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Teacher Training in Intercultural Bilingual Education in Guatemala: A Tool for Critical Decolonization?

Formació de docents en educació intercultural bilingüe a Guatemala: una eina per a la descolonització crítica?

Formación de docentes en educación intercultural bilingüe en Guatemala: ¿una herramienta para la descolonización crítica?

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Abstract This article offers a critical appraisal of the status of intercultural bilingual education in Guatemala, known as Educación Bilingüe Intercultural (EBI). The new national project of 1985 provided hope that Guatemalan socio-cultural diversity would finally be accepted, fostering the creation of a multicultural and multi-linguistic state. In the education sector, the proposal for a renovated curriculum that included a new EBI model represented the possibility of moving away from an assimilationist and colonial EBI and towards interculturalism. However, little has been done in practice to include indigeneity in mainstream culture and education. A gap persists between the rhetoric of what EBI should represent and what is done in the classroom. In this context, the article explores the role of EBI teacher training programmes and the influence these can have on how EBI is intended and implemented. A small-scale qualitative study analyzed how EBI is understood among stakeholders, the impact teachers and their training have on EBI, and EBI's potential role for social transformation. The study acknowledged long-standing challenges impeding the EBI from encouraging social change and transformative interculturalism. However, it has also revealed the beginning of alternative EBI teacher training approaches that foster curriculum decolonization and respect for different identities.

Keywords Intercultural Bilingual Education, Transformative Interculturalism, Indigenous Education, Castellanización.

Resum Aquest article ofereix una crítica de l'educació intercultural bilingüe a Guatemala. El nou projecte de nació de 1985 va permetre albergar l'esperança que la diversitat sociocultural guatemalenca seria finalment acceptada, impulsant la creació d'un estat multicultural i multilingüe. En el sector educatiu, la proposta d'un currículum renovat que incloïa un nou model de EBI representava la possibilitat d'allunyar-se d'una EBI colonitzadora i acostar-se a la interculturalitat. No obstant això, poc s'ha fet en la pràctica per a incloure l'indigenisme en l'educació dominant. Persisteix una bretxa entre la retòrica sobre el que hauria de representar la EBI i el que es fa a l'aula. L'article explora els programes de formació de professors de EBI i la influència que poden tenir en la forma en què es concep i s'aplica. Un estudi qualitatiu va analitzar com s'entén la EBI, l'impacte que els professors i la seva formació tenen, i el paper de la EBI per a la transformació social. L'estudi ha reconegut els reptes que impedeixen que la EBI fomenti el canvi social. No obstant això, també ha revelat el començament d'enfocaments alternatius de formació de professors que fomenten la descolonització del currículum.

Paraules clau educació intercultural bilingüe, educació indígena, interculturalisme transformador, castellanització.

Resumen Este artículo ofrece una crítica de la educación intercultural bilingüe en Guatemala. El nuevo proyecto de nación de 1985 permitió albergar la esperanza de que la diversidad sociocultural guatemalteca sería finalmente aceptada, impulsando la creación de un estado multicultural y multilingüe. En el sector educativo, la propuesta de un currículo renovado que incluía un nuevo modelo de EBI representaba la posibilidad de alejarse de una EBI colonizadora y acercarse a la interculturalidad. Sin embargo, poco se ha hecho en la práctica para incluir el indigenismo en la educación dominante. Persiste una brecha entre la retórica sobre lo que debería representar la EBI y lo que se hace en el aula. El artículo explora los programas de formación de profesores de EBI y la influencia que pueden tener en la forma en que se concibe y se aplica. Un estudio cualitativo analizó cómo se entiende la EBI, el impacto que los profesores y su formación tienen, y el papel de la EBI para la transformación social. El estudio ha reconocido los retos que impiden que la EBI fomente el cambio social. Sin embargo, también ha revelado el comienzo de enfoques alternativos de formación de profesores que fomentan la descolonización del currículo.

Palabras clave educación intercultural bilingüe, educación indígena, interculturalismo transformador, castellanización.

1. Introduction

Guatemala is a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic country where 25 linguistic communities coexist: 22 Mayan, Garifuna, Xinka, and the Spanish-speaking community. With over 40 percent of its inhabitants belonging to indigenous populations, interculturality and indigenous education are fundamental (INE, 2018). Furthermore, ethnic diversity has defined the distribution of power throughout history, discriminating against indigenous peoples when compared to ladinos, and European and Chinese descendants.[1] Rodas (2006) investigated Guatemalan society, focusing on the creation of the ladino identity as opposed to the indigenous. The author explained how, since the nineteenth century, during the Guatemalan Republic's formation process, the establishment of the Spanish-speaking ladino social category has been related to changes in the economic and administrative structure. Ladinos were granted favourable positions in municipal governments, trade, and land access. As a result, according to Rodas (2006), "more than a cultural problem, the indigenous and ladino confrontation in the Guatemalan highlands was defined in terms of local power structures and the distribution of resources" (4). This inequitable framework still stigmatises indigenous peoples today (INE, 2018).

To secure equal rights and educational opportunities for all, Guatemala has ratified international treaties and adopted national legislation.[2] Furthermore, the state encouraged the establishment of intercultural bilingual education, also known in Guatemala as Educación Bilingüe Intercultural (EBI), to promote and protect indigenous education and languages. However, previous research in Guatemala and Latin America (i.e., Bolivia, Ecuador, and Mexico) has revealed substantial issues with EBI in practice (ASIES, 2012; UNESCO, 2004; Sis, 2018; López & Sichra, 2008). The article explores the EBI offer in Guatemala, deepening on how teachers are

1 Alejos (1991/2013: 491), in the areas inhabited by Maya, defines ladino as a social category that is not considered indigenous and is mainly composed of mestizos of Hispanic heritage who speak Spanish. Since the nineteenth century, the ladinos have been the social, economic, and political dominant sector, supported by the Spanish-descended aristocracy.

2 In 1996, Guatemala ratified Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the International Labour Organisation and, in 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. At the national level, the laws and agreements that regulate the implementation of education for indigenous populations include the Political Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala, the National Education Act of 1991, the Peace Accords of 1996, the Law for the Promotion of Education Against Discrimination with the Decree 81-2002, the Governmental Agreements 526-2003 to establish the Vice-Ministry of Bilingual and Intercultural Education, and the Agreement on Generalization of Intercultural Bilingual Education, Agreement 22-2004.

trained, the beliefs around it, and the functions ascribed to it. The perspectives on EBI were gathered during a small-scale qualitative study during the month of May 2023 with academics, professors, and students of Universidad Rafael Landívar (URL) on the campuses in the regions of Alta Verapaz and Quiché, with insights from EBI experts.[3] EBI teacher trainers were the focal point of the study since, in forming future teachers, they are the most influential elements in EBI's definition, quality, and availability. The next section shifts attention to EBI teacher training in Guatemala, with a brief history of its evolution.

2. Overview of EBI Teacher Training

According to Rubio (2007) and Cortez (2019), bilingual teacher education began in the early twentieth century with educators who had not completed their secondary education or indigenous teachers who had been trained as Spanish monolingual teachers. This scenario changed with the development of *Normales*, secondary schools for teacher preparation in bilingual education in the 1980s. In the 2000–2004 administration, the teacher training in EBI was further improved and formalised through the establishment of bilingual intercultural *Normales* schools. Besides *Normales*, in-service teacher training was an important element in EBI teachers' preparation implemented in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Rubio, 2007). International cooperation supported EBI programmes and provided training and educational resources. As part of the national strategy, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) created a training for all in-service teachers that included interculturality and bilingual education. This represented the first effort by the education system to adapt to the country's multicultural nature (Rubio, 2007). In 2013, with the design of a new MINEDUC strategy, teacher education advanced to the university level with the introduction of multiple training programmes, including EBI. The new offer replaced the *Normales* with a two-year secondary school degree focusing on pedagogy, followed by a three-year university study.[4] In conclusion, while Guatemala has a few EBI teachers that have been trained as such at the university level since 2015, most current EBI teachers still apply the approaches gained during in-service training and *Normales* from the 1980s.

3 In Alta Verapaz, the population is mainly Mayan Q'eqchi' (90 percent) and in Quiché 86 percent are indigenous Maya Kiché (INE, 2018).

4 With the reform, Normales schools remain active only for initial and pre-primary education teacher preparation (López & Cortez, 2016).

3. The Evolution of EBI in the Guatemalan Context

In Guatemala, the first approach towards indigenous education dates to the end of the nineteenth century, when it was included in government plans to solve the "Indian problem" (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica [CIRMA], 2005; ICEFI & Save the Children, 2011; López, 2021). The government aspired through assimilationist bilingual education to establish a single language and national identity (Nivón, 2014). Education was limited to the *castellanización* of the indigenous people, teaching them how to read, write, and count in Spanish. Government educational initiatives towards modernisation shaped the educational discourse, imposing the adoption of European practices on the indigenous (López, 2014; Véliz, 2020). This assimilationist approach continued until the end of the civil war at the end of the 1990s. Indeed, EBI in Guatemala had to wait for implementation due to the thirty-year civil conflict between leftist and indigenous guerrillas and the Guatemalan army (1960-1996).

Besides time, in understanding EBI evolution in Guatemala, it is important to recognise the impact of international support, especially that of the United States (Álvarez, 2007). First through Protestant missionaries and later through their development agency, the United States played a significant role in the development of bilingual education (López, 2014; Hvalkof & Abby, 1981). In 1980, the National Bilingual Education Project (PRONEBI), supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), started as the first bilingual education pilot project. However, it still had an assimilationist perspective since it focused on teaching Spanish to indigenous children (Álvarez, 2007). Since the 1970s, intellectuals and university students, including URL, have debated the notion of *mayanidad* as part of a wider political and ideological discourse (see Moya, 1997). However, they had no significant impact on the implementation of EBI. In addition, during the conflict period, these movements lost strength due to the persecution of indigenous people and pro-indigenous organisations (Moya, 1997). It is with PRONEBI that the denomination of Mayan culture and EBI, as intended today, was affirmed.

In 1984, PRONEBI turned into a national programme consolidating EBI within MINEDUC. In this period, the political scene was transforming, and the end of the Guatemalan dictatorships in 1985 gave space for a new national constitution and education reform (López, 2014). The constitution recognised for the first time the multi-ethnic composition of the country and indigenous language rights, establishing bilingual education as a state responsibility (López, 2021, 2014). From 1995, the civil war was coming to an end, and the government, under the pressure of the peace process and international scrutiny, began placing emphasis on multiculturalism,

interculturalism, and the inclusion of indigenous identity (Hale, 2004). In this historical moment, new national and international policies were guiding the Guatemalan government to eradicate the discrimination that contributed to the conflict. However, research on EBI has revealed shortcomings in their expected impact in strengthening EBI and its national-level implementation, as discussed in the next section (Rubio, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2009).

4. The Status of EBI in Guatemala

The overview of EBI's evolution highlighted the complexities of its creation process, characterised by both positive contributions and unsolved obstacles that still affect its implementation today. Vergara's (2021) investigation identified how EBI brought improvements to the education system, especially for indigenous rural children. The introduction of EBI increased the number of bilingual teachers, offered educational services in remote communities, and lowered school dropout rates. The establishment of the EBI also supported teacher training in indigenous languages and bilingual approaches. However, first, EBI quality is insufficient, and second, it is seen as education only for indigenous students (López, 2014, 2021; Véliz, 2020). Despite the inclusion of EBI in the education curriculum and the recognition of the importance of considering students' sociocultural characteristics, the quality of its offer is low (López & Sichra, 2017). Previous analysis revealed a lack of educational materials, bilingual teachers' expertise, and training opportunities (Rodríguez, 2007; Sis, 2018; ICEFI & Save the Children, 2011; PRODESSA, 2016). Furthermore, when indigenous languages are taught, the emphasis is on their technical learning rather than their active use (López, 2021: 957).

Guatemala's multiculturalism and plurilingualism, according to national laws, should be reflected in the educational proposal for all the students through EBI. Notwithstanding, as Crisóstomo (2007) affirms, "it is well known that bilingualism and interculturalism are currently being advocated for the indigenous population with some minimum elements of interculturalism for the ladino population" (12). EBI predominantly follows an assimilationist model where bilingual education is taught to pre-primary and primary indigenous children (Vergara, 2021). Under this model, students are immersed in a setting that attempts to transform their identity through bilingualism in favour of the dominant culture (Lambert, 1984: 246). If the state's goal is to achieve equality among Guatemalans, this low-quality assimilationist modality should be replaced by additive bilingualism as cultural enrichment, allowing for broader perspectives and understandings of cultural origins (Cojtí, 2021: 46; Lambert, 1984; Signoret, 2003).

4.1. Challenges in EBI

EBI confronts multiple challenges, and the following summary tackles the issues that have the greatest influence on EBI implementation in Guatemala.

Table 1
Areas for development in the EBI offer in Guatemala.

Area	Literature analysis
Participatory school and education management	In Guatemala popular participation, particularly indigenous participation, in the formulation of curricula and school management is lacking (Parí, 2007). The benefits of community engagement in education have been documented in the literature (Becerra-Lubies & Varghese, 2017; López & Sichra, 2004). Together with school personnel and students, the participation of indigenous authorities, community members, and parents transforms education into a cultural effort that incorporates indigenous viewpoints (Zavala et al., 2007; López, 2005; 2021; Morales et al., 2022).
Curriculum design diversification	The curriculum can be "a prolific place for interethnic and intercultural negotiation" (López, 2014: 29). While curriculum is typically designed to reflect mainstream culture, it should consider existing indigenous resources, integrating tradition and modernity in the educational offer (López & Sichra, 2004, 2017; López, 2021).
Educational resources	The absence of educational materials (i.e., textbooks) does represent a barrier to EBI implementation (Rubio, 2007; Cojtí, 2007). In Guatemala, according to Crisóstomo (2007), this shortage reflects the perception of EBI as transitional. The teaching of indigenous languages has been formally included in the national curriculum but is affected by a lack of resources (López, 2021). The sector should also promote the emergence of indigenous authors (López & Sichra, 2004).
Differentiation of EBI strategy	There is a growing awareness of the need to differentiate EBI strategies to respond to the socio-linguistic characteristics of learners. Different levels of bilingualism can be identified in the same classroom (Véliz, 2020; López & Sichra, 2004). Indigenous languages changed with urbanisation, and Spanish has been interwoven into the indigenous language (López & Sichra,

	2017). In addition, in certain areas where indigenous languages are getting lost, EBI should focus on linguistic recovery (Rubio, 2007).
Initial and ongoing teacher training	Most countries have implemented reforms in EBI teacher training. Nonetheless, problems persist. Among them, teachers lack the professional preparation required to persuade parents and communities of the benefits of EBI, and they are not trained to identify the linguistic profile of the learners, tailoring their teaching to students' needs (López & Sichra, 2017; Rubio, 2007; López, 2021). Furthermore, ongoing professional development and alternative learning opportunities are limited (López & Sichra, 2008; Becerra-Lubies & Varghese, 2017).
Secondary and higher education	Integrating EBI in secondary and higher education would move it away from its transitional meaning. As of present, it remains widely used in the elementary education of indigenous children living in rural areas (López & Sichra, 2017, 2008; López, 2021). The lack of bilingual secondary schools also makes it difficult for indigenous students to continue their education (López, 2014).
EBI and interculturalism for all	Intercultural education should be aimed at all students (Rubio, 2007; Schmelkes, 2013). Including interculturalism in schools might serve as a staging point for the abolition of discrimination (López, 2021). Although interculturalism is a component of national education in Guatemala, little progress has been made in developing a national curriculum that truly calls for social transformation to build an intercultural society (López & Sichra, 2004).

The development of EBI in Guatemala appears to be still under the colonial transitional approach, impeded by multiple challenges. This article explores issues in teacher training in EBI and their connections to other areas for development from the standpoint of the critical paradigm and decolonial theory, outlined in the next section.

5. The Study: Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

The research investigates EBI teacher training and interculturalism through the lens of critical pedagogy, supplemented by decolonial theory (Giroux, 1978; Apple, 2014; Darder et al., 2003; bell hooks, 2010; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2007; Gorski, 2008).

5.1. Critical Pedagogy and the Decolonial Critiques

Under the critical pedagogy paradigm, learning is linked to social transformation, conceiving pedagogy as a tool to subvert inequality and dominant power. This article takes a critical stance towards EBI and teacher education programmes. It inquires if the main stakeholders in EBI perceive it as going beyond the academic element, seeing in it, through a critical pedagogy perspective, a socio-political function for transformation. Critical educators in EBI should teach students how to identify if and how the educational content is related to dominant cultural discourses, empowering them to fight injustice in a society built on economic, racial, and gender inequalities (bell hooks, 2010; Giroux, 2011; Freire, 1970/2005).

Nonetheless, critical pedagogy is not enough to analyse the Guatemalan context, where the ethno-racist paradigm remnant of colonisation is still in force in all components of society, including education (Cojtí, 2021). Indeed, several authors (Walsh, 2015; Walsh, 2018c; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) highlighted how critical pedagogy has limitations if observed from a decolonial perspective. Freire, according to Walsh (2018c), was affected by the historical period and place in which he lived, focusing on the challenges that he faced as a member of the post-World War II Latin American Left. This caused limitations regarding the perception of how the "modern/colonial matrix of power" was intended by critical pedagogy, leaving aside intersectional aspects of power such as gender and ethnicity (Walsh, 2018c: 89). The fact that most critical pedagogy theorists were white men raised concerns about the lack of inclusion of subordinate cultures as well as gender and racial perspectives (Darder et al., 2003). According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Freire's paradigm does not consider the perspectives of feminist theorists of colour, ethnic minorities, or indigenous peoples. The critic focuses on Freirean pedagogies' rejection of the effects of colonialism, racism, and self-determination movements (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Tuck and Yang (2021: 86) examined the perspective of decolonization in Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. In their understanding of the oppressed-oppressor relationship, undefined workers are deprived of humanity by similarly

abstract oppressors. Freire neither locates power relations in historical time nor identifies different types of oppression.

This connection of the decolonial critique to critical pedagogy relates to the necessity to combine the two theories in analysing teacher training programmes on EBI in Guatemala. The study examines if and how critical pedagogy is adopted in preparing future EBI teachers and if, in doing so, a decolonial viewpoint is considered. When teacher training programmes in EBI understand it as a critical tool for intercultural transformation, they can indeed contribute to contrasting the non-indigenous mainstream culture dominating the education discourse (Cojtí, 2021).

5.2. Decoloniality and Decolonial Interculturality

Decoloniality refers to the process of overcoming coloniality, or the colonial matrix of power (CMP), and the rhetoric of modernity (Schubring, 2021; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2007). Coloniality, introduced by Quijano (1991), refers to the colonial structure that dominates other cultures, repressing alternative perspectives. Decolonial thinking exists as a reaction to coloniality, analysing the dominant knowledge and enabling the insurgence of other forms of existence and "decolonial attitudes" (Walsh, 2018a: 17).

Under the decolonial theory, in the current historical context, Quijano's coloniality must be understood in connection to modernity, representing what Mignolo (2018a: 106) refers to as "the darker side of Western modernity." The connection between modernity and coloniality is seen in the imposition and perpetration of the CMP through modernity's rhetoric. In colonial understanding, western modernity was the only possible direction of history. As it happened in Western countries, modernity was "the point of arrival for the rest of the planet" (Mignolo, 2018a: 119). This relation between decoloniality and the described binomial modernity/coloniality is the subject of the decolonial process of delinking (Mignolo, 2018a, 2018b). Decoloniality seeks to detach from the CMP and the modernity narrative, allowing decolonial subjects to exist (Mignolo, 2018a). Decoloniality indeed promotes decolonial ways of living and knowing. Mignolo (2007, 2018b) and Quijano (1991) especially saw knowledge liberation as the most essential aspect of decoloniality and delinking to reconstruct outside of the modern/colonial paradigm (2018a, 2018b).

In the 1980s, interculturality was introduced in Latin America as part of the development of indigenous educational policies (Abba & Streck, 2019). Tubino (2004) and Walsh (2012, 2018b), however, examined how the proposed interculturality had a functional meaning. It recognised cultural diversity under a neoliberal dominance strategy to maintain social stability. It was not about transformation, and it did not call into question the established social, political, and economic order.

This conceptualization of functional interculturality derived from the multiculturalism discourse, which intended cultural interaction to be limited to reciprocal acknowledgement. Today, intercultural education is primarily implemented within the same framework where different cultures are tolerated without truly engaging in reciprocal learning (Walsh, 2012). This limited interculturality also perpetuates power distribution and marginalisation (Aikman, 1997; Gorski, 2008).

To the interpretation of interculturality as useful to the neoliberal order, Walsh (2018b) and Gorski (2008) counterpose a critical decolonial conceptualization. According to Gorski (2008), for educators to avoid implementing intercultural education as a tool for maintaining the colonial order:

> The first step toward authentic intercultural practice is undertaking shifts in consciousness that acknowledge socio-political context, raise questions regarding control and power, and inform, rather than deferring to, shifts in practice. (522)

Decolonial interculturalism demands questioning to confront systemic inequalities. In this sense, decolonial interculturality aims to transform the dominant conceptualization on which social structures and institutions, including education, are founded to include diverse cultural logics and ways of knowing and being. Interculturality, as Walsh (2018b: 59) describes it, is not a "done deal" but a process and a tool for transformation. James (2008) sees critical interculturality as a practice of negotiation between the mainstream culture and the natives. Decoloniality and interculturality are efforts inside the cracks of the CMP to generate alternative approaches (Walsh, 2018b; Anzaldúa, 2015).

Under these lenses this study contributes to the critical analysis of EBI in Guatemala, with the research process guided by the following main research question:

What is the perception of EBI at URL, and is there any evidence in the EBI teacher education programme at the Quiché and Alta Verapaz campuses of implementing critical and decolonial approaches to deploy transformative EBI?

And sub-questions:

1. How do URL staff, EBI students, and key stakeholders understand intercultural bilingual education and its role?

2. Which are their perceptions about teacher training in EBI and teachers' in fluence on EBI implementation?

3. What circumstances do URL staff, EBI students, and key stakeholders believe are needed to deploy transformative EBI approaches?

The key research questions explored the link between the implementation of a critical approach in teaching EBI and interculturalism to teachers and the subsequent impact on their conceptualization and, eventually, execution in classrooms.

The underlying assumption is that the application of this approach to how EBI is taught may play a transformative role in developing interculturalism. The study explores if and how EBI teacher education offers alternative critical educational practices for delinking and re-knowing, allowing subaltern cultures to negotiate their position with the dominant one.

5.3. Research Design

As I sought to understand participants' beliefs and opinions about EBI and EBI teacher training, the research was designed as a small-scale qualitative study with a critical approach applying a qualitative interview-based methodology. In answering the research questions, respondents were given space to communicate their reality, lived experiences, emotions, and cultural sensitivities (Chilisa & Phatshwane, 2022). The small-scale qualitative design represented the possibility of undertaking research based on "the world views of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalisation... to communicate from their frames of reference." (Chilisa & Phatshwane, 2022: 8).

5.4. Methods for the Fieldwork and Sampling Strategy

The study was carried out during May 2023 in Guatemala City and Alta Verapaz, while information from Quiché was collected remotely. Data were acquired through in-person and online interviews, as well as phone calls, to generate information for answering the main research questions. Semi-structured key informant interviews gave an overview of EBI experts' experiences and perspectives during a preliminary exploratory phase (Laws et al., 2013). Successively, the data were expanded through interviews with informants from URL. The research involved a total of 12 participants; Table 2 provides the background of each participant. The key informants were preidentified based on the purpose of their expertise through judgement sampling during the research design phase. However, during the data collection, certain flexibility in the identification of informants was maintained by applying snowball sampling to address new informants that might have emerged during interviews (Laws et al., 2013; Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Table 2
Characteristics of sample participants in interviews.

Location	Profession	Ethnicity	Gender	Organisation	Interview Method
Guatemala City	EBI expert	Foreigner	Man	Consultant	In person
	EBI Academic Coordinator	Maya	Woman	Universidad Rafael Landívar	In person
	Researcher	Maya	Woman	Universidad Rafael Landívar	In person
	EBI expert	Maya	Man	Consultant	On-line
Quiché	Teacher Trainer	Maya	Man	Universidad Rafael Landívar	Phone call
	Teacher Trainer	Maya	Woman	Universidad Rafael Landívar	On-line
	Student	Ladino[5]	Man	Universidad Rafael Landívar	On-line
	Student	Maya	Woman	Universidad Rafael Landívar	Phone call
Alta Verapaz	Student	Maya	Woman	Universidad Rafael Landívar	Phone call
	Student and in-service teacher	Maya	Woman	Universidad Rafael Landívar	Phone call

5 Among the EBI students who responded to the survey and were available for interview, this student was the only one who auto-defined himself as ladino, while all the others defined themselves as Mayan. I considered it interesting to interview him and learn more about his opinion on EBI and interculturality, looking for the potential influence of individual ethnicity and cultural background on his perspective.

	Teacher Trainer	Maya	Man	Universidad Rafael Landívar	In person
	Teacher Trainer	Maya	Woman	Universidad Rafael Landívar	On-line

6. Findings and Discussion

This section brings the findings together, building on prior research on EBI and its role in promoting decolonial interculturality and equality. It demonstrates how colonial power dynamics prevented EBI's transformative potential over time. For each sub-question, the challenges highlighted by participants are compared to prior research. The findings, also showed how certain URL teacher trainers are adopting critical and decolonial approaches for training EBI teachers, thus questioning the dominant model. I suggest that these identified efforts represent an opportunity to change how EBI is perceived and implemented. In concluding, I discuss the potential of these alternative EBI teacher training methods.

6.2. Understanding of EBI and its Role

First, I sought to find out how participants intended EBI and what role they believed it could play. The findings revealed a lack of consistency in the education sector in understanding EBI and its role. Participants intended EBI as language and culture learning to promote transformative interculturalism and revitalise indigenous knowledge. However, this definition is neither the only one nor the most common. According to them, due to the ongoing influence of the *castellanización,* on the one hand, there is a pedagogical interpretation of EBI that is concerned only with language learning. On the other hand, there is a connotation of EBI as an education modality for rural indigenous students. Both interpretations, which frequently overlap, lack cultural, intercultural, and ideological components. As teacher trainers underlined, the same MINEDUC originally conceived EBI as language learning for indigenous children, avoiding political and ideological issues. This understanding of EBI as subtractive language acquisition recalled previous research critiques (Corbetta et al., 2018; López, 2008, 2014, 2021; López & Sichra, 2017, 2008; Crisóstomo, 2007; Cojtí, 2021).

Respondents highlighted how specific challenges maintain this assimilationist understanding of EBI, preventing its transformative role. A significant outcome

from the study is that the obstacles that emerged during interviews are not new and have been highlighted by EBI researchers over the years. EBI continues to be perceived as lacking relevance, with indigenous languages reduced to colloquial use for Spanish learning and instructions, as already emphasised in Rubio's (2007) and ICEFI's (2011) studies. On this point, a significant issue mentioned by participants but marginally addressed by literature is indigenous languages low consideration in academia and knowledge development. Commenting on the prejudices against native languages, Cojtí (2007) recognised how Spanish is seen as the primary requirement for any academic or professional advancement, including for EBI teachers. Respondents questioned this aspect further, pointing out that indigenous languages are not prioritised in EBI teacher training, perpetuating Spanish dominance in EBI teaching.

The diversification of the curriculum is another issue on which research findings match previous literature (Crisóstomo, 2007; López & Sichra, 2008). According to participants, the curriculum presents EBI as translation and systematic language learning with limited attention to indigenous knowledge, culture, and students' realities. The cultural factor cannot be separated from indigenous languages, as demonstrated by a respondent's example of the terms moon in the Q'eqchi' language and Spanish. In her experience, teachers teach the Spanish translation of "luna" neglecting the fact that the moon is referred to in Q'eqchi' culture as "qana' po", or the grandmother moon. Teachers should investigate cultures to enhance technical definitions with contextual information. The indigenous traditional heritance of the cosmovision taught through the language should be incorporated into EBI instead of employing only translation. Respondents echoed previous research pointing out the importance of contextualising EBI teaching practices and mainstream educational content (Jacir, 2022; GIZ, 2019). Indeed, participants and researchers both recognised the centralised nature of the curriculum based on the dominant culture, which neither adapts to students' profiles nor prioritises local needs, forms of knowing, or cultural elements (López & Sichra, 2008; Véliz, 2020).

Another concern raised in prior studies and reiterated in the findings is participants' criticism of interculturality being taught as cultural exchange without engaging in reciprocal understanding or reflecting on Guatemalan society and identity. According to respondents, the intercultural component is presently missing or limited in the EBI operationalisation, and when it is addressed, it is intended for indigenous students. The concept and scope of interculturality remain uncertain in the education sector. A teacher trainer shared how a prevalent understanding is limited to celebrating the national Independence Day or Indigenous Peoples' International Day. Students celebrate with traditional costumes, food, and dance, but the participant argued that they do not learn about Guatemalan history and culture. Teachers do not address the complexities of Guatemalan peoples and only superficially satisfy

the curriculum requirement of interculturality. The Guatemalan researcher Véliz (2020) already argued how the intercultural education implemented by most of the teachers reproduces cultural assimilation practices against indigenous peoples instead of fostering reciprocal learning. To this critique, respondents' contributions also summoned the superficial role they see in how interculturality is proposed without questioning history, identity, or social order. Respondents' analysis recalled Walsh's (2012; 2018b) and Tubino's (2004, 2013) research on the concept of functional interculturality serving the colonial paradigm.

Among the findings was also mentioned the failure of the educational system to detect and react to societal changes. Participants reaffirmed what López and Sichra (2017) found in their research on how changing social and economic factors challenge the concept that indigenous identity is synonymous with monolingualism and rurality. Participants identified how classrooms are becoming multilingual and teachers, unprepared, are using Spanish as the preferred teaching language. Respondents referred to the MINEDUC normative framework as the main guide for teaching in multilingual classes. However, they also recognised a gap between theory and practice:

They [teachers] can have children from various linguistic regions of the country. But the classroom is in Spanish. The system does not pick that [multilingualism] up. So, we cannot talk about bilingual or multilingual education. (EBI expert)

Furthermore, respondents agreed with previous research on how today clear-cuts between languages and students' identities are no longer possible, and consequently EBI needs to be adjusted (Véliz, 2020; López & Sichra, 2004, 2017).

The findings corroborated previous research concerns, and participants' critiques suggested little progress in EBI's understanding and implementation. However, among respondents' contributions, some different views of EBI and its purpose emerged, representing potential shifts from its assimilationist nature. The section that follows explores these developments, their challenges, and how they are impacting EBI teacher training.

6.2. Teacher's Influence on EBI

The second study sub-question explored participants' opinions on EBI teacher training and teachers' influence on EBI implementation. According to the findings, teachers have a strong personal influence, and, in the participants' view, educators essentially control EBI teaching in class. Respondents also believed that not just teachers but also their training affect whether and how EBI is taught. The reported lack of supervision from educational authorities over EBI in schools makes teachers' skills and attitudes crucial. According to respondents, this situation represents a

problem since most EBI teachers lack proper training and expertise in indigenous language teaching and interculturalism. On teachers' lack of skills in native languages, Rodríguez (2007) already found in his research how it is common to find EBI teachers who do not master their native language. Teachers trained before the reform, according to participants, are also more likely to teach EBI as transitional language learning and are unprepared to advocate for EBI and its benefits. Respondents agreed with Rodríguez (2007) on EBI teachers' unpreparedness due to obsolete training programmes influenced by colonialism and on how these teachers still dominate EBI teaching in schools. Because of inadequacies in the teacher recruitment process, university-graduated teachers proposing an EBI with an intercultural decolonial perspective are just starting to reach schools and have little influence on how EBI is implemented. Respondents' concerns about the impact of inadequate teacher training on EBI implementation reflect criticisms expressed in previous studies (López, 2008; López & Sichra, 2008; Sis, 2018). López (2021) and López and Sichra (2017) have emphasised how teachers' commitment to teach EBI for social change is constrained when their training primarily focuses on subtractive language teaching.

An important research finding is that some universities, since the 2013 reform, have included in their EBI teacher training programmes cultural and intercultural components. Participants commented on the adjustments in URL, and some trainers shared that they are rethinking EBI training, proposing approaches that recall a critical and decolonial perspective. These methods also facilitate future EBI teachers' understanding of power relations in knowledge and education. On this point, it is significant to note that these approaches have not yet been recorded in the literature on EBI in Guatemala. This study identified the need to inquire about these alternative EBI teacher training proposals and their potential contribution to transformative EBI and interculturalism.

The findings under this sub-question revealed the influence of teachers' training, attitudes, and skills on EBI. Participants and prior studies agreed on the urgency of adjusting initial and in-service EBI teacher training as the first step to changing EBI teaching in schools (Sis, 2018). In this regard, the study discovered that there seems to be some progress outside the teacher training system under MINEDUC. Universities are incorporating interculturality into EBI teacher training, and some URL trainers have also started new approaches to prepare future EBI teachers to question mainstream EBI teaching methods and content. However, there is little information besides participants' contributions because of the lack of literature and previous studies.

6.3. EBI's Transformative Role

After exploring participants' perceptions about EBI and teachers' impact, they were questioned about EBI's transformative potential to develop an intercultural society. While respondents recognised the role of EBI for social change, on the circumstances necessary to undertake a transformative EBI, the findings revealed multiple obstacles and criticisms. Furthermore, when comparing them to previous EBI studies, it emerged that the mentioned challenges are not new and have gone unresolved for many years. In reporting the obstacles, participants referred to the educational authorities' lack of a clear approach to implementing EBI, already identified by prior findings from Rodríguez (2007) and Raymundo (2015). The EBI teachers and professionals interviewed felt isolated in their attempts to foster an EBI for interculturalism and social transformation. Respondents and the authors commented how, despite the discourses from the educational sector and stakeholders on the need for enhancement of the EBI and interculturality, no tangible activities are frequently taken. Furthermore, while legislation regulating EBI and interculturality exists, findings show how the educational system keeps failing to comply with it. This gap between public discourse and legislative rhetoric on EBI and what occurs in practice demonstrated the persistence of an issue previously found by research (López, 2014). Raymundo already wrote in 2015 about the contradiction between the multitude of legislative norms promoting EBI in Guatemala and the limited decisions to implement them.

Findings also revealed how past research had only marginally addressed certain concerns that are instead most significant for participants, starting with EBI teacher trainers learning opportunities. Respondents pointed out the lack of training programmes for EBI teacher trainers and the low quality of the available ones as crucial issues for enhancing EBI and its transformative role. According to participants, the abilities of teacher trainers influence the attitudes and practices of future EBI teachers, and their preparation should be monitored and encouraged. Previous research has largely emphasised the need for improving initial and ongoing EBI teacher preparation, leaving marginal attention to the skills of those who impart the training (López & Sichra, 2008, 2017; Sis, 2018; Jacir, 2018; GIZ, 2019). Among the national researchers in EBI, only Cortez (2019) shared the same concern as the teacher trainers interviewed about the inadequate quality and quantity of training options for EBI teacher educators in Guatemala.

Another issue mentioned by participants and addressed very briefly in previous research is the lack of agreed-upon guidelines and standards among teacher education institutions. There are no shared criteria for the EBI teacher profile, nor are there any for the quality, content, or goals that teacher training institutions must consider. Rubio (2007) acknowledged this lack of standards in EBI teacher training

from its inception, and according to the findings, it appears that this deficiency persisted even after the 2013 reform. MINEDUC and the universities are in charge of implementing EBI teacher training programmes, but they are not monitored or required to follow any shared rules on how or what to teach future teachers. MINEDUC has no authority over universities or their initiatives for reforming EBI teacher training.

Finally, participants mentioned the need to change the government's lack of purpose to reform its structure as the most relevant among the conditions necessary to achieve a transformative EBI, recalling López and Sichra's (2017) research. According to respondents, EBI will only be adopted to reform society towards interculturalism and social justice if MINEDUC demonstrates a willingness to implement the structural adjustment required to overcome the colonial paradigm. Today, there is little evidence of such an intention because of the low relevance given to EBI. The identified participants proposing decolonial and critical EBI teacher training approaches are now working in the fissures opened by MINEDUC under the rhetorical discourse of curriculum diversification and interculturality, as outlined by López and Sichra (2017). However, these efforts will remain limited if no wider changes are adopted to move from rhetoric to practice.

The comparison of the findings to prior studies confirmed participants' perceptions that nothing is moving ahead in EBI, reporting challenges and concerns already raised in earlier studies. The concept of EBI inside the educational system and promoted by MINEDUC continues to be transitional, under the dominant culture and an intercultural framework to maintain the current social order. The findings indicated that among the educational authorities, there is no interest in introducing a transformative EBI for social change. However, as further described in the conclusion, a few EBI teacher trainers at the university level inside URL are working for a different EBI. A few attempts were identified to uncover and contrast the power relations replicated in EBI by trainers who believed in the use of a decolonial approach for social transformation. In preparing future EBI teachers, they are promoting critical pedagogy into their practices and the relevance of indigenous knowledge and culture integration besides language learning, challenging the curriculum. Through their critical and decolonial perspective, they are also reflecting on the legitimacy the curriculum and the education sector give to certain knowledge and cultures over others. These teacher trainers are developing alternative critical approaches for delinking EBI from the CMP and negotiating the place of native languages and knowledge in relation to the dominant one (Mignolo, 2007).

7. Conclusion

The research explored participants' perceptions of EBI, the teacher training offer, and EBI's potential to promote transformative interculturalism and social justice. From respondents' contributions, findings revealed that EBI continues to be tied to the colonial paradigm and power dynamics. The Spanish language and culture are seen as the modernity to aspire to and the prerequisites for success, and are prioritised in the logic of the CMP over native knowledge and languages. Most social and political institutions, including education, give EBI and interculturality secondary status. EBI is regarded as a transitional language learning programme for indigenous students to learn Spanish. Interculturality is taught within a framework of appreciation for diversity without addressing the socio-political context or questioning discrimination. While the public discourse celebrates the richness indigenous peoples represent for the country, there is no intention to cocreate an intercultural education from a decolonial perspective.

After the conflict, the educational reform was considered a chance to create an education that would encourage inclusion, besides access and quality, to build a new society for all Guatemalans. Indigenous people desired to contribute to the country's progress by positioning their knowledge and perspectives alongside mainstream ones. The design of a new educational curriculum represented an opportunity for the EBI to move beyond its understanding of assimilationist language learning, including culture and interculturalism. However, the EBI model proposed by the indigenous people under the reform was never implemented. EBI continued to be taught in schools as grammar and translation, neglecting ancestral knowledge, interculturalism, and reciprocal understanding. According to the findings, this idea of EBI as systematic language learning for indigenous people is still prevalent today.

Participants recognised long-standing challenges preventing progress in EBI's understanding, in how EBI teachers are trained, and in achieving its transformative role. However, the study also revealed how certain changes are taking place. Indeed, a few URL academics are advocating for EBI's transformative potential to start a different interaction between the indigenous and non-indigenous, overcoming dominant transitory or discriminatory approaches. These teacher trainers are mentoring prospective EBI teachers through a critical pedagogy approach, guiding them in recognising power relations in education, and enhancing EBI's decolonizing role. The trainers are preparing new EBI teachers to implement an EBI aimed at promoting inclusiveness, higher educational quality for everyone, and transformational decolonial interculturality. The understanding of EBI and its role in these new approaches could be a chance to delink it from the CMP and for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples to re-know each other and redefine their interactions.

However, these efforts identified by the research are an exception to the common EBI understanding and to the mainstream EBI teacher training offer. Their influence will be limited unless structural changes within the educational authorities occur. Adjustments must begin with MINEDUC's engagement in establishing decolonial interculturalism at the heart of EBI, starting with changing from EBI to Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (EIB). Most of the region's countries (i.e., Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru) have already made the change, but Guatemala continues to reproduce EBI as indigenous language learning for indigenous students (López, 2021).

This article reports a small example of the complexity behind EBI, its role, the forces preventing it from transforming society, and the few efforts towards a new decolonial EBI offer. EBI development seems to be linked to the motivation of a few, and the hope is that keeping the discussions alive will inspire more to act. For this reason, additional investigations should be conducted to identify alternative EBI approaches, their evolution, and their impact. More research is needed to hear the voices of those who promote transformative EBI with critical and decolonial approaches, navigating the cracks in the CMP (Walsh, 2018b; Anzaldúa, 2015).

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