.M., March 7th, 2025). Even with contextualized material in the third session, the approach remained similar. In the

interviews, all participants focused on the vocabulary and verbs used in the Colombian Christmas context. For example, "*All the information is useful and it's not boring to read*" (Participant A.G., March 14th, 2025) or "*I would use the red material because its content is very useful for everyday life; the verbs can be used often.*" (Participant L.M., March 14th, 2025). In other words, even culturally familiar visual resources were interpreted from a functional and linguistic perspective, rather than a critical or reflective one. The contextualized material may have motivated participants to reflect on their use and the importance of the content, but this did not allow them to delve deeper into the visual content or the material's focus. This is consistent with the findings of Amaya and Fajardo (2022), who state that while contextualized materials can improve motivation, many teachers still use them in a rigid, language-centered way. Furthermore, Núñez and Téllez (2009) emphasize that textbooks often dictate the sequence of grammar and vocabulary, which shapes how preservice teachers perceive the materials: as tools for transmitting content, rather than fostering intercultural interpretation or understanding.

The resources further illustrate this tendency. On the red and blue worksheets, participants underlined verbs, labeled objects, and pondered concepts like imperatives. There was very little annotation linking the images to broader meanings. For example, one artifact from the contextualized material included a culturally rich image where a Colombian woman showed pictures of what she usually does at Christmas, but the participant only wrote, "*It works to show the verbs in the simple present.*" (Participant L.M., March 14th, 2025). This shows how even meaningful visual elements were reduced to grammatical functions.

This linguistic orientation may be a consequence of how the participants were taught and trained. As one participant noted in her interview, "*We usually see the images as part of the exercises, not as something to think about.*" (Participant IV, March 28th, 2025) Another added, "*I think we need more practice using the materials in different*

ways."(Participant A.G., March 28th, 2025) These reflections point to the influence of instructional models that prioritize linguistic structure over interpretive or intercultural dimensions. From a theoretical perspective, this is consistent with Aicega's (2007) critique of English as a foreign language (EFL) textbook, which often structure content around grammatical progression and reinforce instrumentalist perspectives on language learning. As Holguín and Arques (2024) argue, this limits the transformative potential of visual and intercultural materials, reducing their function to that of linguistic scaffolding rather than cultural artifacts.

In conclusion, the analysis revealed that participants frequently perceived and used contextualized and non-contextualized materials with a primary linguistic rather than critical focus. While this allowed them to perform grammatical tasks, it also limited the potential for visual and intercultural interaction. These findings underscore the need for teacher training programs to broaden the pedagogical view of materials, emphasizing their multimodal, cultural, and reflexive dimensions, in addition to their linguistic function.

Superficial or Stereotypical Interculturality

This category examines how prospective English teachers perceived contextualized visual materials as more culturally familiar and emotionally engaging than uncontextualized ones. Triangulated data from diaries, interviews, and artifacts revealed that participants felt more connected and motivated when the materials reflected their own everyday realities, traditions, and environments. However, this motivation remained mostly superficial. While participants recognized cultural references and appreciated their inclusion, their responses did not demonstrate a deeper critical engagement with the cultural meanings present in the images or texts.

Holguín and Castaño (2024) argue that pedagogical practices that incorporate Latin American cultural references can enable prospective teachers to critically appropriate

educational discourse and connect learning to broader social realities. Similarly, Amaya and Fajardo (2022) highlight that contextualized materials foster creativity, relevance, and engagement in the classroom. In this study, participants valued materials that reflected the Colombian context and its cultural differences, but most of their reflections focused on content familiarity and personal recognition, rather than the analytical or critical thinking that the material can entail. As preservice English teachers expressed in Journal 3 and interviews:

“It names something from a town, and it teaches us that the festivals in that town are very different from how we see them in other cities in Colombia, and well, that for me is quite interesting.” (Participant I.V, March 14, 2025)

“The theme and the traditions are very interesting. It's easier to identify with the situation and complete the activity.” (Participant A.G, March 14, 2025)

“I liked this material better because it felt more real.” (Participant I.V, March 14, 2025)

“It can generate meaningful learning because they can relate a holiday to an English topic, and that already creates a connection.” (Participant L.M, March 14, 2025)

These types of comments confirm that the materials successfully activated prior knowledge and increased student engagement. However, they also suggest that participants analyzed the intercultural content primarily from a descriptive perspective, focusing on similarity or identification without questioning underlying assumptions or stereotypes. As Tomlinson (2011) asserts, contextualized materials support language development by connecting with students' interests and identities; however, Serafini (2014) reminds us that true visual literacy must go further. It must empower students to critically question, interpret, and construct meaning, not just recognize what is familiar. Even in the

final session, where participants directly compared contextualized and decontextualized materials, their evaluations focused on affective and aesthetic dimensions. For example, some stated, “The red one made me feel more a part of the activity” (Participant A.G., March 14, 2025) or “When the image is about something you know or experience, it’s easier to understand and express ideas” (Participant I.V., March 14, 2025). While these comments reveal positive emotional involvement, they also reflect a narrow conception of culture: as something static or familiar, rather than dynamic and contested.

One of the most telling indicators of this superficial involvement was the belief expressed by several participants that the blue (uncontextualized) material seemed “more academic” because it focused on grammar and excluded cultural elements. One participant commented, “The blue material focuses more on grammar and vocabulary; it’s more academic” (Participant L.M., March 28, 2025), while another said, “The red material makes you think; the blue focuses more on filling in the blanks.” (Participant A.G., March 28, 2025). These perspectives suggest an implicit hierarchy where culture is perceived as less rigorous or less important to academic learning, an idea that reflects what Walsh (2009) describes as a coexistence model of interculturality, which tolerates cultural references but does not critically interrogate them.

Walsh (2009) and Castro-Gómez (2007) define true critical interculturality as challenging this limited view by proposing that language education should not only include cultural content but also question the power relations, identities, and ideologies it conveys. However, in this research, participants did not display that level of engagement. While they recognized the cultural elements of the red material as more pleasing and familiar, they did not express concerns about cultural representation, stereotypes, or marginalization. Their only concern was with one of the three images depicting the Day of the Candles in Colombia. The last image reveals a hand bandaged with burns, as shown in Figure 1. All

participants agreed that the image was explicit or crude, but the rest of their reflections remained within the limits of personal relevance and classroom effectiveness.

Figure 1 Task activity 5a in contextualized visual material.



In summary, participants' perceptions point to a superficial or stereotypical view of interculturality, which equates cultural content with emotional connection, but rarely with critical thinking. While contextualized visual tools served as motivational and identity-affirming tools, they were not sufficient to foster deep intercultural awareness. As the findings show, cultivating critical interculturality in EFL contexts requires the inclusion of relevant materials and pedagogical strategies that encourage students to reflect, analyze, and transform beyond recognition.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This research examined the perceptions of preservice English Foreign Language teachers at Universidad La Gran Colombia (UGC) concerning the use of contextualized versus non-contextualized visual literacy (VL) materials in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. By conducting a detailed analysis of journals, interviews, and student artifacts, the researchers identified four key categories that identified the participants' attitudes, interpretations, and pedagogical preferences regarding visual materials.

The first finding indicated that contextualized visual materials were viewed as much more engaging and motivating than their non-contextualized materials. Participants described these materials (contextualized) as attractive, relatable, and successful in encouraging classroom interaction. Phrases like “it is more interactive” and “this material reflects our realities” highlighted learners' positive perceptions. In regards with the cultural and social contexts of the learners, these materials created both emotional and cognitive connections. In contrast, non-contextualized materials were frequently regarded as irrelevant, overly focused on grammar, and lacking visual appeal.

The second finding indicates that non-contextualized materials were seen as unengaging by participants, who often labeled them as “boring” or “out of context.” These materials did not create authentic connections, leading to mechanical engagement with the tasks. Although participants appreciated the visuals and gave positive feedback on their engagement, their reflections remained superficial. There was a noticeable absence of deep analytical interpretation of the visuals, even with the inclusion of culturally rich images. This indicates a significant gap in fostering critical visual literacy among preservice teachers.

Thirdly, both types of materials were predominantly viewed through a linguistic lens, where visuals were secondary to grammar and vocabulary instructions. This linguistic centered approach limited opportunities to explore visuals as multimodal text and hindered their potential for fostering intercultural awareness and reflective learning. Therefore, this must be an important aspect to work within the context where this project was carried out, thus students can go beyond the linguistic or formal part of the language, and as a result they become active readers of the visual world.

Lastly, while contextualized materials enabled stronger connections, participants' interpretations of intercultural content were often stereotypical or shallow. While materials like the one depicting Christmas celebrations in Colombia triggered positive emotions and identification, they also risked reinforcing simplified or stereotypical cultural portrayals. Participants did not critically question how these visuals represented culture, or which cultural narratives were included or excluded. Therefore, students need more reflection upon interculturality, which might lead them to recognize other silent voices and cultures.

Recommendations for Future Res

This study emphasizes the need to prepare preservice teachers not only to value cultural representations but also to engage critically with them. Visual materials should be seen as more than decorative or functional tools, they can open spaces for meaningful conversations about identity, culture, and society. Without this deeper engagement, visual literacy in EFL classrooms risks losing its potential to foster intercultural awareness and global citizenship. To address these gaps, teacher education programs should include innovative practices that foster critical visual literacy. For instance, preservice teachers could be encouraged to analyze, identify, and relate visual content to their students' real-life contexts. They should also learn to critically position themselves, question the reliability of visual representations, and propose alternative perspectives that challenge stereotypes and promote deeper reflection (Holguín & Castaño Arques, 2024). These practices would allow future educators to move beyond surface-level descriptions and instead engage with visuals as gateways to social and cultural understanding.

In addition, universities and teacher educators play a key role in shaping how preservice teachers perceive and use visual materials. It is essential to design training programs that inspire innovation, creativity, and critical thinking, enabling future teachers to design culturally responsive materials for their classrooms. Visuals should not only support grammar or vocabulary instruction but also serve as tools for dialogue, questioning, and exploration of cultural realities. Finally, future researchers could explore how guided visual analysis and questioning techniques influence preservice teachers' ability to interpret, critique, and design educational materials.

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