

Digital comic creation and intercultural awareness in English as an Additional Language: a case study in Brazilian primary education /

Criação de histórias em quadrinhos digitais e desenvolvimento de consciência intercultural nas aulas de Inglês como Língua Adicional: um estudo de caso no ensino fundamental brasileiro

*Gelson Bueno Filho**

English teacher at private educational institutions in Goiânia, Brazil. He is currently pursuing a teaching degree in Portuguese Language and Literature at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG) and in English at the Centro Universitário Internacional de Goiânia (Uninter).

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6043-696X>

*Iury Aragonez***

PhD candidate in the Graduate Programme in Letters and Linguistics at the Federal University of Goiás, with a scholarship from the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education. He holds an MA in Letters and Linguistics and a BA in English Language Teaching from the same institution.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7107-1824>

*Neuda Lago****

She holds a PhD in Letters from the Federal University of Goiás and completed postdoctoral studies at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. She leads the Literary and Linguistic Research Group in Education, registered with the CNPq Directory of Research Groups (DGP-CNPq). She is a Full Professor at the Faculty of Letters and a permanent lecturer in the Graduate Programme in Letters and Linguistics at the Federal University of Goiás.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0887-9083>

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*  gelson_bueno@discente.ufg.br

**  iuryaragonez@ufg.br

***  neudalago@ufg.br

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the pedagogical potential of comics as a didactic resource for teaching English as an Additional Language (EAL) in primary education. The study analyses a classroom project conducted in October 2023 with 32 fifth-grade students at a private school in Brazil, in which learners adapted the Greek myth of Arachne into culturally contextualised digital comics. Using a qualitative approach, the research examines how the creation of comics fostered linguistic development, multimodal literacy, and intercultural awareness. It also explores classroom dynamics, highlighting how collaborative tasks supported peer interaction, negotiation of meaning, and learner autonomy. The discussion draws on Chen *et al.* (2018), Kaptevskaia, Jaramillo, and Zorro (2025), Kirtley, Garcia, and Carlson (2020), Kusters *et al.* (2017), and Suseno, Dian, and Megawati (2025). The findings indicate that creating comics engages young learners, promotes creativity and collaboration, expands students' semiotic repertoires, and encourages reflection on cultural diversity. Furthermore, the study underscores the role of digital resources in shaping multimodal meaning-making and points to practical challenges related to infrastructure and time constraints in this educational setting.

KEYWORDS: Comics; Literature; Language education; Interculturality; Multimodality.

RESUMO

Este artigo discute o potencial pedagógico das histórias em quadrinhos como recurso didático para as aulas de Inglês como Língua Adicional (ILA) no ensino fundamental. O estudo analisa um projeto desenvolvido em outubro de 2023 com 32 estudantes brasileiros/as do quinto ano de uma escola privada, no qual a turma transformou o mito grego de Aracne em histórias em quadrinhos digitais culturalmente contextualizadas. Com base em uma abordagem qualitativa, investigamos como a criação de quadrinhos favoreceu o desenvolvimento linguístico, o letramento multimodal e a consciência intercultural da turma. Também exploramos as dinâmicas de sala de aula, destacando como tarefas colaborativas favoreceram a interação entre pares, a negociação de sentidos e a autonomia dos/as estudantes. A discussão ancora-se nos trabalhos de Chen et al. (2018), Kaptevskaia, Jaramillo e Zorro (2025), Kirtley, Garcia e Carlson (2020), Kusters et al. (2017) e Suseno, Dian e Megawati (2025). Os resultados indicam que produzir quadrinhos engaja os/as estudantes, promove criatividade e colaboração, amplia repertórios semióticos e estimula a reflexão sobre a diversidade cultural. Além disso, o estudo ressalta o papel dos recursos digitais na construção de sentidos multimodais e aponta desafios práticos relacionados à infraestrutura e às limitações de tempo nesse contexto educacional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Quadrinhos; Literatura; Educação linguística; Interculturalidade; Multimodalidade.

1 Introduction

The educational landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years, driven by the rise of new pedagogical approaches and emerging technologies. This shift reflects a growing understanding that teaching methods and materials must evolve to meet students' diverse needs, interests, and learning styles. In the context of English language instruction for primary students, educators have consistently sought engaging and effective methods to attain their pedagogical goals. As the discussion turns to traditional versus innovative methods, it becomes clear that achieving

meaningful learning requires approaches that offer contextualised content while stimulating creativity and innovation.

Traditional language-teaching methods are typically teacher-centred, textbook-driven, and oriented toward measurable outcomes, often prioritising the “mastery” of grammatical rules. In contrast, innovative practices tend to emphasise interaction, adaptability, real-life relevance, and learner autonomy (Hashim, 2025). A further defining feature of contemporary approaches is the integration of digital technologies into instructional materials and classroom activities. According to Hashim (2025), technology-enhanced language learning centres on digital tools and online platforms to support language education, including resources like apps, virtual reality, and interactive multimedia, among others.

Within the scope of these emerging practices, this article examines an educational initiative implemented in a 5th-grade English-language classroom at a private school in Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil. The project introduced the use of digital comic adaptations as a didactic resource and aimed to explore alternative ways to teach English as an Additional Language (EAL) by drawing on a medium that is particularly appealing for young learners (Lazarinis *et al.*, 2015). Considering this orientation, our discussion situates itself within comics pedagogy, as the initiative described seeks to understand how comics can enhance students’ learning experience (Kirtley; Garcia; Carlson, 2020b).

In this article, we investigate the conception, implementation, and outcomes of this innovative project. We analyse how comics have become an engaging bridge between written and visual language, offering a deeper understanding of the text and promoting creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness among students. By sharing this journey, we aim to highlight the (trans)formative potential of new pedagogical practices and inspire other educators to explore creative teaching strategies that enrich their students’ learning trajectories.

Rather than simply presenting comics as an engaging classroom resource, we argue that digital comic creation can function simultaneously as a literacy practice, a form of intercultural inquiry, and a space for semiotic expansion in EAL contexts. More specifically, the article contributes to current discussions in comics pedagogy by showing how the adaptation of a literary narrative into digitally

produced comics may enable young learners to negotiate meanings collaboratively, reinterpret cultural representations, and mobilise verbal and visual resources in situated ways.

The next section introduces the study's praxiological foundations.

2 Literature, interculturality, and comics

The use of literature in the English-language classroom has been debated as a solid asset for generating engagement and linguistic development (Oliveira; Lago, 2020). The role of literary texts in language teaching moved from being the sole instructional material until the 19th century to a process of demonisation and exclusion in the 20th century. Nevertheless, the last few decades have witnessed a revival of literature in language learning. For instance, the 2007 Modern Language Association (MLA) report strongly advises against the abyss between literature and language teaching in teacher education courses. The MLA (2007) advocates a holistic curriculum that integrates linguistic competence, cultural literacy, and literary appreciation. Accordingly, literature should not be marginalised in language education but recognised as an essential component that fosters creativity, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness.

Thus, incorporating literary texts in English learning enriches the educational environment and may trigger deeper student engagement while enhancing language skills. In this regard, Hossen and Al-Musayeb (2022, p. 16) argue that “literature can provide a great opportunity to build up one’s language proficiency.” Through narratives, students are transported into a world of imagination and inventiveness, motivating them to understand the plot, characters, context, and cultural nuances of the story. By analysing characters and events, they are encouraged to refine their reading skills through contact with different genres and writing styles. Furthermore, they can improve their speaking skills by expressing their interpretations and opinions in group discussions. Writing skills can also be strengthened through tasks that focus on producing literary texts (poems, chronicles, comic strips, among others), which, in turn, develop creative authorship (Bobkina; Domínguez, 2014).

As Oliveira and Lago (2020) maintain, beyond language development, literature broadens learners’ linguistic and cognitive repertoires by integrating critical thinking, personal experience, and

creativity. The authors further note that learning additional languages provides access to knowledge about other cultures. In this context, literature can function as an intercultural resource that helps us make sense of “the other”, especially through texts that address relevant social and cultural issues, such as race and ethnicity, class, labour, gender roles, civil rights, immigration, and more.

From a critical standpoint, interculturality opens doors to authentic language comprehension for students learning EAL in Latin America, surpassing linguistic boundaries to embrace historical and cultural complexities. Kramsch (2019) emphasises that new pedagogical practices have broken the traditional link between language learning and a standardised variant, such as British or American norms. Instead, these variants coexist with less privileged varieties, broadening learners’ linguistic and cultural repertoires. Such a perspective also challenges Eurocentric language ideologies by legitimising marginalised linguistic identities grounded in their own local references.

Integrating this principle into education empowers students and nurtures an inclusive learning environment that values the voices and experiences of both local and global communities. In this sense, intercultural praxis offers learners an opportunity to explore the English language as well as the social and historical contexts in which it is spoken. By critically contrasting elements of local and non-local cultures, students are encouraged to engage actively in their learning, acknowledging the value of their origins and identities as they develop language repertoires.

Comics can play a significant role in this process, as they “reveal and allow learners to question the world around them” (Kirtley; Garcia; Carlson, 2020a, p. 245). This potential stems from the fact that all “stories are related to a cultural context that has a specific setting, time, with preconceived ideas or references that the audience must be equipped with to understand” (EdComix, [2026a], p. 37). By working with these culturally situated stories, learners can identify differences in perspectives and practices, thereby cultivating intercultural awareness within the learning environment. Additionally, the medium encourages critical reflection on representation, particularly regarding which identities are included or excluded from the narratives (EdComix, [2026a]), challenging stereotypes and promoting more nuanced understandings of social-related issues.

Beyond their intercultural potential, comics are also pedagogically promising because of their multimodal configuration. As Lima (2022) argues, the multimodal nature of comics makes them

especially relevant in educational contexts, as they combine linguistic and visual elements that support comprehension. This feature is chiefly valuable in additional language learning, as images, colours, and spatial organisation scaffold comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, the integration of visual and textual cues may reduce learners' anxiety while facilitating multimodal literacy, confidence, and engagement (Karap, 2017).

Recent research has reinforced the pedagogical pertinence of comics in EAL classrooms. Habeahan (2025) found that teachers perceive them as a captivating and supportive resource for language learning, arguing that the interaction between verbal and non-verbal modes creates a layered semiotic environment that supports inferential reading processes and reduces the cognitive load associated with extended linear texts. Similarly, Suseno, Dian, and Megawati (2025) highlight the potential of digital comics for developing speaking skills, emphasising their capacity to enhance motivation, participation, and vocabulary development through the integration of narrative, dialogue, and imagery. These studies position comics as legitimate multimodal texts in language education, surpassing the view of them as merely entertaining materials and stressing their role in socially situated meaning-making.

In this regard, comic-making can be understood as a productive practice that expands learners' writing abilities, semiotic awareness, and sense of authorship. Because comics combine concise verbal elements with sequential visual representations, they enable students to construct meanings in accessible ways while mobilising different forms of knowledge and expression (Cheng *et al.*, 2018; EdComix, [2026b]). This potential is notably significant for young learners, whose target-language repertoires are still developing, as creating comics allows them to experiment with storytelling while incorporating their own experiences, ideas, and interests (Kaptevskaia; Jaramillo; Zorro, 2025). Moreover, when comic creation takes place collaboratively, learners move beyond the role of text consumers and become active creators who negotiate meanings, make shared decisions, and assume collective responsibility for the production process. As Lan (2018) suggests, this shift fosters autonomy and ownership, while scriptwriting itself becomes a reflective practice through which students learn to introduce and develop their ideas (Chen *et al.*, 2018).

Taken together, these perspectives help us understand comic creation as more than a motivating activity or a creative add-on. In the EAL classroom, it can become a space where literary adaptation, multimodal composition, and intercultural reflection intersect. When students rework a literary text into comics, they are not only retelling a story; they are also making interpretative choices, negotiating meanings with others, and reshaping cultural representations through different semiotic elements. This is distinctively important in primary education, where meaning is often built through the interplay of words, images, layout, and shared classroom interaction.

From this vantage point, we contend that comics can widen learners' semiotics repertoires, conceived as the comprehensive array of resources through which meaning is produced—speech, images, sounds, gestures, signs, and more. According to Kusters *et al.* (2017, p. 228-229), “the lens of semiotic repertoires enables a holistic focus (addressing ideologies, histories, potential and constraints) on action that is both multilingual and multimodal”, shifting attention from a purely linguistic orientation to a view of meaning-making as a complex, emergent process.

Building on these discussions, comic-making in the classroom can be understood as a multi-layered productive practice. When children devise their own comic strips, they mobilise linguistic assets, make intentional visual choices, and organise narrative sequences, engaging in a form of creative authorship that expands traditional notions of writing in the EAL context and advances semiotic awareness.

Despite their many benefits, comics can also pose challenges in the English-language classroom. Comic creation and reading tasks may be time-consuming, which can be a problem for teachers within tight lesson schedules. In Brazilian primary education, English classes typically last around 50 minutes and occur twice a week, leaving limited room for activities that require extended production time. Likewise, creating comics may demand specific skills—such as drawing, photography, or familiarity with digital tools—that not all students possess.

When working with digital comics, teachers also encounter infrastructural constraints, such as scarce equipment and unreliable internet connection. It is worth noting that “[e]ven in areas that are neither underprivileged nor remote, having multiple computers available and able to run simultaneously for several hours and at a reasonable speed can be problematic in schools with limited resources”

(EdComix, [2026b], p. 45). In addition, digital comic creators or platforms may require paid subscriptions, a cost that can place them beyond the reach of some educational institutions.

Nevertheless, strategic planning, coordinated action involving the school's leadership and teachers from other departments, support from parents and legal guardians, and students' own disposition to work with comics can contribute to mitigating some of these challenges and to establishing the pedagogical conditions necessary for implementing comic creation in the classroom.

The subsequent section outlines the methodological procedures adopted in this study.

3 The study: context, participants, and procedures¹

We adopted a qualitative approach to scrutinise the pedagogical strategy implemented in the English-language classroom, since it allows for a detailed analysis of social interactions, students' perceptions, and learning processes, offering a holistic view of the phenomenon. As Cardano (2017, p. 15) articulates, "qualitative research involves using a form of closer observation and aligning data construction procedures with the characteristics of the object to which they apply, subjecting the method to the peculiarities of the empirical context to which it is applied."

Our research is characterised as a case study, which enabled a detailed examination of students' engagement, interaction, and learning dynamics during the project's implementation (McDonough; McDonough, 2014). The empirical material comprises eight digital comics produced by students over a month, and our analysis considers three closely connected dimensions. The first concerns the students' linguistic choices, especially narrative organisation and dialogue construction. The second involves their multimodal meaning-making, with attention to elements such as panels, speech balloons, visual sequencing, gestures, and settings. The third focuses on intercultural representations, particularly on how students reworked historical, symbolic, and everyday aspects of the countries they had researched. In dialogue with accounts of comics pedagogy and interculturality, the analysis supported critical interpretations of students' linguistic and cultural understandings, their

¹ This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Federal University of Goiás (CEP – UFG), under the project *A educação em língua e literatura* (CAAE: 67697923.1.0000.5083; received approval no. 6.796.850).

integration of multimodal elements, and the incorporation of intercultural perspectives into their assignments.

The study was conducted in a private school situated in a middle-class neighbourhood in the southeastern region of Goiânia, the capital of Goiás, Brazil, in October 2023. The institution offers five weekly English classes, taught entirely in English and centred on the four traditional language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The participants were 32 students, comprising 19 girls and 13 boys, aged 10-11, with English proficiency levels ranging from A2 to B1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The chart below presents their personal information.

Chart 1: Students' profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Amount of English language instruction
Agatha	11	Female	8 years (since kindergarten)
Alice	10	Female	3 years (since 3rd grade)
Ana	10	Female	5 years (since 1st grade)
Arthur	10	Male	8 years (since kindergarten)
Augusto	10	Male	5 years (since 1st grade)
Caio	10	Male	1 year (since 5th grade)
Caroline	10	Female	5 years (since 1st grade)
Clara	10	Female	8 years (since kindergarten)
Daniel	10	Male	5 years (since 1st grade)
David	10	Male	5 years (since 1st grade)
Eduarda	10	Female	3 years (since 3rd grade)
Emily	10	Female	3 years (since 3rd grade)
Gabriela	11	Female	5 years (since 1st grade)
George	10	Male	8 years (since kindergarten)
Harry	10	Male	8 years (since kindergarten)
Helena	10	Female	5 years (since 1st grade)
Isabela	10	Female	5 years (since 1st grade)
James	11	Male	8 years (since kindergarten)
John	11	Male	5 years (since 1st grade)
Julia	10	Female	8 years (since kindergarten)
Karen	10	Female	3 years (since 3rd grade)
Lisie	10	Female	8 years (since kindergarten)
Louise	10	Female	3 years (since 3rd grade)
Marina	11	Female	5 years (since 1st grade)
Mary	10	Female	4 years (since 2nd grade)
Pablo	11	Male	2 years (since 4th grade)
Patricia	10	Female	8 years (since kindergarten)
Peter	11	Male	1 year (since 5th grade)
Saymon	10	Male	5 years (since 1st grade)

Valentina	10	Female	5 years (since 1st grade)
Victoria	11	Female	8 years (since kindergarten)
William	11	Male	8 years (since kindergarten)

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2026).

In October 2023, the school organised a cultural exhibition in which humanities and language teachers presented students' work. As part of this event, the English department adopted the theme *English-Speaking Countries*, linking it to the 5th-grade History curriculum on colonialism. By exploring formerly colonised nations where English functions as an official language, students were encouraged to compare these contexts with Brazil's colonial experience and reflect on issues such as cultural hybridity, linguistic diversity, and the enduring effects of imperial expansion. Guided by these objectives, the lead teacher (the first author) designed the project activities.

As required by the school, the project incorporated Hannah Fish's *Arachne* (2016), a retelling of the Greek myth in which a talented young weaver challenges the goddess Athena in a contest that culminates in her transformation into a spider. This narrative later served as the basis for students' comic adaptations, which relocated the story to the cultural contexts of the countries they had researched.

The project was organised into several steps to achieve specific goals. First, the teacher formed 8 groups of 4 students to promote teamwork and ensure a diverse range of nations for the task. Next, he shortlisted 8 options—Australia, Canada, India, Jamaica, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, and the United States of America—based on two criteria: they had been colonised and had English as an official language. These countries were then raffled among the groups to ensure a random and equitable distribution of topics. The final arrangement was as follows:

Chart 2: Groups and their case-study countries

Group	Students	Countries
1	Alice, David, Lisie, and Victoria	Australia
2	Caio, Daniel, Emily, and Karen	Canada
3	Arthur, Augusto, Julia, and Patricia	India
4	Eduarda, George, Harry, and Helena	Jamaica
5	Isabela, John, Saymon, and Valentina	Nigeria
6	Agatha, Clara, Pablo, and Peter	South Africa
7	Ana, Caroline, Mary, and Louise	Uganda
8	James, Marina, Victoria, and William	United States of America

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2026).

At home, each group conducted detailed research involving the culture, history, cuisine, and linguistic identities of their respective countries. This step led students to familiarise themselves with each nation's distinctive characteristics and to develop a broad, contextualised understanding of the impact of British colonisation. At this point, they began to visualise the parallels between the identity-formation processes of many of these regions and those of Brazil, such as the coexistence of Indigenous and colonial cultural elements, the lasting influence of a colonial language, and the development of hybrid national identities shaped by cultural exchange.

After the research phase, the class discussed the collected information together, with the teacher mediating the conversation and prompting learners to elaborate on the knowledge they had brought. This moment was vital for them to share their discoveries, compare data, and contemplate the similarities and differences between the case-study countries. As a result, the discussion reinforced collaborative, critical intergroup learning.

Subsequently, the class read *Arachne*, as requested by the school, and was challenged to adapt the story into a new narrative of their own. The teacher instructed learners to base their storylines on the sequence of events from the source text while changing all characters and setting details to reflect the countries their group had investigated. This step stimulated their creative authorship and encouraged them to use their newly acquired knowledge to craft a plot that incorporated the historical and cultural elements of the nations under study.

Finally, students transformed their narratives into comics using Pixton, a digital platform that enables the creation of comics through customizable characters, backgrounds, and dialogue. According to a study by Lazarinis *et al.* (2015, p. 307), which analysed 30 comic creators, Pixton emerged as “the most complete web tool” owing to the breadth of its features, including adjustable panel sizes, the insertion of images, shapes, and audio files, as well as options for recording and publishing, among others. Engaging with this digital resource allowed the class to explore different forms of artistic and semiotic expression while consolidating their learning about the colonised countries. As the culminating stage of the project, students showcased the results of their work at the school's cultural exhibition.

In the following section, we discuss the results of the comic creation experience.

4 Comic creation as a didactic resource to expand semiotic repertoires and intercultural awareness

As previously discussed, the comic creation task comprised a series of structured procedures, in line with the principle that any work with “expressive language must respond to a serious didactic planning, where the educational intentions of the use of the medium are clearly shown” (Rodríguez-Vázquez; Aguaded, 2016, p. 28). The first step students took was to define the structure of their stories—number of characters, settings, dialogue, and so on—which emphasises that comic production encompasses not only creativity but also preparation and organisation (Kaptevskaia; Jaramillo; Zorro, 2025). The lead teacher conducted this initial moment in both Portuguese and English to facilitate comprehension.

In the second step, students drafted their initial story designs. Simple instructions guided the writing process: they were required to determine the narrative voice (first- or third-person), arrange the comic panels, and formulate the characters’ dialogues in accordance with the chosen narrative framework. As they worked through this structured sequence of actions and images, learners enhanced their scriptwriting skills by crafting “coherent stories with a clear beginning, middle, and ending, which are important components of effective storytelling” (Kaptevskaia; Jaramillo; Zorro, 2025, p. 8804). They could consult dictionaries and could request assistance from the teacher regarding potential translations of their intended meanings. In this sense, the teacher acted as “a writing advisor, guiding the student’s communication intentions” (Gutiérrez-Huancayo, 2025, p. 2393). Furthermore, they could use the internet for language and culture-related research.

Even though “[s]tudents tend to find scriptwriting difficult because their thought processes are often divergent” (Chen *et al.*, 2018, p. 964), the group dynamics proved particularly productive. Working collaboratively, learners drew on different cultural knowledge to negotiate meanings, compare interpretations, and justify their choices. In doing so, they articulated ideas, considered alternative perspectives, refined their own positions, and rehearsed vocabulary while developing explanations within the creative process. Such interaction is consistent with studies showing that comic-making

promotes meaningful participation and engagement in language learning (Suseno; Dian; Megawati, 2025). Rather than merely motivating students, the activity created authentic communicative opportunities that strengthened linguistic precision, autonomy, and ownership of the learning process (Chen *et al.*, 2018; Suseno; Dian; Megawati, 2025).

Building on these collaborative discussions, students then devised their storylines. Using the central premise of the Greek myth—two characters competing to outdo one another—they created new protagonists while relocating the plot and setting to the countries investigated throughout the project. Each group incorporated a historical or cultural aspect of its assigned nation into the narrative, adapting the source story in ways that encouraged creative engagement with the case-study contexts.

The results show that the groups followed the structure of Arachne’s myth, as instructed. Within this framework, many of their stories reproduce widely circulating narrative arcs centred on hierarchical conflicts between privileged and marginalised characters (goddess versus mortal, queen versus peasant, rich versus poor). The chart below provides a brief description of the stories they created.

Chart 3: Students’ stories

Group	Title	Plot
1	The Australian Flutist	Isla, an Aboriginal girl who loves playing the flute, is practising at the Sydney Opera House when Ella challenges her to a musical contest. A crowd gathers, and Isla’s performance captivates them. A renowned conductor invites her to perform in a future show, and she becomes Australia’s most famous musician.
2	The Canadian Painter	Hannah discovers ancient cave paintings in Canada, inspiring her passion for art. She becomes a celebrated artist, whose fame angers Amelia, the goddess of the arts. Disguised as a child, Amelia challenges her to paint a Canadian landmark. Hannah wins, and the furious goddess turns her into a painting before eventually restoring her after the artwork gains fame.
3	The Indian Dancer	Anika, India’s greatest dancer, claims her talent comes from her mother rather than the goddess Dya. Offended, Dya challenges her to a contest, but Anika wins. Enraged, the goddess turns her into a tiger. Anika scares Dya away, regains her human form, and Dya vows to stop punishing gifted mortals.
4	The Jamaican Singer	Amelia, a famous Jamaican reggae singer, is often compared to her cousin Dankan. After a heated argument, they agree to a televised singing contest. The audience votes Amelia the winner, prompting Dankan to apologise. The cousins reconcile and decide to form a band together.
5	The Nigerian Cook	Adoalisa, a Nigerian queen, visits a farmers’ market and meets Ebunaluwa, who boasts of making Nigeria’s best soup. Offended, the queen challenges her to a cooking contest. After tasting both dishes, a distinguished judge declares Adoalisa one of Africa’s greatest cooks.
6	The South African Chef	Zuri, a girl from a poor Cape Town neighbourhood, enters a cooking contest against Kaya, a wealthy rival who sabotages her dish. Zuri improvises a new recipe and wins. Later, she becomes owner of a famous restaurant chain, and Kaya ends up working for her.

7	The Ugandan Cook	Lydia, a gifted Ugandan cook, rejects the idea that her talent comes from the goddess Aisha. Angered, Aisha turns her into a leopard. After being chased, the goddess restores Lydia to human form, and both apologise, recognising their earlier behaviour as misguided.
8	The Basketball Game	Bella, a girl from San Francisco, enters a basketball competition and ends up facing Luanna, a childhood rival who once bullied her. Determined to prove herself, Bella plays with skill and effort, outperforms Luanna, and wins the game.

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2026).

Upon close examination of the adaptations, students' remarkable linguistic performance is evident, together with a carefully crafted integration of visual and verbal elements. Each panel demonstrates an appropriate command of English and an ability to use visual context to enrich the narrative, despite occasional slips in punctuation, word choice, spelling, and sentence structure. The groups selected images that complemented and expanded textual meaning, while gestures, facial expressions, and settings added emotional depth and conveyed nuances such as tone and connotation.

Their productions reveal a solid understanding of basic comic conventions, including panels, captions, sequencing, and the forms and functions of speech and thought balloons. Round balloons were consistently used for casual dialogue, spiked balloons to convey emotions such as anger, agitation, hostility, or frustration, and cloud-shaped balloons to represent internal monologue. The main difficulty concerned balloon placement: some groups did not always preserve the conventional reading order of comics (left to right, top to bottom), disrupting the narrative flow and suggesting limited previous familiarity with the genre's visual and narrative codes. Overall, the adaptations provide evidence of the students' broadened semiotic literacy.

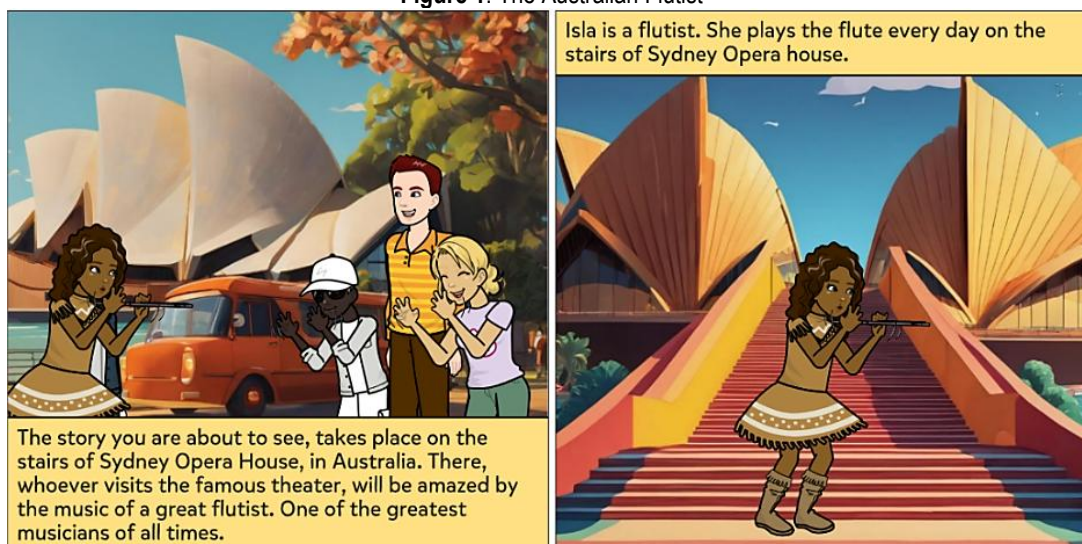
Research played a pivotal role in ensuring the relevance of cross-cultural adaptation and in preventing misrepresentations of racial, ethnic, or wider sociocultural identities. This scholarly endeavour sharpened learners' understanding of the specific contexts of the countries under study, advancing their cultural sensitivity and awareness. The outcomes of their research are evident in the background settings, colour palettes, character names, clothing items, and plot developments chosen. They also appear in the national symbols portrayed, as will be discussed further on. In some cases, however, we observe moments of misinterpretation and small lapses in accuracy.

When viewed collectively, the comics can be grouped into two broad categories: *performative cultural expressions* and *everyday cultural practices*. The first category encompasses artistic forms of expression such as music, dance, and painting, which appear in the adaptations set in Australia, Canada, India, and Jamaica. The second category includes activities through which people express personal interests and articulate aspects of their local traditions, particularly cooking and sports. These elements are evident in the stories representing Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, and the United States. Moving forward, we present a detailed account of these two categories, outlining how each one shapes learners' reinterpretations of the source narrative.

Starting with the *performative cultural expressions* category, in Australia, the competition is transposed into a music contest centred on flute playing (Fig. 1). Initially, students intended their character to play a didgeridoo, an instrument closely associated with Aboriginal musical traditions. However, the digital comic platform used did not provide visual assets for this instrument, and attempts to generate or insert external images resulted in visuals that seemed inconsistent with the platform's graphic style. As a result, the group opted for a flute as the closest available alternative within the tool's limitations. While the flute is not a traditional instrument within most Aboriginal musical practices, its visual similarity to other wind instruments, such as the didgeridoo and the didgeribone, made it the most feasible adaptation. In an attempt to highlight Aboriginal culture and musical heritage, learners strategically translated these symbols into more familiar Western references.

Conversely, the protagonist's portrayal is noteworthy: the group depicts a brown-skinned young girl wearing traditional Aboriginal attire, challenging dominant, white-centred representations of Australian identity. This choice signals a critical commitment to valuing the country's Indigenous cultures, made possible by the group's prior research into Australia's history of colonisation. Moreover, by centring Isla's journey to become "the most famous Australian musician ever" (Alice, David, Lisie, and Victoria's comic strip, 2023), the story constructs a counter-hegemonic narrative that repositions a historically minoritised group at the forefront of cultural achievement.

Figure 1: The Australian Flutist



Source: Alice, David, Lisie, and Victoria's comic strip (2023).

In Canada, Hannah faces off against the goddess of arts, Amelia, in a challenge to depict popular Canadian tourist sites (Fig. 2). This focus on well-known landmarks emphasises the importance of national identity and cultural pride in shaping artistic expression. The characters' artwork features both natural beauty (Niagara Falls) and a residential setting (a street in Digby), reflecting the country's diverse landscapes. A small inaccuracy emerges, nonetheless, when learners describe Digby as a "poor city." Although it is a small rural town, it is not classified as an impoverished area, which suggests that the group may have associated rurality with poverty. This assumption reveals how preconceived notions can shape students' interpretations of cultural contexts. Thus, while research into Canadian tourist destinations ensured that the adaptation captured distinctive aspects of the region's culture, some details—particularly regarding the chosen town—could have been represented with greater precision.

Figure 2: The Canadian Painter



Source: Caio, Daniel, Emily, and Karen's comic strip (2023).

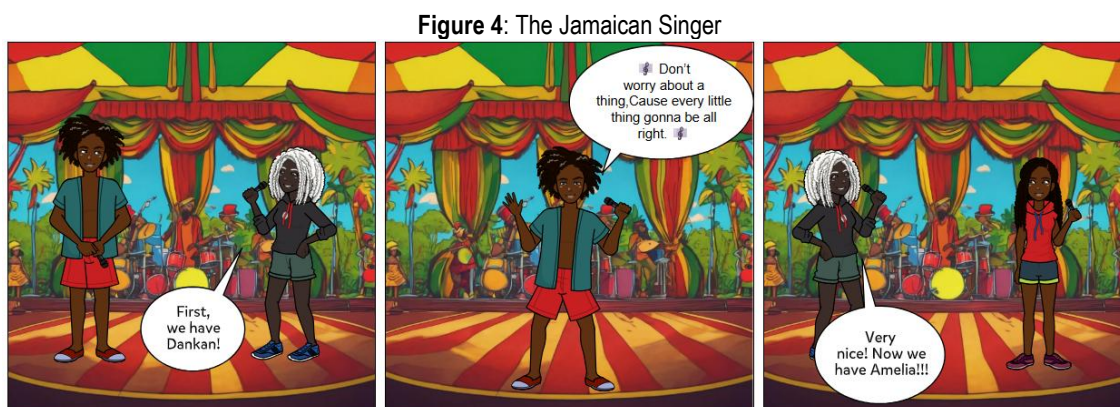
In India, the process of cross-cultural adaptation not only respects but also celebrates the region's particular artistic traditions, demonstrating students' nuanced intercultural awareness. In the story, the dance contest is set against the backdrop of a Taj Mahal-like building, integrating local classical dance forms and divine mythology (Fig. 3). This comic strip presents a striking inversion of hierarchy: the most powerful figure—a goddess—is brought low by a moral lesson on insecurity and envy, transforming a commonly dominant character into one who must confront her own vulnerabilities.

Figure 3: The Indian Dancer



Source: Arthur, Augusto, Julia, and Patricia's comic strip (2023).

Artistic features also appear in Jamaica's case. In *The Jamaican Singer* (Fig. 4), the group devised a musical duel focused on reggae, a genre deeply rooted in the region's values and traditions. The comic strip features *Three Little Birds* by Bob Marley and the Wailers, and *Don't Worry, Be Happy* by Bobby McFerrin. Although the latter may have been chosen due to its widespread popularity, students could have extended their research to identify another Jamaican artist for their story. In this instance, we infer that insufficient research may have led them to assume—incorrectly—that all reggae songs originate from Jamaica, thereby reproducing a stereotyped view of this country's cultural identity. At the same time, the narrative's denouement reinforces ideals commonly associated with reggae music, conveying a message of reconciliation and collaboration.



Source: Eduarda, George, Harry, and Helena's comic strip (2023).

Now turning to the category of *everyday cultural practices*, it is interesting to observe that all three groups in charge of African nations decided to focus on cooking. This convergence may indicate limited research into the specific characteristics of each country, resulting in a reductionist understanding of their cultural symbols. It also mirrors a broader homogenising view of Africa, shaped by colonial narratives that flatten national distinctions and obscure the cultural richness of individual countries. Such tendencies are reinforced by the persistent erasure of African histories and cultures from school curricula, a process that Carvalho, Silva, and Almeida (2023) describe as *Africanicide*. These findings illustrate a wider challenge of intercultural work organised around national contexts:

while such activities can widen students' engagement with other histories and traditions, they may also reinforce simplified cultural representations if not critically mediated.

In Nigeria, the competition centres on rivalry between the Queen of Lagos and a commoner over soup (Fig. 5). The plot aligns with students' research into the country's past, as the region was historically organised into independent kingdoms. Their selection of soup—a traditional and culturally significant Nigerian dish—as the object of dispute also demonstrates a degree of intercultural awareness. Unlike most adaptations, this version does not include punishment for the underprivileged character. Although the queen does not accept her defeat gracefully and reacts with anger, she does not seek revenge. Whether intentional or not, this narrative choice resonates with Yoruba cosmology, most notably the principle of *Ìwà Pèlẹ́*, which “refers to a character defined by humility, kindness, patience, and integrity” (Àjàgùnnà, 2025, para. 2).



Source: Isabela, John, Saymon, and Valentina's comic strip (2023).

In Uganda, the story also revolves around cooking, with the goddess Aisha turning Lydia into a leopard (Fig. 6). This adaptation emphasises Ugandan culinary practices and the intersection of skill and divine influence, illustrating how cultural details can enrich the narrative. However, students could have deepened their research by incorporating a traditional Ugandan dish rather than vaguely mentioning “chicken” and “meat”, which are common across many regions. The specificity of a local dish would have enhanced their intercultural awareness. In contrast, the choice to transform Lydia into a leopard reflects a more successful engagement with local fauna, suggesting that their research into

the region's wildlife was more detailed than their exploration of its cuisine. Moreover, in the final sequence of the comic strip, both Aisha and Lydia take accountability and apologise for their problematic behaviours—a resolution that, whether deliberate or not, aligns with Ugandan principles of forgiveness and reconciliation (Hansen, 2009).

Figure 6: The Ugandan Cook



Source: Ana, Caroline, Mary, and Louise's comic strip (2023).

In South Africa, cuisine drives the plot through a soup contest between Zuri and Kaya (Fig. 7). This comic strip contains several plot inconsistencies. For instance, after being sabotaged by Kaya, Zuri manages to prepare an entirely new dish in only two minutes, which strains narrative plausibility. In the denouement, Zuri becomes a successful restaurant owner while Kaya is depicted as her employee. Even though this reversal of fortune is a familiar trope in popular storytelling, the strip fails to explain how an initially wealthy character suddenly becomes impoverished. Additionally, despite the premise of a soup contest, the images show that neither competitor actually presents soup. Zuri even chooses to make spaghetti, which is not a traditional South African dish. Overall, this group's work suggests that more time was needed to develop a coherent narrative, as well as to conduct deeper research into South African cultural features that could have strengthened their cultural sensitivity.

Figure 7: The South African Chef



Source: Agatha, Clara, Pablo, and Peter's comic strip (2023).

Finally, in the United States, the story is reimagined as a high-stakes basketball game (Fig. 8), reflecting the country's profound cultural ties to this sport and its competitive ethos. The adaptation involves national broadcasting and personal rivalry, emphasising the themes of athletic integrity and achievement central to American culture. Notably, the group chose to portray two girls competing in a historically male-dominated sport, introducing a meaningful subversion of widespread gender norms. It is, however, curious that they selected the names Bella and Luanna, which are not classic American names. By contrast, the first two panels of the comics feature a yellow taxi, suggesting that students incorporated elements of their cultural knowledge into the narrative.

Figure 8: The Basketball Game



Source: James, Marina, Victoria, and William's comic strip (2023).

During the creation process, students engaged in extensive discussions as they incorporated cultural elements into their adaptations of Arachne's myth. The need to represent each country's traditions and values led them to revisit their research notes, compare their ideas with the available information, and negotiate how best to integrate specific cultural elements while preserving the source narrative. Some groups, nonetheless, encountered difficulties understanding culturally specific practices and symbolic meanings, prompting them to seek further clarification from the teacher to ensure more accurate representations. These challenges underscore the complexity of cross-cultural storytelling and highlight the importance of research, dialogue, and teacher mediation in supporting culturally informed comic creation.

Another challenge was the absence of adequate infrastructure for producing digital comics, underscoring the technological limitations identified by Habeahan (2025). Because the classroom was not equipped with computers and the school's computer lab was unavailable, the teachers relied on their own laptops to complete the task. As there were four groups but only two available laptops, the activity was organised in rotations: while two groups worked on the digital production of their comics, the remaining groups completed complementary intercultural tasks related to their assigned countries, including posters on local cuisine, cultural practices, and varieties of English, as well as postcards imagining visits to major cities. These postcards were later printed and displayed with custom-made stamps produced for the exhibition. This rotation system maintained student engagement while also serving as a form of learning verification and contributing to the exhibition. Nevertheless, sharing computers occasionally slowed production and required careful time management. This experience helps illustrate the infrastructural constraints that continue to challenge pedagogical innovation, even in private schools, which are often assumed to have greater material resources.

When considered as a whole, the comic creation project enabled learners to expand their English-language knowledge, especially in relation to writing and speaking skills. Beyond that, aligned with comics pedagogy, the project allowed students to draw on and extend their semiotic repertoires, moving beyond verbal communication to incorporate elements of visual literacy and multimodal storytelling. In terms of interculturality, we observe that learners simultaneously challenged and

reproduced ideas about the countries they studied. Overall, the project indicates that they broadened their intercultural sensitivity and awareness.

Final remarks

In this article, we discussed a comic creation project with 5th-graders in an English classroom grounded in an intercultural perspective. In this sense, students were encouraged to explore the English language alongside the historical and cultural aspects of countries that England once colonised. This approach is particularly meaningful in the Brazilian context, as Brazil itself bears a legacy of colonisation lasting over three centuries. By examining colonialism through the lens of a nation that also experienced European domination, students were able to draw parallels among colonial experiences.

Through research into the cultures, histories, cuisines, and linguistic identities of English-speaking countries, learners were challenged to confront stereotypes and expand their understanding of diverse cultural realities. Thus, the project not only expanded their English language repertoires but also empowered them to act as cultural critics, questioning and reinterpreting colonial narratives through a dynamic, transformative learning process.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that comics can be used as a relevant pedagogical resource for teaching EAL in primary education. By combining visual and verbal modes, comics create a multimodal learning environment in which young learners can explore language through different semiotic routes. The findings also highlight the role of creative authorship in language learning engagement. Through adapting a literary narrative into digital comics, students moved from readers of texts to creators of their own stories. This process encouraged them to experiment with vocabulary, narrative organisation (setting, plot, characters, and so on), and dialogue construction while working collaboratively in groups. In this sense, we align with the view that digital comics offer “an opportunity for students to bring writing, technology, creativity, innovation, and student self-expression into the classroom” (Kaptevskaja; Jaramillo; Zorro, 2025, p. 8804).

At the same time, the project revealed challenges in implementing comic creation tasks in the classroom. Some students showed limited familiarity with the visual conventions of comics, particularly in relation to panel sequencing and speech balloon placement. In addition, infrastructural barriers—such as inadequate computer facilities—required teachers to devise compensatory strategies for the digital stage of the activity.

This study also has important limitations that should be acknowledged. It is based on a single educational context, namely a private school with extended English instruction. For that reason, its findings cannot be taken as representative of Brazilian primary education more broadly. Besides, our analysis is centred on students' final productions and on the pedagogical process as documented by the researchers, rather than on interviews with participants or a longer-term follow-up of learning developments. Future research could deepen this discussion by including public-school settings, learners' perspectives, and comparative studies across different age groups or levels of access to digital resources.

Despite these constraints, the results suggest that comic creation can enrich the language-learning process when carefully planned. The collaborative nature of the task encouraged discussion, negotiation of ideas, and shared decision-making among students. Furthermore, the integration of research, storytelling, and visual composition expanded students' semiotic repertoires and intercultural awareness.

In conclusion, the use of comics in the EAL classroom represents a promising pedagogical strategy for connecting linguistic, cultural, and multimodal dimensions of learning and serves as a valuable didactic resource. When implemented through structured classroom activities, comic creation can support students' engagement with language while fostering reflection on cultural diversity and intercultural perspectives.

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