



## **Neurodivergent Students in English Language Lessons: Reflections at the Teaching Practicum**

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The inclusion of neurodivergent learners in English language lessons has gained significant attention to promote equitable and effective learning environments for all students. This article presents reflections stemming from my role as a mentor in an English language practicum. It is within this context, supporting student-teachers, that I have helped to develop lessons designed to embrace autism as a unique neurological diversity within the realm of English Language Teaching. Employing narrative inquiry as a research methodology, the transition from instrumental to humanizing perspectives regarding lesson planning is examined providing insights into meaningful practices for teacher education. The narratives inspected reveal the potential to contest normative curricula perpetuating oppression, silencing, and marginalization. Insights into challenges, opportunities, and meaningful practices associated with neurodiversity inclusion in English language teaching (ELT) settings are provided, along with implications for teacher education. The study underscores the adaptability of lesson planning to address the diverse needs of neurodivergent students and highlights how teaching practicum experiences enhance student-teachers' abilities to cultivate inclusive and effective learning environments.

Keywords: English lessons, English teaching, mentor, neurodivergent learners, learning

### **INTRODUCTION**

The inclusion of neurodivergent learners in English language classrooms is evident in educational scenarios in Bogotá, Colombia. In Bogotá, at least until 2022, “98% of public schools in the capital enrolled girls, boys, adolescents, and young people with disabilities, including only 1043 students with autism spectrum disorder (SAD)” (Secretaría de Educación de Bogotá, 2022). This inclusion, in the capital city of Colombia, has brought about the invitation for teachers, in all areas, to come up with pedagogical learning processes and strategies under an inclusive education approach, which proposes a school transformation to promote the recognition of diversity, respect for difference, the elimination of barriers to learning and the participation, with the sole purpose of advancing towards quality education.

Such an invitation has reached teacher education programs (e.g., English language teaching) that somehow have attempted to include specific content to educate student-

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teachers on how to adapt or accommodate disciplinary lessons to the needs of neurodivergent learners. For example, English Bachelor of Arts programs, at least in the ones where I have worked, concentrate on disciplinary contents (e.g., grammar approaches, teaching methods, phonetics, phonology, etc.) that prioritize instrumental and technical skills. Although there are spaces to think of possibilities to welcome other types of learners (e.g., neurodivergent learners), most academic spaces fall short of mapping the academic and social realities neurodivergent learners encounter in educational scenarios.

Since neurodiversity encompasses a range of neurological differences (e.g., autism, ADHD, dyslexia, etc.), it becomes more and more complex to incorporate in English lessons, variations where individuals with diverse learning processes can thrive. However, regarding diversity in English Language Teaching (ELT), there have been investigative attempts to re-think learning spaces to welcome various bodily and cognitive-divergent learners. Several studies have addressed the educational needs of diverse learners in various contexts. Alabdulaziz (2024), for instance, conducted a study on the effectiveness of video modeling for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This study is noteworthy for its insights into supporting students in different educational settings. Arenas González (2012) explored methodologies to promote autonomous language learning among visually impaired students, contributing to inclusive language education. Similarly, Castillo and Florez-Martelo (2020) investigated the pedagogical implications of inclusion for hard-of-hearing students in English language learning, advocating for inclusive policies. Cuervo-Rodríguez and Castañeda-Trujillo (2021) examined the experiences of pre-service English teachers with dyslexia, highlighting the potential for leveraging this condition to enhance empathy and teaching effectiveness. De la Cruz et al. (2020) explored teaching methodologies for a student with ADHD, emphasizing the benefits of creative and proactive strategies. Additionally, Giraldo Martinez and Ramos Carvajal (2021) investigated a methodological intervention for students with ASD and Down syndrome, demonstrating the effectiveness of diverse strategies in enhancing learning outcomes.

The above efforts certainly contribute to broadening the understanding of unfamiliar dimensions of English language teaching. However, much more needs to be done to not only update pre-service teachers' language competencies but also pre-service teachers' possibilities to experience the teaching practicum as a space in which pedagogical knowledge can disrupt colonial principles (i.e., methods and methodologies) by embracing cognitive divergent experiences as a source of knowledge. In this line of thought, at least in the Colombian context, scholars have been interested in documenting how it is that the pedagogical practicum is limited to instrumental constructions in which student-teachers are to apply different types of procedural knowledge (Lucero & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2019), maintain an agentive-empty role (Samacá, 2020); and even function as a regulatory stage to meet the Ministry of Education's requirements (Lucero & Cortés-Ibañez, 2021). These interests also have reached student-teachers' reflections on their pedagogical experience showing that there is much more to explore beyond disciplinary accounts of language teaching.

Still unexplored, is also the awareness of neurodiversity that remains a significant gap in research concerning how neurodivergent learners learn. Even more scarce is research regarding how pre-service teachers build knowledge and professional knowledge when working with neurodivergent individuals in English language education. Therefore, as a mentor teacher, I want to share my experience accompanying pre-service teachers at the teacher practicum stage. I want to capitalize on this opportunity to share co-constructed knowledge that emerged from English Language Lessons that revolved around four neurodivergent students at a primary school level (i.e., 3rd and 4th grades) in a public school in Bogotá, Colombia.

It is then in this line of thought that this article intends to explore lesson planning experiences, conversations, and personal reflections around the challenges and opportunities associated with the inclusion of neurodivergent learners in English language lessons, providing insights into meaningful practices, strategies, and the broader implications for teacher education. Moreover, this study recognizes that since there are diverse needs neurodivergent learners have, English language teachers must, beyond employing strategies, accommodate these differences in both cognitive units of learning and opportunities for inclusion (see, Montaña & Vera, 2012; Saleh Al-Busaidi, & Tuzlukova, 2018).

### **Theoretical Orientations**

In this study, I employ three main theoretical categories. Neurodivergency, Teaching Practicum, and Lesson Planning. These three categories are not to be understood as isolated concepts but as complementary since the intricate connections among them present unique opportunities to engage in theoretical reflections for English language teaching at the teacher education stage.

#### *Neurodivergency: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Identity*

Neurodivergence describes the variation in cognitive functioning and neurological development among individuals. In this paper, neurodivergence is used as an umbrella term in which other neurodevelopmental conditions are packed. This is the case of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Given that the literature on neurodivergency in education is scarce (Granieri et al., 2023), this paper adds an investigative review to neurodivergency by inspecting ASD among English language learners. In this vein, I refer to autistic identity as the “individual’s endeavor to obtain membership in a higher-status out-group by adopting the behaviors and traits of that group” (Pryke-Hobbes et al. 2023, p. 3). This choice is not naive. On the contrary, I assume a political stance as there has been an evident yet hidden complicity to mask autism within neurotypical social groups. In this respect, autistic learners adopt behaviors associated with a neurotypical identity and conceal behaviors associated with their autistic identity.

This study acknowledges that literature on neurodivergency in education is scarce (Granieri et al., 2023), even more so when it comes to English language learning. Yet, I intend here to avoid pathologizing neurodiversity. Instead, I think of it not as a condition but as a broader spectrum of human diversity. This conceptualization gives us the possibility to explore its implications for understanding and supporting individuals with diverse neurological profiles, and the social, educational, and workplace

implications of embracing neurodiversity. In this sense, neurodiversity is becoming more and more visible in classrooms as, nowadays, there are more tools (e.g., epistemological, technological or even political) to identify learners with neurodiversity, at least in the Colombian context, language teaching practices cannot continue constructing one ideal student (i.e., the most proficient one). On the contrary, language teaching practices must accommodate designing and delivering as these may exclude students who diverge from the canonical yet colonial profile (Akin & Neumann, 2013), disadvantaging and positioning students.

#### *Teaching Practicum Experiences*

Teaching practicum experiences (TPE) enhance preservice teachers' abilities to create inclusive and effective learning environments. I am not afraid here to refer to effectiveness inasmuch as it refers more to achieving a result rather than obtaining perfect outcomes. Although the Teaching Practicum (TP) has been studied to comprehend how it functions as a regulatory stage to meet the national education ministry's requirements (Lucero & Cortés-Ibañez, 2021) in Colombia, its importance goes beyond being a mere instrumental driven and political space. The TP actually encapsulates pedagogical knowledge as possibilities to disrupt traditional and monolithic dimensions of teaching (e.g., lesson planning). As a matter of fact, since the TP is an integral stage in the preparation of future English language teachers, teaching practicum experiences are an opportunity to re-think and re-signify English language teaching (Aguirre-Garzón & Ubaque-Casallas, 2022). Hence, I think of the TP as a human space for pre-service teachers to humanize their own pedagogies. This, by dismantling biases and stereotypes about neurodivergent students and the various discourses of de-humanity that surround them (e.g., ideal proficient speakers).

I then chose to think of TPE as all those lived and embodied subjectivities (i.e., sensing and emotioning) moments that go beyond disciplinary experiences. This said, TPE encapsulate all human sensations that as individuals we feel in our bodies and that give shape to our doings as educators. Therefore, since TPE are context-dependent, they are also personally felt, constructed, and understood as these are framed within one's system of beliefs as well as within one's mindset. Such a system of beliefs is here understood as the disciplinary repertoire I bring to teaching, and the latter is conceived as one's series of self-perceptions and beliefs I hold about ourselves and others (see, Salazar-Sierra et al., 2024).

#### *Lesson Planning for Neurodivergent Students*

Lesson planning is pivotal to resignify teachers' epistemologies (Ubaque-Casallas & Aguirre-Garzón, 2020). When lesson planning, not only cognitive but also social dimensions are considered to tailor English language lessons. According to Solís Hernández (2007) in any English lesson, "a very important aspect that should not be neglected in either event is the "surprise" element" (p. 228) as this triggers emotions that make learning accessible to all individuals, regardless of their diversity (e.g., autism). In this sense, although I agree with Bailey (1996) who stated that a lesson plan serves as a road map, I acknowledge there is no perfect road as epistemologies are as diverse and mutable as learning scenarios. In fact, when lesson planning, one

encounters a diverse range of learners who present unique challenges and opportunities yet not everybody reflects on it when lesson planning (see, Ubaque-Casallas & Aguirre-Garzón, 2020).

Following the above, this study regards lesson planning as a possibility for accommodating, consciously and strategically, content to cater to the diverse needs of neurodiverse students by individualizing instruction. In this sense, however, I hold the view that although the purpose of lesson planning is to provide a framework (e.g., cognitive, technical, instrumental, methodological) (Gün 2014), lesson planning represents as well an epistemological and political arena where equitable learning opportunities can be constructed.

I am aware of the colonial implications of assuming any qualitative or quantitative approach to research. With this, I do not position myself as a neutral researcher, but I am aware that any methodological decision brings to research a specific lens. With this in mind, to explore TPE regarding lesson planning accommodation, this study made a narrative inquiry (Zhang, 2022) to comprehend the experiences of two student-teachers at the teaching practicum stage of lesson planning and teaching young neurodivergent learners. This research lens aligned with our understanding that experience and life are deeply intertwined (Dewey, 1938), yet it also opened up possibilities to explore such intertwining correlation as there is no universal or fixed formula to conduct narrative research (Holley & Colyar, 2012). Therefore, since narrative inquiry involves asking questions, I chose to begin by wondering how student-teachers experienced teaching neurodivergent students, and how lesson planning accommodation for them served as a path to re-signify teaching mindsets as pre-service teachers.

#### *Participants*

Two young, student-teachers shared their experiences embarking on the final stage of their teaching practicum as they were fully immersed in the dynamics of classroom instruction and engagement (e.g., developing comprehensive pedagogical knowledge; evaluating and addressing the learning processes of students). Nathaly and Philip are pre-service English language teachers who were, by the time this manuscript was written, pursuing their education at a public university in Bogotá, Colombia. What sets Nathaly and Philip apart is their diverse social backgrounds, which contribute to their rich perspectives on education. Nathaly comes from a working-class family in the heart of Bogotá, where she has witnessed firsthand the challenges and disparities within the education system. On the other hand, Philip hails from a more affluent background, having grown up in a privileged neighborhood with access to quality educational resources. This contrast in social strata has provided Nathaly and Philip with unique insights into the complexities of education, including issues related to equity, inclusion, and access. Both eagerly participated in feedback sessions and collaborative lesson-planning sessions in which they made evident their desire to accommodate existing pedagogical practices to foster a more humane and inclusive teaching environment for neurodivergent English learners. As educators, they recognized the pressing need to challenge conventional educational paradigms, aiming to redefine teaching as a more equitable, culturally responsive, and empathetic endeavor as neurodivergent English learners are frequently masked and invisible in instructional and learning designs.

### Data Analysis

TPE were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Smith-Spark & Lewis, 2023). This approach allowed me to delve into Nathaly's and Philip's narratives without imposing preconceived notions. As a qualitative research methodology, it was employed to both systematically analyze data, and reach critical self-awareness and introspection regarding narratives inspected. As a researcher, I attempted to acknowledge and critically reflect on my own biases, assumptions, and subjective perspectives. This approach then allowed me to interrogate how my own backgrounds, values, and preconceptions may influence the analysis of Nathaly's and Philip's experiences. In this regard, I collected Nathaly's and Philip's TPE and registered them verbatim. Transcripts were read and re-read to approach how they experienced teaching and lesson planning accommodation for neurodivergent students. I proceeded to code by making detailed notes throughout all the transcripts to identify key meanings and points of interest. I made emphasis at the semantic, and descriptive level and then from a more interpretative stance. After this, codes were aggregated within an independent document and I used InVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software, to establish interconnections and identify recurring patterns among the codes. This systematic approach allowed us to structure cohesive thematic categories that I here present in Table 1.

Table 1

#### List of themes

Themes
De-humanized teaching
Masked designs - PIAR <sup>1</sup>
Lesson Accommodation

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### *De-humanized Teaching*

This theme embodies a critical discourse within the educational sphere, pointing towards pedagogical practices that diminish the essence of human experience, empathy, and individuality within learning environments. This is manifested through various systemic, instructional, and attitudinal factors that erode the fundamental aspects of the humanity of neurodivergent learners. In this sense, this theme refers to practices, discourses, and other strategies that negate and reduce neurodivergent learners to mere recipients of standardized information, devoid of their unique identities, backgrounds, and perspectives. In the following experiences, I open room to see dehumanization when it comes to teaching neurodivergent learners.

I am not sure about what or how neurodivergent learners should learn English. I know ... I have also seen that they exhibit differences or... conditions that affect

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<sup>1</sup> PIAR stands for Plan Individual de Justes Razonables, which translates to Individualized Plan for Reasonable Adjustments in English. It serves as a tool to facilitate teaching and learning processes, as outlined in Decree 1421 of 2017 in Colombia. This plan aims to ensure students' educational experiences by providing pedagogical and social assessments, along with necessary support and reasonable accommodations in curriculum, infrastructure, and other areas essential for their participation, retention, and advancement.

their cognitive process. But I must say that I have seen them displaying more emotional and behavioral situations, I do not want to use the word problems, but these are labeled a condition one has to deal with as a teacher. For example, I have these autistic guys and last week I had to break down grammar concepts into manageable segments for them to be able to digest them. However, although I offered lots of repetition and more drilling than other things, they did not retain much and ended up being frustrated. I felt bad but the head teacher just told me – *they will never get that, and learn to deal with it*- So, they are just that like a burden to teachers. [Sic] (Nathaly. Lesson plan conversation, August 2022)

I must say that the situation of some students with autism is difficult. They just sit there and are expected to cope with concepts, especially concepts, the same way other students do. Simon, for example, is thought to have social interaction problems. That is at least the official version we received from the school special educator. He is treated that way. He is put in isolation just by himself; the reason for all this is the belief that he is uninterested in interacting with others. So, he is not even subject to communicative evaluation. It is sad if you ask me. Simon is just a paper with lots of don'ts. That is what, at least, I have seen in the reports I have read about him. [Sic] (Philip. Lesson plan conversation, November 2022)

It is no secret that the existence of learners in ELT has become a category of abstraction (Ubaque-Casallas, 2023). For Castañeda-Peña (2018), for example, “English language teaching and learning identities are oriented towards that goal of identifying decontextualized forms of being in the field of teaching, where there is a single and monolithic idea of the language teacher and a single and fixed idea of the language learner” (p. 18). However, in Simon's case, his position in the classroom is intersected not only by his condition as a neurodivergent learner but also by his non-expected role as an English language learner. Simon is a subject of invisibilization through dehumanizing discourses that mark the humanity he has been stolen (Freire, 2000). Importantly, such discourses come from professionals who have also represented Simon as abnormal; as someone whose behavior patterns differ from neurotypical English language learning peers (e.g., struggle with social interactions, adherence to routines, overreaction difficulty expressing emotions, etc.)

Another thing I have seen is that when they are included in activities if they are, students with autism face exclusion or ostracization. I have seen, for example, that even other students say – *no le hables que él no te entiende* - and this is frustrating because they do understand. It is as if others would focus more on deficits rather than strengths, or even the human being they have in front of them. As for teachers, they normalize or forcefully change their behaviors either ignoring them or just having them do activities to keep them busy. -*Como el tiene su problema pues yo no lo molesto*- [Sic] (Nathaly. Lesson plan conversation, August 2022)

I have also perceived and lived more than anything else that there is no material to teach these kids. I have mainly been told to think of and use visual aids like pictures, charts, and schedules to aid comprehension. I am supposed to provide simple, clear, and direct instructions, as well as provide positive reinforcement and rewards. I am okay with all this, except rewards. It is too behavioral. It is just praising for no

reason. I am quite sure students also feel like that. They do not even understand why they are being rewarded. In one activity, a student of mine got a prize where he never participated. So? What is then the purpose? [*Sic*] (Philip. Lesson plan conversation, November 2022)

Another dimension of *dehumanization* appears to be material. Although the importance of language learning and teaching materials is unquestionable (Li, Gao & Cui, 2021), these seem to account only for cognitive-instrumental processes regarding language learning. In the experiences narrated above, materials fail to escape from the already constituted hegemonic designs. Moreover, they end up reproducing the marginalization and silencing of neurodivergent English learners. In fact, they fail to “respond to the local needs, interests, and life experiences of the learners in their own context” (Núñez-Pardo, 2020, p. 23). They seem to be oblivious to the living conditions and situations neurodivergent English learners encounter and embody. This reality reinforces ableism as a status of ailment, weakness, and subordination (McLean, 2011) that is even reproduced in materials and by all means in the practices and beliefs that circulate in the classroom.

#### *Masked Designs -PIAR*

This theme is linked to the previous *De-humanized Teaching* theme, yet Masked Designs make explicit reference to Plan Individual de Ajustes Razonables (PIAR), translated and hereafter referred to as Individual Adjustment Plan (IAP). Although IAP is a valid tool in the planning of English classes by adapting the course to satisfy the specific needs of neurodivergent learners, it is limited by its technical nature. That is the adoption of inclusive methodologies (e.g., linguistic games, interactive activities, or the use of visual lessons to reforge the understanding of the language) as the main sources of personalized evaluation and sequence. Based on Nathaly’s and Philip’s experiences, the IAP appears to be used to adapt the evaluation methods and sequence of student progress. However, although there are alternative evaluations to guarantee a fair and accurate evaluation, taking into account the individual needs of students, it is just concentrated on measuring cognitive repertoires. It negates and silences the human/individual.

I have had the possibility to the decree 1421 of 2017. It actually provides regulations on the framework of education including educational attention to the population with disabilities in Colombia. Here at the school, I am forced to evaluate students using those frames. To be honest, it is quite complex as there are already standardized questionnaires and tests. They already tell you who the students are cognitively speaking. So, I feel like if I were just working with toys [*Sic*] (Nathaly. Lesson plan conversation, August 2022)

I do not know how to handle the adaptations we are required. There is this special educator who tells us who students are. She shares this plan with all objectives and adaptations to be made and it is up to us to make this happen. However, I feel I cannot do much. I have two students with autism and they just sit in the class in table 10. They draw off and look up at the roof for two hours. Then, we must make space to work with them. Sure, we use tech and visual aids and stuff but they are



barely interested in that. They know we are treating them differently. (Philip. Lesson plan conversation, September, 2022)

At the core of dehumanizing teaching lies the disregard for the individuality and socio-emotional needs of students. As it is made evident in Nathaly's and Philip's experiences, such dehumanization occurs through the installation of curricular norms and decrees that overlook the multifaceted nature of neurodivergent learners, treating them as passive vessels. Moreover, thanks to these experiences it appears as if dehumanized teaching often emanates from rigid institutional structures, curricula, and assessment methods that prioritize conformity over embracing diversity and inclusivity. This pedagogical framework tends to ignore the socio-cultural contexts of students, marginalizing those whose experiences and identities do not align with the dominant norms.

I was told to personalize the IAP for two of my students. I did so. Yet when I tried to incorporate other dimensions different from the cognitive accumulative one, the special educator at the school told me that was not possible and that I needed to concentrate on helping these students be at the same pace. I was a bit upset since I know my students are more in need of attention and care. Little do they benefit from me bringing new visual aids of audios to have them repeat as parrots just because they must learn how to pronounce the *th* sound [θ] [Sic] (Nathaly. Lesson plan conversation, August 2022)

I feel I can do more than design content. I understand that is needed for the school and parents. I just feel that students need more than developing the competences those "normal" students are developing. You Get me? I mean, the IAP is really useful, don't get me wrong! but it is not enough. It just makes evident that neurodivergent students are just there more like items than real people. [Sic] (Philip. Lesson plan conversation, September 2022)

A masking design perpetuates power dynamics that suppress students' humanity. Yet it also restricts educators from forming authentic connections with their students, impeding the cultivation of trust, empathy, and mentorship crucial for holistic development. Although the importance of IAP is acknowledged, this approach inadvertently reinforces inequalities by perpetuating a one-size-fits-all model that disregards the diverse needs and strengths of learners from varying backgrounds. In this case, needs and strengths that do not fall into the cognitive realm are not taken into consideration. Moreover, the perception appears to be that IAP fosters a *de*-humanizing curriculum that denies humanity. The IAP seems to focus solely on a single dominant narrative (i.e., normalizing and cognitive designs), it erases the voices and contributions of neurodivergent English learners whose identities and experiences diverge from the prescribed norms. This erasure not only neglects the value of diverse perspectives, corporalities, and ways of learning but also reinforces the idea that certain groups are inferior or irrelevant, perpetuating oppressive structures.

#### *Lesson Accommodation*

This theme enunciates discourses and beliefs that turned into action and that counter dehumanizing strategies, and normative curricula that perpetuate oppression, silencing,

and marginalization. *Lesson Accommodation* disrupts oppressive structures embedded within traditional educational systems. In this sense, this theme aims to embody a paradigm shift away from the monolithic and often exclusionary approaches present in conventional curricula and lesson planning in ELT by thinking of accommodation as a platform and mechanism to dismantle the silencing effect perpetuated by standardized ELT education (Ubaque-Casallas & Aguirre-Garzón, 2020). In this line of thought, traditional ELT curricula often disregard or downplay the perspectives and histories of marginalized communities, rendering their stories invisible. Lesson accommodation then disrupts this pattern by shifting the focus from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered one, yet recognizing and honoring the agency and autonomy of neurodivergent English learners. In the following experiences, I open room to inspect *Lesson Accommodation*.

I believe lesson planning is not the same as lesson accommodation. The former is more about the sequencing of content; the latter has to do with embedding the human being into the class. For example, I always take into consideration the IAP format <sup>2</sup>we receive at the school yet I take it beyond the mere description of activities. I do my best to see the little person I have with me. I talk to them, I listen to them and based on that understanding I move sideways, never do I move forward. You get me? Moving forward would be like just thinking of accumulation. [*Sic*] (Nathaly. Lesson accommodation conversation, October 2022)

Last week, the head teacher told me to think of the outcomes these three [autist] students had to accomplish. She was really interested in showing parents that they could at the end understand and use vocabulary related to animals, seasons, and feelings. In the quizzes we had, they had failed. None of them was able to show an understanding of these topics. However, I began thinking of lesson accommodation for them, I used all notes taken when observing classes. Thanks to my notes, I spotted certain areas that could not be explained by instrumental or technical knowledge. They had to be regarded from a more personal and human gaze. [*Sic*] (Philip. Lesson accommodation conversation, October 2022)

Lesson planning and lesson accommodation are different. The former is thought to account for procedural, instrumental, and technical dimensions. It “undoubtedly contributes to effective learning [helping] all teachers, especially novice ones, to organize content, materials, learning objectives, strategies, instructional procedures, assessment, and time allotted for each activity” (Solís-Hernández, 2007, p. 229). The former, however, is a material and ideological strategy that allows some tension over the structure of ELT colonization and its project of dispossession (Walsh, 2023). In this respect, the above narrated shows the need to humanize ELT. It is a need that moves away from content accumulation (i.e., normative-cognitive and prescriptive curricula) to move into a more sensitive way of teaching in which doings account not only for a new way of teaching language (Sarmiento Párraga & Perales Cárdenas, 2022) but also for different ways of making humanity.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.saldarriagaconcha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Formato-PIAR.pdf>

I already had content but I did not know their voices. I sat one day and began speaking. Such a basic act is needed. When you talk to them, and look at their eyes, listen to their voices you get closer to them. You open yourself to see the person and not the student who has special needs or conditions etc., etc., etc., I learned from that simple act how to make them be part of my class; not by having them interact or speak but by offering them a hand to walk into lessons and be more confident about themselves. [Sic] (Nathaly. Lesson accommodation conversation, December 2022)

I must say that I had to converse with them, to talk to them. I say I had to because I saw no other way to know about them. Think about Simon. Had I not approached him, I would have perpetuated this idea is the different student who had a bunch of problems. I think that just by listening to what he had to say permitted me to add something for him in my lessons. A lot or a little but there was always something for him, a good experience I would say, and something I could get from him. [Sic] (Philip. Lesson accommodation conversation, December 2022)

Lesson accommodation begins with dialogue. It is a resistance means (Veronelli, 2016) in which dialogue stands as a powerful decolonial tool, transcending the confines of societal expectations to genuinely delve into the essence of the other—their history, struggles, and desires. In this case the histories, struggles, and desires of neurodivergent learners who encounter significant challenges in traditional classroom settings due to the inherent erasure of their unique cognitive styles and existences by prevailing curricular and canonical practices. It is then in and through dialogue that lesson accommodation becomes not just a request but a pathway to acknowledge someone's humanity and validate their existence beyond the preconceived boundaries of English language teaching. Importantly, lesson accommodation continues with providing not only a good experience which is not limited to cognitive adaptations (Spaeth & Pearson, 2023) but it extends to living and feeling humanly in the classroom. Moreover, it becomes a strategy for cultivating critical knowledge essential for the humanization of teaching practices. Nathaly's and Philip's narratives and pedagogical practices are then acknowledging and challenging the biases embedded within educational structures that marginalize certain identities and perspectives.

## CONCLUSIONS

ELT education is diverse. Although canonical discourses and practices maintain a colonial effect over the ELT field and teacher education, it is undeniable that ELT scenarios are more and more diverse. It is in this case that it is possible to adopt decolonial actions to counter-hegemonic strategies. The preceding is based on the premise that the colonial discourses in the ELT and teacher education are executed through specific enunciative strategies (e.g., lesson planning). This is why thinking about lesson accommodation and not about lesson planning becomes a possibility to encourage moments that interrupt existing dominant framings of ELT education are possible. In this sense, this study presented reflections of two student-teachers at the teaching practicum and my own as a means to disrupt Western bias and colonial ideologies (e.g., onto-epistemological) in ELT (see, Kramsch, 2014). These views somehow are the reflections of the cries (i.e., “our strategies, and actions of struggle rebellion, resistance, disobedience, insurgency, rupture, and transgression up against the

imposed condition of silencing”) (Walsh, 2023, p. 25) that become evident during our doing and thinking as EFL teachers.

It is then in the above rationale that this study did not intend to account for effective strategies to teach neurodivergent learners, having done so would have implied keeping cognitive-oriented frames of teaching. Instead, it intended to use reflection and reflexivity as tools to challenge and reshape the dominant narratives within ELT spaces. In a world filled with historical injustices and colonial legacies, teachers must critically examine their own biases, assumptions, and perspectives. In then in this sense that reflection involves a deliberate contemplation of one's teaching practices, allowing mentor teachers and student-teachers like Nathaly and Philip to identify embedded colonial ideologies and power structures within the ELT curriculum and classroom dynamics.

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