

Design and evaluation of the pedagogical relevance, cultural relevance, and contextual suitability of culturally responsive learning materials for multilingual students at UE the “Eladio Roldós Barreiro”

Diseño y evaluación de la pertinencia pedagógica, relevancia cultural y adecuación contextual de materiales de aprendizaje culturalmente receptivos para estudiantes multilingües de la UE “Eladio Roldós Barreiro”

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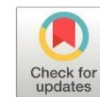
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Artículo de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica

Enviado: 17/06/2026

Revisado: 18/07/2026

Aceptado: 04/08/2026

Publicado: 25/08/2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33262/exploradordigital.v10i3.3754>

Cítese:

Beltrán Lesano, J. L., & Romero García, V. H. (2026). Design and evaluation of the pedagogical relevance, cultural relevance, and contextual suitability of culturally responsive learning materials for multilingual students at UE the “Eladio Roldós Barreiro”. Explorador Digital, 10(3), 229-253.

<https://doi.org/10.33262/exploradordigital.v10i3.3754>



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Palabras claves:

Materiales culturalmente sensibles; estudiantes multilingües; inglés como lengua extranjera; investigación basada en el diseño; relevancia cultural; relevancia pedagógica; adecuación contextual.

Resumen

Introducción. Las aulas multilingües de inglés como lengua extranjera requieren materiales que articulen los objetivos pedagógicos con las realidades lingüísticas y culturales del estudiantado. **Objetivo.** Desarrollar y evaluar materiales de aprendizaje culturalmente receptivos para estudiantes multilingües de la Unidad Educativa Eladio Roldós Barreiro, considerando la pertinencia pedagógica, la relevancia cultural y la adecuación contextual mediante investigación basada en diseño. **Metodología.** Se realizó un estudio mixto con enfoque de investigación basada en diseño en 70 estudiantes multilingües de inglés, de 12 a 17 años. Las entrevistas semiestructuradas se analizaron temáticamente y mediante frecuencias y porcentajes; las percepciones sobre los materiales implementados se evaluaron con un cuestionario tipo Likert. Los instrumentos y materiales fueron revisados por tres especialistas y los hallazgos cualitativos y cuantitativos se integraron mediante triangulación metodológica. **Resultados.** Los estudiantes mostraron preferencia por actividades interactivas, especialmente juegos (48,6 %) y diálogos (45,7 %), mientras que la pronunciación fue la dificultad más reportada (45,7 %). El español fue la lengua principal de comunicación diaria para el 97,1 % de los participantes. Entre los referentes culturales destacaron Navidad y Año Nuevo, y la evaluación de los materiales mostró percepciones predominantemente positivas sobre su pertinencia pedagógica, relevancia cultural y adecuación contextual. **Conclusión.** Los resultados respaldan el uso de materiales culturalmente receptivos que incorporen preferencias comunicativas, antecedentes lingüísticos y referentes culturales significativos del estudiantado. El proceso DBR aportó evidencia empírica para refinar materiales contextualizados de EFL en entornos educativos multilingües. **Área de estudio general:** Educación. **Área de estudio específica:** Pedagogía del idioma inglés y educación intercultural. **Tipo de estudio:** Artículo original.

Keywords:

Culturally responsive materials.

Abstract

Introduction. Multilingual English as foreign language classrooms require learning materials that connect pedagogical objectives with students' linguistic and cultural realities. **Objective.** To develop and evaluate culturally responsive learning materials for

multilingual
students.
English as a
foreign language.
design-based
research.
cultural
relevance.
pedagogical
relevance.
contextual
appropriateness.

multilingual students at the Eladio Roldós Barreiro Educational Unit, considering pedagogical relevance, cultural significance, and contextual appropriateness through a design-based research approach. **Methodology.** A mixed-methods design-based research study was conducted with 70 multilingual EFL students aged 12–17. Semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically and quantified through frequencies and percentages; students' perceptions of the implemented materials were assessed through a Likert-type questionnaire. Three specialists reviewed the instruments and materials, and qualitative and quantitative findings were integrated through methodological triangulation. **Results.** Students showed a preference for interactive activities, particularly games (48.6%) and dialogues (45.7%), while pronunciation was the most frequently reported learning difficulty (45.7%). Spanish was the main language of daily communication for 97.1% of participants. Cultural references such as Christmas and New Year were frequently identified, and the evaluation of the implemented materials showed positive perceptions of their pedagogical relevance, cultural relevance, and contextual appropriateness. **Conclusion.** The findings support the use of culturally responsive materials that incorporate students' communicative preferences, linguistic backgrounds, and meaningful cultural references. The DBR process provided empirical evidence for refining contextualized EFL materials in multilingual educational settings. **General Area of Study:** Education. **Specific area of study:** English language pedagogy and intercultural education. **Type of study:** Original article.

1. Introduction

The interest in designing and evaluating the pedagogical relevance, cultural appropriateness, and contextual suitability of culturally responsive learning materials for multilingual students stems from an educational need identified in contexts characterized by linguistic and intercultural diversity, where teaching resources often fail to reflect students' linguistic identities or cultural references (Weidl & Erling, 2025). In diverse classrooms, it is common to use materials with content far removed from students' sociocultural experiences, which generates a sense of disconnection and limits the construction of meaningful learning during the teaching-learning process.

This study is based on the culturally relevant pedagogy proposed by Ladson-Billings (1995) and on sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), both of which emphasize the significant role of culture in learning. In line with these principles, recent research shows that integrating contextualized pedagogical strategies, collaborative learning, and leveraging the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) significantly enhances the participation and learning of multilingual students (Bjarnason, 2023; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2025).

Furthermore, the research incorporates contributions from studies on identity and language learning. Norton (2013) argues that students' identity is not a fixed characteristic, but rather a dynamic construct that is continually negotiated through social and educational interactions. From this perspective, learning a foreign language is intricately linked to the opportunities students must participate in, be recognized, and position themselves within the communicative practices of the classroom.

In addition, Kramsch (1998) argues that language and culture are inseparable dimensions since meaning is constructed from specific sociocultural contexts. Consequently, English language teaching should not be limited to the development of linguistic skills but should promote spaces where students can connect academic content with their own cultural experiences. In this regard, the systematic incorporation of cultural content into language-learning materials can facilitate connections between language instruction and learners' sociocultural contexts (Vargas & Avila, 2018).

For his part, Byram (1997) emphasizes the importance of intercultural competence as a capacity that allows one to understand, interpret, and value diverse cultural perspectives. This view is particularly relevant in multilingual contexts, where education must foster dialogue between cultures and the recognition of linguistic diversity as a resource for learning.

Taken together, these approaches agree that learning a foreign language transcends the acquisition of linguistic structures, as it involves processes of identity construction, cultural interaction, and social participation.

Therefore, analyzing the educational, cultural, and contextual value of culturally responsive learning materials is a relevant way to understand how these resources can foster more inclusive, meaningful, and coherent educational experiences that reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity present in multilingual contexts.

Most research has focused on describing intercultural experiences or analyzing educational policies related to linguistic diversity; however, there is little empirical evidence on the instructional value, sociocultural relevance, and contextual alignment of culturally responsive learning materials in multilingual Ecuadorian contexts. This gap limits the generation of scientific evidence that would allow for an assessment of students' pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural needs.

Globally, international research demonstrates the persistent inequalities faced by multilingual students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction and in bilingual

programs. According to UNESCO (2025) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) there is a need to integrate multilingualism into education systems and adapt school policies to cultural and linguistic diversity to ensure greater equity and inclusion.

Similarly, these studies acknowledge the importance of incorporating Indigenous and local cultures into language curricula; however, a tension persists between the discourses of inclusion promoted by educational policies and the reality of classroom materials, which continue to privilege Anglocentric perspectives that rarely reflect the sociocultural experiences of students from diverse backgrounds.

In the Ecuadorian context, where students speak languages such as Kichwa, Shuar, and Spanish, among others, the national curriculum explicitly promotes an intercultural approach as a cross-cutting theme throughout the education system. However, in practice, classroom materials remain standardized, commercially driven, and culturally detached from students' realities. These mismatches between educational policy and pedagogical practice can create gaps between the materials used in the classroom and the pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural needs of students, limiting the instructional, sociocultural, and contextual quality of the teaching-learning process (Desai et al., 2025).

The proposed study contributes to the limited body of research on culturally responsive learning materials in multilingual Ecuadorian contexts by generating empirical evidence regarding their pedagogical relevance, cultural significance, and contextual appropriateness. Furthermore, through a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach, the study proposes evidence-informed design principles that can guide the development of culturally responsive EFL materials for linguistically diverse educational settings.

In this way, the proposal seeks to respond to a specific need of the educational system, offering contextualized strategies that promote more equitable and culturally relevant teaching (Jacob et al., 2022; Jacob et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the project incorporates the principles of materials design from a systematic perspective, grounded in pedagogical evidence. Its findings can contribute to curriculum improvement, the strengthening of inclusive practices, and the development of multilingual education proposals in the Ecuadorian context (Bowden, 2025). Consequently, it addresses the need to analyze learning materials that recognize students' linguistic and cultural identities, since strengthening cultural identity through educational practices can promote a greater sense of belonging and meaningful participation among learners (Cargua-Pineda, 2025).

Methodologically, the project aligns with contributions from applied linguistics and the development of educational materials, which promote qualitative and design-based approaches aimed at understanding students holistically. From this perspective, the research analyzes culturally responsive materials developed and implemented based on pedagogical evidence and adapted to the sociocultural characteristics of the student body (Bowden, 2025). Furthermore, in the social sphere, the proposal is linked to principles of

educational inclusion, linguistic justice, and the recognition of minority languages within formal education systems.

In this sense, the present study aims to design and evaluate culturally responsive learning materials for multilingual students, considering their pedagogical needs, linguistic profiles, and cultural references. This study adopts a Design-Based Research (DBR) framework to generate pedagogical evidence on the use of contextualized materials in the teaching of English as a foreign language in intercultural educational contexts (UNESCO, 2025).

2. Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative techniques, such as semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, with a quantitative assessment instrument using a Likert-type questionnaire. This integration allows for an understanding of the linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical needs of multilingual students, as well as an evaluation of the pedagogical appropriateness, cultural relevance, and contextual suitability of the implemented materials.

The study is based on Design-Based Research (DBR), particularly in the analysis, design, and pedagogical validation phases of educational materials. This approach allows for the development of contextualized proposals supported by pedagogical evidence, aimed at addressing real educational needs. Its selection is justified because the research problem requires not only understanding an educational reality but also developing and evaluating culturally responsive materials supported by pedagogical evidence (Cela-Ranilla et al., 2025; Schäfer, 2025).

2.1. Research phases

Analysis and diagnostic phase: identification of students' knowledge backgrounds, linguistic profiles, and cultural references through semi-structured interviews and contextual review.

Design phase: construction of culturally responsive learning materials based on the information obtained during the diagnostic phase.

Evaluation and refinement phase: concurrent technical validation of the materials and instruments (interview and survey) is conducted through expert review, ensuring coherence between the design and the objectives. Subsequently, an evaluation of their pedagogical relevance, cultural significance, and contextual appropriateness is conducted using a Likert-type questionnaire administered to the participating students. This phase concludes with a retrospective analysis of the results. The analysis will identify strengths, limitations, and opportunities for the iterative refinement of the designed materials.

2.1.1. Integration between phases

The study phases are structured sequentially and iteratively. First, the diagnostic phase will identify the linguistic profiles, cultural references, and pedagogical needs of multilingual students; these results will guide the design of culturally responsive

materials. Before implementation, the materials will undergo a validation process through expert judgment, who will assess their pedagogical, cultural, and contextual relevance. Subsequently, the designed materials will be implemented with the participating students and evaluated using a Likert-type questionnaire. This questionnaire will gather their perceptions of the materials' pedagogical relevance, cultural significance, and contextual appropriateness. Each phase is explicitly aligned with the research objectives and the corresponding data collection instruments. The diagnostic phase addresses Objective 1 through semi-structured interviews; the implementation and evaluation phases address Objective 2 through a Likert-type questionnaire; and the retrospective analysis and methodological triangulation address Objective 3 by integrating qualitative and quantitative findings to refine the proposed materials.

2.2. Participants and context

2.2.1. Setting

This research will be conducted at UE “Eladio Roldós Barreiro,” located in the province of *Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas*. This school constitutes a natural learning context characterized by remarkable cultural and linguistic diversity, which defines it as an ideal “learning ecology” for the DBR approach. The choice of this environment is justified by the need to evaluate the effectiveness of the designed materials in the face of the challenges of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the regular classroom.

2.2.2. Participants

- *Students*: 70 multilingual EFL students, aged between 12 and 17, selected through convenience sampling. Within the framework of this design research, the students function as end users whose interaction with the materials will provide empirical evidence for the iterative refinement of the proposed intervention. This sampling strategy is justified by the accessibility of participants and the context-specific nature of the Design-Based Research (DBR) approach, which prioritizes iterative refinement in authentic educational settings rather than statistical generalization.
- *Validating experts*: three specialists in English language pedagogy, educational research, and intercultural education, who will participate in the concomitant technical validation of the materials and data collection instruments, ensuring the quality of the design and its coherence with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy.

2.2.3. Definition of study categories

To guide data collection and analysis, the study categories and subcategories were established in accordance with the research objectives. Their conceptual definitions, dimensions, and corresponding instruments are summarized, as shown in **Table 1**.

- *Knowledge bases and linguistic profiles*: this encompasses the linguistic knowledge and practices that serve as the empirical basis for contextualizing the design (Moll et al., 1992).
- *Culturally responsive learning materials*: this refers to systematically developed teaching resources. This category analyzes how the iterative design process connects the EFL curriculum with the students' sociocultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

• *Pertinence, relevance, and appropriateness*: these are evaluation dimensions that allow us to judge the effectiveness of the practical intervention and generate theoretical design principles (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Table 1
Matrix of operationalization of categories

Specific Objectives	Category/ Variable	Conceptual Definition	Dimensions	Instruments
Identifying pedagogical needs, linguistic profiles, and cultural references	Knowledge funds, linguistic profiles, and cultural references	Set of knowledge, identities, sociocultural experiences, and linguistic practices that students possess and that influence their learning processes (Moll et al., 1992).	- Pedagogical needs - Linguistic profiles - Cultural references	Semi-structured interview guide
Assess the pedagogical relevance, cultural significance, and contextual appropriateness of the implemented materials.	Pedagogical relevance, cultural relevance, and contextual appropriateness of the materials	Degree to which the implemented materials meet criteria of pedagogical quality, cultural relevance, and contextual appropriateness to respond to the educational needs of multilingual students (Ladson-Billings, 1995).	-Pedagogical relevance -Cultural relevance -Contextual appropriateness	Survey - Likert-type questionnaire.

2.2.4. Data collection techniques and instruments

To enhance methodological rigor and facilitate the triangulation of evidence, multiple data collection techniques were employed to examine the phenomenon from complementary perspective (Denzin, 2017).

- *For diagnosis (Objective 1)*: semi-structured interview guide to identify initial needs and profiles.
- *For design (Objective 2)*: likert-type questionnaire to evaluate student's perceptions of the pedagogical relevance, cultural significance, and contextual appropriateness of the materials.
- *For evaluation (Objective 3)*: methodological triangulation will be applied, systematically cross-referencing the interview findings with the survey results. This process constitutes a retrospective analysis of all the information gathered, allowing for the interpretation of the relationship between design and learning for the iterative refinement of the materials.

2.2.4.1. Instrument validation

The data collection instruments underwent expert review to assess their clarity, coherence, content validity, relevance, and internal consistency. This process strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the instrument (Ahmed, 2024) and was conducted concurrently with the technical review of the designed materials. This procedure ensured that the instruments were appropriate for evaluating the pedagogical intervention in accordance with DBR standards.

2.2.4.2. Data analysis

Qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to students' pedagogical needs, linguistic profiles, and cultural references. Quantitative data collected through the Likert-type questionnaire will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and graphical representations. Finally, the findings from both datasets will be integrated through methodological triangulation to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the results and to support the iterative refinement of the culturally responsive learning materials within the Design-Based Research (DBR) framework.

2.2.5. Ethical considerations

The research will guarantee compliance with ethical principles related to confidentiality, informed consent, and the academic use of the collected information. Student participation will be voluntary, and the corresponding institutional authorization will be requested, as well as the consent of legal guardians when necessary. The data obtained will be used exclusively for research and academic purposes.

3. Results

This section presents the findings obtained from the diagnostic and evaluation phase of the study. The results are organized according to the specific objectives and the analytical categories established in the research design. First, students' pedagogical needs, linguistic profiles, and cultural references are examined. Subsequently, their perceptions of the pedagogical relevance, cultural relevance, and contextual appropriateness of the implemented culturally responsive learning materials are analyzed.

3.1. Results of specific objective 1: identification of students' pedagogical needs, linguistic profiles, and cultural references

To address the first specific objective, the responses obtained through the semi-structured interview were analyzed using thematic analysis. This procedure enabled the identification of the main categories and subcategories emerging from the participants' responses. Subsequently, the identified themes were quantified through frequencies and percentages to determine the predominant response patterns and to facilitate their interpretation within the mixed-methods approach adopted in this study. The results are

organized according to the three analytical categories established in the research design: pedagogical needs, linguistic profiles, and cultural references.

3.1.1. Category 1. Pedagogical needs

The analysis of students' pedagogical needs focused on three aspects: the learning activities students enjoy the most, the activities they perceive as most effective for learning English, and the main difficulties they experience during the language learning process. Each aspect was analyzed independently through thematic coding, followed by the calculation of frequencies and percentages to identify the predominant response patterns. The distribution of students' preferred learning activities is presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2
Students' preferred learning activities

Learning activity	Frequency (n)	Percentage of participants (%)
Games	34	48.6
Dialogues	32	45.7
Competitions	8	11.4
Posters	5	7.1
Tongue twisters	4	5.7

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the total number of participants (N=70). Because students were allowed to mention more than one preferred learning activity, the total frequency exceeds the number of participants. **Source:** Prepared by the author based on the semi-structured interview data.

The findings indicate that games were the learning activity most frequently mentioned by the participants (48.6%), followed closely by dialogues (45.7%). These results suggest that students show a clear preference for interactive and participatory learning experiences that promote communication and active engagement during English lessons. Less frequently mentioned activities included competitions (11.4%), posters (7.1%), and tongue twisters (5.7%), which, although less common, also reflect students' interest in varied instructional strategies. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of incorporating interactive and culturally responsive learning activities, particularly games and dialogues, to foster students' motivation, participation, and meaningful engagement in multilingual educational contexts. Students' perceptions of the activities they considered in multilingual educational contexts. **Table 3** summarizes students' perceptions of the activities they considered most effective for learning English.

Table 3
Students' perceptions of the most effective learning activities for learning English

Learning activity	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Dialogues	25	35.7
Reading	22	31.4
Writing	20	28.6
Games	16	22.9

Table 3

Students' perceptions of the most effective learning activities for learning English (continuation)

Learning activity	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Audios	9	12.9
Competitions	8	11.4
Tongue twisters	3	4.3
Posters	3	4.3
All activities	1	1.4

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the total number of participants (N=70). Because students were allowed to mention more than one learning activity, they considered effective for learning English, the total frequency exceeds the number of participants.

Source: Prepared by the author based on the semi-structured interview data.

The findings indicate that dialogues were perceived as the most effective learning activity for learning English, being mentioned by 35.7% of the participants. Reading (31.4%) and writing (28.6%) were also frequently identified as effective strategies, suggesting that students value activities that strengthen both communicative competence and literacy skills. Games (22.9%) ranked fourth, followed by audio-based activities (12.9%) and competitions (11.4%). Posters and tongue twisters were the least frequently mentioned activities accounting for 4.3% each. Collectively, these findings suggest that students perceive interactive communicative activities, together with reading and writing tasks, as the most effective approaches for supporting their English language development in multilingual educational contexts. The difficulties students reported experiencing during the English language learning process are summarized in **Table 4**.

Table 4

Students perceived difficulties in learning English

Learning difficulty	Frequency (n)	Percentage of participants (%)
Pronunciation	32	45.7
Translation of words	18	25.7
Vocabulary	17	24.3
Memorization	14	20.0
Speaking	10	14.3
Writing	8	11.4
Grammar	8	11.4
Listening	3	4.3

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the total number of participants (N=70). Because students were allowed to mention more than one perceived difficulty in learning English, the total frequency exceeds the number of participants.

Source: Prepared by the author based on the semi-structured interview data.

The findings indicate that pronunciation was the most frequently reported difficulty, being mentioned by 45.7% of the participants. This was followed by translation of words (25.7%), vocabulary (24.3%), and memorization (20.0%), suggesting that students

experience considerable challenges in understanding, retaining, and accurately producing English language content. Difficulties related to speaking, including confidence and oral interaction, were reported by 14.3% of the participants, whereas writing and grammar were each mentioned by 11.4%. Listening was the least frequently reported difficulty (4.3%).

Taken together, these findings suggest that students perceive pronunciation and vocabulary-related aspects as the main barriers to their English language learning. Therefore, culturally responsive learning materials should provide opportunities for practice and communicative activities that strengthen students' confidence in oral communication within authentic multilingual learning environments.

3.1.2. Category 2. Linguistic profiles

The analysis of students' linguistic profiles focused on three aspects: the language they use most frequently in their daily lives, the people with whom they usually communicate using that language, and their perceptions regarding the importance of using their preferred language in different communication contexts. Following the same analytical procedure applied in the previous category, responses were examined through thematic coding and subsequently quantified using frequencies and percentages to identify the predominant response patterns. The distribution of the languages most frequently used by students in their daily communication is shown in **Table 5**.

Table 5

Students' main language used in daily communication

Main language	Frequency (n)	Percentage of participants (%)
Spanish	68	97.1
Spanish and English	1	1.4
Other response	1	1.4

Note. Similar responses such as Spanish, and equivalent expressions were grouped into the same category. Percentages were calculated based on the number of participants (N=70).

Source: Prepared by the author based on the semi-structured interview data.

As shown in **Table 5**, Spanish was the predominant language used by the participants in their daily communication. A total of 97.1% of students reported Spanish as their primary language, whereas only 1.4% indicated using both Spanish and English, and 1.4% provided another response. These findings demonstrate that Spanish remains the primary language of everyday communication despite the multilingual educational context. Therefore, culturally responsive materials should acknowledge students' primary language while progressively supporting the development of their English-language competence. The social contexts in which students reported using their main language are presented in **Table 6**.

Table 6
Contexts in which students use their main language

Communication context	Frequency (n)	Percentage of participants (%)
Family	35	50.0
Friends	24	34.3
Teachers	22	31.4
Community/Everyone	9	12.9
Neighbors	6	8.6

Note: Percentages were calculated based on the total number of participants (N=70). Because students were allowed to mention more than one communication context, the total frequency exceeds the number of participants. Similar responses (parents, mother, father, and family) were grouped into the same thematic category.

Source: Prepared by author based on semi-structured interview data.

The findings indicate that family was the communication context most frequently mentioned by the participants, representing 50.0% of the responses. This was followed by friends (34.3%) and teachers (31.4%), suggesting that students primarily use their main language in both family and educational environments. Less frequently reported contexts included the general community (12.9%) and neighbors (8.6%). Overall, these findings demonstrate that students use their primary language across multiple social settings, with family playing a significant role in everyday communication. These results highlight the importance of developing culturally responsive learning materials that are built upon students' authentic linguistic interactions across home, school, and community contexts. **Table 7** presents the reasons students identified for recognizing their language during English lessons.

Table 7
Students' perceptions of the importance of recognizing their language during English lessons

Perception	Frequency (n)	Percentage of participants (%)
Identity and culture	16	22.9
Communication and understanding	15	21.4
Learning improvement	13	18.6
Respect, inclusion and rights	11	15.7
Not considered important / unnecessary	10	14.3

Note: Responses were analyzed through thematic coding according to the reasons provided by the participants. Similar ideas were grouped into broader thematic categories. Because some students expressed more than one reason in the same response, the total frequency does not necessarily correspond to the total number of participants (N=70).

Source: Prepared by the author based on the semi-structured interview data.

The findings indicate that identity and culture constituted the most frequently reported reason for considering students' language important during English lessons, being mentioned by 22.9% of the participants. Students emphasized that their language represents an essential part of who they are and reflects their cultural background. The

second most common theme was communication and understanding (21.4%), as participants explained that recognizing their language helps them express their ideas more effectively and facilitates classroom interaction.

Learning improvement (18.6%) also emerged as a relevant category, with students indicating that acknowledging their linguistic background contributes to better comprehension and supports English language learning. In addition, respect, inclusion, and rights (15.7%) were frequently highlighted, as several participants associated language recognition with equal treatment, respect for diversity, and a greater sense of belonging. Finally, 14.3% of the responses suggested that recognizing students' language was not considered important or necessary, mainly because participants perceived Spanish as the common language used in their educational context. Collectively, these findings suggest that recognizing students' linguistic backgrounds contributes not only to communication and learning, but also to strengthening cultural identity and fostering more inclusive multilingual educational environments.

3.1.3. Category 3. Cultural references

The analysis of students' cultural references focused on three aspects: the cultural traditions and practices that were most meaningful to them, their perceptions regarding the incorporation of cultural elements into English lessons, and the cultural content they would like to see represented in learning materials. Following the same analytical procedure applied in the previous categories, responses were analyzed through thematic coding and subsequently quantified using frequencies and percentages to identify the predominant response patterns. **Table 8** presents the cultural traditions and celebrations that students identified as meaningful within their family and community contexts.

Table 8

Cultural traditions and celebrations identified by students

Cultural tradition or celebration	Frequency (n)	Percentage of participants (%)
Christmas	38	54.3
New Year	37	52.9
Birthdays	28	40.0
Mother's Day	17	24.4
Carnival	15	21.4
Father's Day	15	21.4
Holy Week	11	15.7

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the total number of participants (N=70). Because students were allowed to mention more than one cultural tradition or celebration, the total frequency exceeds the number of participants.

Source: Prepared by the author based on the semi-structured interview data.

The findings indicate that Christmas (54.3%) and New Year (52.9%) were the cultural celebrations most frequently identified by the participants, reflecting their importance within students' family and community life. Birthdays were also commonly mentioned (40.0%), highlighting the value students place on personal and family celebrations. Other

frequently reported cultural references included Mother's Day (24.3%), Carnival (21.4%), Father's Day (21.4%), and Holy Week (15.7%). Overall, these findings suggest that students primarily associate their cultural identity with family-centered and nationally recognized celebrations.

Consequently, incorporating these cultural references into English learning materials may contribute to creating more meaningful and culturally responsive learning experiences by connecting classroom content with students' everyday lives. Students' perceptions regarding the inclusion of cultural elements in their English lessons are summarized in **Table 9**.

Table 9*Students' perceptions of the inclusion of cultural elements in English lessons*

Perception	Frequency (n)	Percentage of participants (%)
Yes	37	52.9
No	18	25.7
Partially	11	15.7
Not sure/ Have not noticed	4	5.7

Note. Similar responses expressing agreement were grouped under "Yes." Responses such as "sometimes," "not very often," and "a little" were coded as "Partially." Responses indicating uncertainty were grouped under "Not sure/Have not noticed." Percentages were calculated based on the total number of participants (N=70).

Source: Prepared by the author based on the semi-structured interview data.

The findings indicate that 52.9% of the participants perceived that cultural elements are incorporated into English lessons. Students frequently stated that teachers include traditions, everyday situations, and culturally related content during classroom activities. However, 25.7% of the respondents considered that cultural elements were not incorporated into English lessons. In addition, 15.7% expressed that cultural content was included only partially or occasionally, while 5.7% reported that they had not noticed whether cultural elements were present.

Overall, these findings suggest that, although more than half of the students recognize the inclusion of cultural references in English instruction, there is still room to strengthen the systematic integration of culturally responsive content in classroom practices to ensure that all learners perceive their cultural backgrounds as valued within the learning process. **Table 10** summarizes students' preferences for the types of cultural content they would like to see incorporated into English learning materials.

Table 10*Students preferred cultural content for English learning materials*

Cultural content	Frequency (n)	Percentage of participants (%)
Legends and myths	25	35.7
Gastronomy	17	24.3
Celebrations	14	20.0

Table 10*Students preferred cultural content for English learning materials (continuation)*

Cultural content	Frequency (n)	Percentage of participants (%)
Traditional dances	7	10.0
Traditional clothing	4	5.7
All cultural elements	4	5.7
Other responses	2	2.9

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the total number of participants (N=70). Because students were allowed to mention more than one type of cultural content, the total frequency exceeds the number of participants. Similar responses were grouped into thematic categories.

Source: Prepared by the author based on the semi-structured interview data.

The findings indicate that legends and myths were the cultural content most frequently mentioned by the participants, representing 35.7% of the responses. This was followed by gastronomy (24.3%) and celebrations (20.0%), suggesting that students prefer learning materials that incorporate cultural elements closely related to their traditions, daily experiences, and community identity. These findings reflect students' interest in learning English through culturally familiar contexts that facilitate meaningful connections between language and their sociocultural backgrounds.

Less frequently mentioned cultural content included traditional dances (10.0%), traditional clothing (5.7%), and responses requesting the inclusion of all cultural elements (5.7%). A small proportion of participants provided other responses (2.9%), indicating additional individual interests. Overall, these findings suggest that students value learning materials that integrate authentic cultural content, particularly local stories, gastronomy, and traditional celebrations. Incorporating these cultural references can increase engagement and promote more meaningful learning experiences within multilingual educational contexts.

3.2. Results of specific Objective 2: evaluation of the pedagogical relevance, cultural relevance, and contextual appropriateness of the implemented materials

To address the second specific objective, the data collected through the Likert-type questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each response category to identify students' perceptions of the implemented culturally responsive learning materials.

The results are presented according to the three evaluation dimensions established in the research design: pedagogical relevance, cultural relevance, and contextual appropriateness. This analysis provides empirical evidence regarding the extent to which the materials responded to students' educational needs, reflected their cultural backgrounds, and corresponded to their multilingual learning context.

3.2.1. Category 1. Pedagogical relevance

Table 11 presents students' responses to the first three items of the Lyke-type questionnaire, which assessed the pedagogical relevance of the implemented culturally responsive learning materials.

Table 11

Students' perceptions of the pedagogical relevance of the implemented materials

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (12.9%)	39 (55.7%)	22 (31.4%)
2	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.9%)	12 (17.1%)	26 (37.1%)	30 (42.9%)
3	0 (0.0%)	5 (7.1%)	8 (11.4%)	36 (51.4%)	21 (30.0%)

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the total number of participants (N=70). Responses correspond to the three items that evaluate the cultural relevance dimension of the implemented culturally responsive learning materials.

Source: Prepared by the author based on the Likert-type questionnaire.

The findings presented in **Table 11** indicate an overall positive perception of the pedagogical relevance of the implemented culturally responsive learning materials. Across the three items, most participants selected agree or strongly agree, indicating that the materials effectively supported students' learning processes and contributed to meaningful English language learning.

Neutral responses ranged from 11.4% to 17.1%, whereas negative responses were minimal or absent across the three items. Overall, the predominance of positive responses demonstrates that students perceived the implemented materials as pedagogically relevant and appropriate for their educational context. These results provide empirical evidence that the culturally responsive learning materials promoted meaningful learning experiences and effectively addressed the pedagogical needs of multilingual learners. The results for items 4, 5, and 6, which assess the cultural relevance of the implemented culturally responsive learning materials, are reported in **Table 12**.

Table 12

Students' perceptions of the cultural relevance of the implemented materials

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
4	0 (0.0%)	5 (7.1%)	29 (41.4%)	26 (37.1%)	10 (14.3%)
5	3 (4.3%)	7 (10.0%)	22 (31.4%)	32 (45.7%)	6 (8.6%)
6	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.9%)	11 (15.7%)	40 (57.1%)	17 (24.3%)

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the total number of participants (N=70). Responses correspond to the three items that evaluate the dimension cultural relevance of the implemented culturally responsive learning materials.

Source: Prepared by the author based on the Likert-type questionnaire.

The findings presented in **Table 12** indicate a positive perception of the cultural relevance of the implemented culturally responsive learning materials. Across the three items, most participants selected Agree or Strongly agree, suggesting that the materials adequately reflected students' cultural backgrounds and incorporated meaningful cultural elements into the English learning process.

The highest level of positive agreement was observed in item 6, where 57.1% of the participants selected Agree and 24.3% selected Strongly agree, representing a combined positive perception of 81.4%. Likewise, item 5 received 54.3% positive responses, although 31.4% of the participants remained neutral. In contrast, item 4 showed a more balanced distribution of responses, with 51.4% expressing positive perception and 41.4% selecting the neutral option, indicating that some students were uncertain about this aspect of the materials.

Overall, neutral responses ranged from 15.7% to 41.4%, whereas negative responses remained low across the three items. These findings demonstrate that students perceived the implemented materials as culturally relevant and respectful of their cultural identities. The predominance of positive responses provides empirical evidence that the culturally responsive learning materials contributed to strengthening students' sense of cultural representation and promoted more inclusive English language learning experiences within a multilingual educational context. **Table 13** reports students' responses to items 7, 8, and 9, which assess the contextual appropriateness of the implemented culturally responsive learning materials.

Table 13

Students' perceptions of the contextual appropriateness of the implemented materials

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
7	1 (1.4%)	5 (7.1%)	21 (30.0%)	33 (47.1%)	10 (14.3%)
8	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.9%)	3 (4.3%)	26 (37.1%)	39 (55.7%)
9	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (10.0%)	38 (54.3%)	25 (35.7%)

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the total number of participants (N=70). Responses correspond to the three items that evaluate the dimension contextual appropriateness of the implemented culturally responsive learning materials.

Source: Prepared by the author based on the Likert-type questionnaire.

The findings presented in **Table 13** indicate a highly positive perception of the contextual appropriateness of the implemented culturally responsive learning materials. Across the three items, most participants selected agree or strongly agree, indicating that the materials were perceived as appropriate for students' educational and sociocultural context.

Item 8 received the highest level of positive response, with 55.7% of the participants selecting strongly agree and 37.1% selecting agree, representing a combined positive perception of 92.8%. Similarly, item 9 showed 90.0% positive responses, with 54.3% selecting agree and 35.7% selecting strongly agree. In contrast, item 7 presented a more moderate distribution with 61.4% positive responses, 30.0% neutral responses, and 8.5% expressing disagreement.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that students considered implemented learning materials to be well aligned with their learning environment, cultural experiences, and

educational realities. The consistently elevated level of agreement across the three items provides empirical evidence that the materials successfully reflected the characteristics of the multilingual educational context, thereby supporting more meaningful, authentic, and context-sensitive English language learning experiences.

3.3. Results of specific objective 3: retrospective analysis, methodological triangulation, and refinement of design principles

To address the third specific objective, a retrospective analysis was conducted by integrating the qualitative findings from the diagnostic phase (Objective 1) with the quantitative data (Objective 2) through methodological triangulation. This process allowed for the transition from a purely descriptive intervention to the generation of evidence-informed design principles, a core requirement of the Design-Based Research (DBR) framework.

By systematically cross-referencing the initial needs with the students' subsequent perceptions, the following refined principles have been established for the development of culturally responsive materials in multilingual Ecuadorian contexts:

3.3.1. Principle of interactive scaffolding (Pedagogical dimension)

The diagnostic phase revealed a strong preference for games (48.6%) and dialogues (45.7%) as the most effective and enjoyable learning activities. Concurrently, pronunciation (45.7%) was identified as the primary linguistic barrier. The evaluative phase confirmed the effectiveness of addressing these needs, as 87.1% of students (combined agreement) perceived the implemented materials as pedagogically relevant for their learning process.

Refined design principle: culturally responsive materials must function as a system of social interaction that prioritizes oral communication over rote memorization. By incorporating gamified mechanics and contextualized dialogues, materials reduce the affective filter and provide the necessary scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) to mitigate anxiety related to pronunciation while fostering active classroom participation.

3.3.2. Principle of identity as a cognitive resource (Linguistic dimension)

The retrospective analysis revealed a strong relationship between students' linguistic profiles identified during the diagnostic phase and their subsequent evaluation of the cultural relevance of the implemented learning materials. The initial findings showed that Spanish constitutes the participants' primary language of communication (97.1%) across family, school, and community settings. Furthermore, 22.9% of students emphasized that recognizing their linguistic background is vital for their identity and culture. These findings highlight the educational value of incorporating learners' linguistic repertoires into the design of culturally responsive instructional materials.

Based on this diagnostic evidence, the learning materials were designed to acknowledge students' linguistic identities while promoting English language development through culturally meaningful learning experiences. Rather than treating the students' first language as an obstacle, the instructional design recognized it as a pedagogical resource

to facilitate comprehension and establish meaningful connections between prior knowledge and new language content.

The evaluation findings confirmed the effectiveness of these design decisions, as 81.4% of participants (combined agreement on Item 6) felt their cultural and linguistic backgrounds were respected and represented.

Refined design principle: the students' first language should not be viewed as an obstacle to English acquisition, but rather as a "fund of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992) and a cognitive bridge. Design must integrate the learners' linguistic repertoires to validate their identity, which in turn enhances comprehension and engagement in the target language.

3.3.3. Principle of sociocultural realism (contextual dimension)

Triangulated data shows a high interest in local legends and myths (35.7%) and gastronomy (24.3%). The evaluation of contextual appropriateness yielded the highest positive results, with 92.8% of students agreeing that the materials were well-aligned with their sociocultural reality (Item 8).

Refined design principle: educational materials reach their highest level of contextual suitability when they mirror the learning ecology of the student (family and community). By utilizing local narratives and authentic cultural practices, the design transforms English from a "foreign" entity into a meaningful tool for expressing the students' own reality.

Conclusion of the DBR cycle: this retrospective analysis confirms that a design grounded in the systematic diagnosis of pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural needs significantly reduces the gap between intercultural policy and classroom practice. These principles may serve as the theoretical and practical basis for future iterations of the prototype, aiming to refine more specific areas of language production, such as grammar and writing, which showed lower frequency in initial student preferences but remain essential for academic proficiency.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of culturally responsive materials in bridging the gap between standardized English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum and the sociocultural realities of multilingual students.

4.1. Pedagogical scaffolding and oral proficiency

The diagnostic finding indicated that pronunciation (45.7%) was the primary barrier, while students preferred games (48.6%). The 87.1% positive perception reported for item 1 confirms that interactive scaffolding effectively addressed these needs, supporting Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development.

4.2. Identity as a mediating cognitive resource

A key finding was the role of the students' first language; as, 22.9% of participants explicitly identified language recognition as essential to identity. The 81.4% positive response in Item 6 validates the “funds of knowledge” approach (Moll et al., 1992).

However, the 41.4% neutral response in Item 4 (cultural relevance) suggests that the integration of cultural elements must be deeper in future iterations.

4.3. Contextualization

The overwhelming 92.8% positive perception of contextual appropriateness suggests that incorporating content like myths (35.7%) and gastronomy (24.3%) creates a meaningful connection. As argued by Ladson-Billings (1995), when students see their world reflected in the curriculum, English becomes a tool for authentic expression.

4.4. Limitations and future cycles

Despite the positive outcomes, this study faces limitations inherent to its context-specific nature. The convenience sampling of 70 students at a single educational unit means the results provide a “proof of concept” rather than statistical generalizability. From a DBR perspective, the retrospective analysis (Objective 3) serves as the foundation for refinement. Future cycles should be aimed at:

Enhance written production: since students identified reading (31.4%) and writing (28.6%) as effective learning activities but preferred games for enjoyment, the next design cycle should better integrate literacy development into gamified tasks.

Deep in cultural specificity: to address the neutral responses in cultural relevance, the design must evolve from nationally recognized celebrations (like Christmas or New Year) to more localized or regional narratives that resonate more deeply with the students' daily lives.

5. Conclusions

- The development and evaluation of culturally responsive learning materials at UE “Eladio Roldós Barreiro” demonstrate that a systematic, design-based approach successfully addresses the disconnection between standardized EFL curricula and the sociocultural realities of multilingual students. By integrating students' “funds of knowledge” into the instructional design, this study moved beyond standardized Anglocentric perspectives to create a more inclusive and meaningful learning ecology.
- The research findings confirm that materials grounded in interactive scaffolding, identity validation, and sociocultural realism significantly enhance student engagement and motivation. Specifically, the elevated levels of positive perception regarding pedagogical relevance (87.1%) and contextual appropriateness (92.8%) provide evidence that when language learning mirrors the students' own narratives, such as local legends and gastronomy, English transforms from a foreign entity into a tool for authentic expression.

- Furthermore, this study establishes that the students' first language is a vital cognitive resource rather than a barrier. The validation of the learners' linguistic identities (as evidenced by the 81.4% positive response in cultural relevance) addresses the initial problem of "invisibility," fostering a sense of belonging and linguistic justice within the classroom.
- Finally, within the iterative framework of Design-Based Research (DBR), these refined principles provide a solid theoretical and practical foundation for future instructional cycles. While the first iteration successfully addressed oral interaction and contextual alignment, the data suggest that subsequent design should focus on gamifying written production and deepening cultural specificity to further reduce neutral perceptions. This research offers a replicable framework for enhancing English language pedagogy in diverse Ecuadorian contexts, ensuring that intercultural policy is effectively translated into meaningful classroom practice.

6. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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8. Authors' Contribution Statement

The authors declare that they have participated in the conduct of this research. Their individual contributions are described below in accordance with the CRediT Taxonomy. Jimmy Leodan Beltrán Lesano: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, data collection, and analysis, writing of the original draft, revision of the manuscript, critical review of the content and approval of the definitive version of the manuscript.

Víctor Hugo Romero García: academic supervision, methodological supervision, critical review of the manuscript, and approval of the last version of the manuscript.

Disclosure of delegation to generative AI

The authors state that they used ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.5) as a support tool to reorganize and editorially reformulate the original manuscript, correct the style, translate the abstract into English, and check the formal compliance with the journal's format. The experimental data, design, statistical results, and scientific decisions come from the authors' research and were not generated or modified by the tool. The authors reviewed, contrasted, and approved each section and assumed full responsibility for the final

content. The tool is not listed as an author and does not assume responsibility for the results.

Statement submitted by: Jimmy Leodan Beltrán Lesano.

9. Financing costs

This research was funded entirely with the authors' own funds.

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