

Infusing critical pedagogy in language-skill classrooms: A critical autoethnography of a teacher of color as a praxis of decolonization

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ABSTRACT

This study responds to concerns about the scarcity of teaching materials (and methods) because a classic tenet of critical pedagogy often discourages English teachers from applying the philosophy. In this critical autoethnography, the author presents his lived experience as an English student and teacher-educator of color in Indonesia, a multilingual country, through eleven narratives focused on language-skill classrooms. The data were collected using the critical incident procedure and analyzed using content analysis. Through this study, the author found that English-language-skill classrooms are so positivist, prescriptive, and formalistic that they leave no room for knowledge-making activities, nor do they cultivate students' critical thinking. Thus, the author proposes three teaching strategies to infuse critical pedagogy into English language-skill instruction: providing sociohistorical contexts, offering alternative narratives, and exposing various grammatical conventions of World Englishes. These teaching strategies are the author's transformative praxis, believed to be applicable to teaching language-skill subjects in multilingual countries whose students' first language is not English and in post-colonial countries where the trace of colonialism still influences educational practices. As a critical autoethnography, this study solely highlights the author's experiences, and therefore the findings are not generalizable. This is the study's main limitation. Yet, the author hopes this work provides verisimilitude that resonates with other English students, teachers, and teacher-educators, so that more autoethnographic work in the same vein can manifest.

Keywords: critical pedagogy; decolonization; English language skills; Indonesia; pedagogical praxis

First Received:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
April 7 th , 2026	August 19 th , 2026	August 21 st , 2026	September 1 st , 2026

How to cite (in APA style):

Purnama, A. (2026). Infusing critical pedagogy in language-skill classrooms: A critical autoethnography of a teacher of color as a praxis of decolonization. *Journal of Research on English and Language Learning (J-REaLL)*, 7(2), 452–464.
<https://doi.org/10.33474/j-reall.v7i2.25210>

INTRODUCTION

Implementing critical pedagogy in English teaching, whether as a second or foreign language, bears some challenges. Among others, the availability of teaching resources and methods can be a major barrier for teachers who desire to infuse critical pedagogy into their English teaching, especially in the context of a multilingual country. Evaluating and foreseeing the practicality and relevance of integrating critical pedagogy in English as a second language instruction, Crookes (2010) argues

that critical pedagogy in that context is actually “relevant and possible” (p. 338). However, he also notes that its relevance and practicality can be improved if teaching materials and samples are widely available. This indicates that the lack of resources to support the philosophy of critical pedagogy in English teaching is an issue worth consideration. Crookes (2010) criticizes “the classic tenets of critical pedagogy” as “oversimplification” because the beliefs suggest that teaching materials should come from both teachers and students as a way of disrupting unequal power relations in classroom settings (p. 341). In this framework, students are also responsible for constructing and bringing in teaching materials for the class. Whereas teachers cannot simply pull the teaching resources from thin air and depend too much on their students.

For Crookes (2010), the classic tenets are exactly what make fully working teaching materials scarce. In critical pedagogy, teachers are expected to be sensitive to students’ diverse needs, and this stimulates the conceptualization of the view that students’ involvement in formulating teaching materials is a must (Freire, 1970). However, relying too much on students is predicted not to motivate teachers to invent fresh, working teaching materials (and methods) that are suitable for their unique teaching practices. Therefore, teachers should take a more active role in constructing both teaching materials and methods that particularly work for their unique pedagogical circumstances while taking into account the specific needs of their students (Canagarajah, 2012; Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

Besides the necessity of paying significant attention to the pedagogical aspect when infusing critical pedagogy into English teaching, teachers are also expected to be critically aware of the social, political, and ideological consequences of teaching English. Although not entirely true, it is still commonly believed that English mastery can generate personal and national economic benefits (Kubota, 2015), where the idea stimulates worldwide demand for English instruction. Yet, the colonizing nature and covert consequences of (teaching) English for people of color toward their ethnoracial and linguistic identities have not been widely realized, specifically in multilingual countries where people’s first languages are mostly not English. I intentionally use the word ‘multilingual’ instead of ‘non-native English-speaking’ in this paper to disrupt the binary of native and non-native speakers, which fails to provide (linguistic) justice for those whose first language is not English (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009).

Since multilayered tensions exist in the implementation of critical pedagogy in English teaching and the nature of English itself, this study aims to unpack those tensions by presenting my life experiences as an English student and teacher of color in Indonesia, a multilingual country. Freire (2001) suggests that critical reflection on pedagogical practices is a prerequisite for bridging theory and practice. Therefore, employing a critical autoethnography approach with its emphasis on critical reflection and reflexivity (Yazan, 2020), I intend to frame theory not merely as hogwash and practice as purely activism (Freire, 1970) by firstly addressing the nature of English and English teaching as a means of decolonizing them. Then, by critically reflecting on the experienced dynamics of the English language-skill classrooms in a multilingual country, I offer the formulation of English language-skill instructions which has the possibility of not only raising students’ critical awareness to interrogate the normality of English teaching around the globe, but also enabling both teachers and students of color to question about the legitimacy and authority of their English teaching, learning, and languaging practices. This formulation aims to provide a practical teaching approach in which critical pedagogy becomes the core of teaching English, consisting of providing sociohistorical contexts, offering alternative narratives, and exposing various grammatical conventions of World Englishes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English and colonial constructs

There is a close relationship between language and colonialism. Rosa and Flores (2017) explain that language became one of the salient elements in European colonization, in which the colonizers employed language as a way of sustaining their superiority over the colonized through the formation of a language hierarchy. Language hierarchy in the context of colonization deployed the notion that

European languages were the only means to accomplish humanity. The colonized were considered to be less human, with their languages deemed to be animal-like languages (Veronelli, 2015). Therefore, the colonized were required to learn the languages of the colonizers to transcend themselves to be more human beings. In addition to the formation of language hierarchy, language was also used to eradicate local cultures, values, and identities. After all, teaching a language is not merely about teaching its grammatical conventions. It propagates understanding about cultures, values, and belief systems of its users. Thus, the colonizers massively exposed their cultures, values, and belief systems to the colonized to pave the way for the colonial agenda (Shakib, 2011).

As one of the European languages, English was also politically constructed as a colonial tool. However, English has been growing and transforming into a new form beyond a tool for colonization. It is now something that Motha (2014) refers to as a globally hot “commodity” covertly established with its powerful system to make English remain a globally hot commodity while maintaining other languages and cultural practices at the margin (p. 7). Motha (2014) calls this concealed system “Empire”, a modern power relation which is fueled by a neocolonialism agenda and situates Western values and dominant English variations at the center as legitimate and authorized (p. 31). As a commodity, English provides the inner circle countries great economic and cultural benefits (Kachru, 1992; Motha, 2014) through various English-related programs and political agendas while seducing the outer circle countries by economic advancement and internationalization through language attainment (Kubota, 2015). In this sense, English has been and is still an important component of (neo) colonialism.

Understanding English as a commodity with a powerful support system provides a plausible explanation for why English has long been taught prescriptively and formalistically all over the world. Prescriptive and formalistic teachings leave no room for diversity since the prescriptive approach treats students on the basis of language weaknesses rooted in raciolinguistic ideologies (Bauler & Cushing, 2026), which will definitely be apparent in the context of multilingual countries, as English is not their first language. Meanwhile, the formalistic approach serves as the only prescribed remedy for curing students’ language weaknesses. Prescriptive and formalistic (English) teachings strengthen the centrality of some dominant English variations as legitimate and predominant, stemming from and reinforced by a disruptive ideology of native speakerism (Holliday, 2006). As a result, language hierarchy is still maintained to the present day in which the English that is desired to be acquired by the current global learners is the one that had been formulated by the colonizers; that is, the English variations closely aligned with the White people. The White mainstream English, Baker-Bell (2020) calls it. I put more attention to the prescriptive and formalistic teachings of English, as it is embodied in English language-skill classes, because it is how English is mostly taught in multilingual countries, including my own country, Indonesia.

With its colonial background and embedded neocolonial agenda, English should be taught carefully. As it is elucidated by Motha (2014), “English should be neither taught nor learned without a consciousness of the racialized effects of its acquisition” (p. 77). What is worth questioning here is not English as a field of study but the Empire casting a shadow over English teaching around the world. Thus, I believe that some real actions need to be taken to make English teaching more liberating, as critical pedagogy suggests (Freire, 1970) for both teachers and students. Having merely a critical awareness of the effects of teaching English is not enough. English teachers should not only be critically aware of the social, political, and ideological consequences of teaching English, but they must also take direct action to decolonize English and immobilize the Empire that only gives benefits to particular dominant groups, so that social justice can be achieved.

Various measures have been implemented to disrupt the Empire. Scholars propose numerous concepts and philosophical orientations to inform English teaching practices. World Englishes highlights diverse English varieties as legitimate as the White mainstream English (Kachru, 1992). Trans (language and linguistics) perspectives accentuate the role of multilingual semiotic resources in English (and other languages) production to disrupt linguistic containment, leading to injustice toward speakers of non-dominant English varieties who are mostly multilingual (Canagarajah, 2013;

García, 2019). All these concepts and philosophical orientations are in line with the spirit and philosophy of critical pedagogy, in the sense that they are all pursuing social justice, exterminating oppression and marginalization, and advocating for marginalized and underprivileged people in the scope of language and linguistics. Nevertheless, inks will never be a mesmerizing painting without actions, and therefore, the concepts and philosophical orientations will be forgotten if their active realizations are not implemented, with teacher-scholars being the spearhead in the battle.

English teachers who are willing to stand against injustice, oppression, and marginalization can embrace the aforementioned teaching philosophies. Even better, teachers can translate, adapt, or modify the philosophical orientations to form their unique pedagogical practices and share the practices with other teachers as a working transformational praxis (Freire, 1970; Freire, 2001). That way, fetishization of concepts over concrete practical actions can be evaded (Kubota & Miller, 2017), and the teacher-theorist dichotomy, which is also a construct of colonialism, can be disrupted (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), with teachers being actively involved in taking roles as teacher-scholars. A simpler step can also be taken by English teachers who are just ready to start. Abandoning the use of the term English as second language (ESL) and promoting English as additional language (EAL) are meaningful not only to disrupt language hierarchy (Park, 2017), but also to see and frame English teaching in a different way.

METHOD

Drawing upon my personal experiences as a student and teacher of English in Indonesia, this work used autoethnography as the methodological framework to connect my stories of navigating various language-skill instructions whilst noting cultural practices and social structures (Adams, 2017; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Eleven narratives, around 500-1,000 words each, were composed using the critical incident procedure (Farrell, 2008) during my PhD coursework stage in fall 2021. The narratives were derived from two humble questions: (1) how did my teachers teach language-skill courses? and (2) how did I teach language-skill courses? These two questions were then operationalized into more specific ones focusing on different aspects, for instance: what methods in the attended language-skill courses did I adopt in my teaching? What were the biggest takeaways from the language-skill courses I attended? How did I feel when my teacher inappropriately treated other students or me due to our deviant language performance? What ramifications did a particular teaching method provide for my students? The eleven narratives obtained through the critical incident procedure became the primary data in this study, which I paired with my past teaching artifacts, such as syllabi, slides, and evaluation rubrics, as secondary data. The primary data were then analyzed using content analysis, an analytical procedure that allowed me to establish themes and construct meaningful stories out of them (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Guided by Vaismoradi et al. (2016), I went through four steps for developing themes, consisting of initialization, construction, rectification, and finalization. Although the secondary data were not included in the analysis, they worked in the background to triangulate my narratives, enabling me to remain reflective and reflexive through a triangulation and reflexivity matrix constructed for verifying the alignment between the two types of data and reflexive audits where the secondary data took a role as the validator of the primary data analysis.

The research design and data interpretation of this study were highly guided by my ontological and epistemological worldview, position, and subjectivity. I acknowledged my positionality and wrote as an Indonesian teacher-educator who was enrolled as a student in the English department of Indonesian institutions for bachelor's and master's degrees prior to earning a PhD from a US university supported by a Fulbright scholarship. I am also an associate professor of English at a private university in Indonesia. Reflecting on this, my positionality as an English teacher of color provides a point of view for interrogating the rampant concepts, perspectives, and assumptions on TESOL and teacher education through my narratives and teaching artifacts. I further acknowledged that my positionality highly influences the findings and interpretation in this study. Like other scholars in the field, I saw autoethnography as one of the liberating methods that is able to echo marginalized voices

(Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Purnama, 2026), in this case, the voices of a color teacher who is often considered marginal in the global TESOL community.

FINDINGS

English language-skill instruction in Indonesia

Similar to some Asian countries that emphasize English instruction to obtain mastery and achieve similarity with so-called native speakers (Park, 2017), English teaching in Indonesia, at least from my experiences as a teacher and a student, also puts a major concern over language skills mastery to accomplish performance similarity. These learning outcomes translate into prescriptive and formalistic pedagogy that demands correctness and precision. English teaching in the context focuses on teaching language skills and is led by the uniformity of teaching resources and methods aligned with the colonial dominant groups (Hamied & Musthafa, 2019) for various teaching-English methods implemented in Indonesia). This singular practice masks the colonial dimension of English, disabling both teachers and students from questioning the legitimacy and authority of their English teaching, learning, and languaging practices.

Generally, English language-skills instruction focuses on five dimensions: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammar. Each skill is taught differently based on the level of study and proficiency, but is imparted similarly using prescriptive, formalistic, banking approaches (Freire, 1970). My critical reflections presented in this section come from my life experiences as a student and teacher of English. I began learning English formally in the third grade of elementary school and have been continuing up to this moment, where I have obtained a PhD degree from one of the U.S universities. However, the critical reflections presented in this paper stem from my learning and teaching experiences as an undergraduate English major. I should acknowledge here that my teaching practices in the past were strongly influenced by my prior learning experiences, which were not aligned with the philosophy of critical pedagogy.

Reading for extending exposure

"I learned reading skills at the college level throughout some courses with different names: Intensive Reading I, Intensive Reading II, Extensive Reading I, and Extensive Reading II. These reading classes were institutionally set as prerequisites in the undergraduate English major where I studied. Presented in four semesters during the first and second years, the courses aimed to improve students' abilities in comprehending English texts and academic discourses. Various discussions, such as genres, paragraph and essay elements, text conventions, etc., were presented as the core of the instruction and followed by some reading assignments. Students in these classes were commonly introduced to theories, approaches, and strategies before being asked to apply them to the assigned readings." (Critical Incident 4, September 14th, 2021)

Although offering practical activities to improve reading skills, I found these courses not liberating. "Students' critical thinking was not stimulated since teachers only provided how-to-instructions" (Critical Incident 6, October 3rd, 2021). As a result, no knowledge-making activities took place during my four-semester learning. I just repeated the same tedious things: learning the theories, deciding which to use, and applying them in reading. For instance, I was asked to analyze a reading passage to identify elements such as the topic, topic sentence, main ideas, supporting details, claims, or arguments, and this happened in almost every meeting. This made reading classes the most "boring class" among other language-skill classes (Critical Incident 4, September 14th, 2021). In addition, the learning materials presented apparently followed the scheme of the Empire (Motha, 2014). Never had I found the readings covering issues about colonialism, injustice, or diversity; nor had I read rich experiences, colorful descriptions, and inspiring stories of people and their cultures in the contexts of the outer circle countries. I read countless sentences, paragraphs, and essays about learning (English), the benefits it may bring, the ways it can drive economic

growth, and elaborations on history, values, and the greatness of people and their cultures. All of which revolve around the inner-circle countries, whether the US, the UK, or Australia.

Reflecting on my learning experience, I admit that reading classes can give students benefits in their English learning and familiarize them with meaningful academic discourse, but I also do believe that the learning materials were politically designed so that reading classes become good carriers to deliver significant exposure to the dominant discourses desired by the Empire. If teachers do not execute their pedagogical practices in reading (and other language skills) classes mindfully, they can easily fall into the Empire's scheme and become agents of (neo)colonialism.

Writing for reporting ideas

"Writing courses required me to enroll for more credits. During my undergraduate study, the writing classes consisted of five courses in five sequential semesters: Sentence Writing, Paragraph Writing I, Paragraph Writing II, Essay Writing, and Creative Writing. Except for creative writing focused on literary genres, all four writing courses were designed to train students to compose academic writing." (Critical Incident 10, November 2nd, 2021)

Teaching instructions in writing classes were highly prescriptive and formalistic, in which teachers often asked students to perform similarly to (white) native speakers. I still remember clearly how my teacher discussed one of the students' writings and commented: "You should not convey your idea this way. It shows how your complicated thinking is. It is how Indonesian people generally think. Native speakers don't think that way; they do this and that, so their writing becomes this and that" (Critical Incident 11, November 11th, 2021). It was a frustrating experience for most students because, instead of being introduced to various academic writing genres and conventions, they were required to change their thinking to align with native speakers. This is how native speakerism takes form, as the teacher considered a native speaker of English as the ideal to which non-native English speakers need to conform; even to a level where students have no freedom in thinking.

Moreover, writing activities were framed as if they were not meant to generate new ideas. Grammatical accuracy was extremely emphasized, up to a point where students only reported existing ideas due to the demand for achieving syntactic accuracy. Whereas writing is supposed to be a fun, inspiring activity. Writing is not merely an activity of composing sentences, but it is a powerful endeavor to generate new understanding (Murray, 1972) by "mulling over problems, thinking with others, and exploring new ideas or bringing disparate ideas together" (Estrem, 2015, p. 19).

Listening for understanding dominant variations

"There were not so many moments I could recall from listening classes. Presented in three consecutive semesters under the names of Listening Comprehension I, Listening Comprehension II, and Listening Comprehension III, listening classes were as uninteresting as reading classes. Classroom activities were mostly response and correction, in which students were asked to listen to short utterances, conversations, or monologues and respond to them afterwards. Teachers would evaluate and correct students' responses, with some additional explanations primarily concerning English idioms, proverbs, and adages if necessary." (Critical Incident 5, September 29th, 2021)

Listening classes shared the same potential problem as reading classes, where the instructions only offered exposure to dominant discourses established by the Empire, in this case to the White mainstream English used by the Whites of the inner circle countries. I never heard any short utterance, conversation, or monologue delivered by the African Americans, even though they are the legitimate citizens of the inner circle countries; nor by the Indians, Pakistanis, or Filipinos, although they demographically constitute a larger number of English speakers compared to people speaking English in the UK. All I remember are European names often coming up in the spoken

discourse: Edward, Elizabeth, Judith, John, Phillips, Sophia, Smith, and Willow. Excluding non-dominant English discourse originating from non-white English speakers (and their cultures) dismisses the fact that they are also legitimate English speakers from which students can learn. This also reifies the argument that what so-called native speakers always refer to as White entities (Holliday, 2006).

Speaking for performing whiteness

“To train students’ speaking abilities, the English major provided three required speaking classes in three successive semesters. Speaking I, Speaking II, and Speaking III were designed to encourage students to speak English by numerous fascinating teaching methods even though students did not get used to it.” (Critical Incident 1, August 20th, 2021)

Speaking classes were probably one of the most infuriating language skill classes for students, given that stereotyping and racialization (on the basis of language production), which are harmful for students’ ethnoracial identities, often took place in these classes. Not to mention dialects, Indonesian students are typically multilingual with indigenous languages as their first language, Indonesian language as their second language, and a foreign language as their third language (Coleman, 2016). Indonesians are generally able to recognize the ethnoraciality of other Indonesians from their use of the Indonesian language because the unique linguistic features of their indigenous languages often spice the national language. The same thing also happens to English, in which it is quite common to encounter English colorfully spiced with diverse linguistic features of the indigenous languages. This is why I often found speaking teachers commenting, “don’t put a lot of stress on the ‘d’; it makes you speak like Javanese—one of the Indonesia’s *suku bangsa*” or “it is ‘f’ not ‘p’ in ‘feeling’; ‘peeling’ is Sundanese—another Indonesia’s *suku bangsa*—English, ‘peeling’ has a different meaning in English” (Critical Incident 1, August 20th, 2021).

Teachers’ derogatory comments to students’ speaking performances are not only influenced by native speakerism in which the native speakers’ accents and pronunciations become a benchmark for evaluating students’ languaging correctness, but it also implies their unconscious adherence to the Empire with an expectation for students of getting benefits from so-called Whiteness, a powerful social construct resulting in tangible violent effects for non-Whites by the designation of abundant privileges for the Whites (ACLRC, 2021). I remember one of my speaking teachers gave me some advice: “speak with a native accent, don’t mispronounce things, be accurate with grammar, and people will respect you” (Critical Incident 2, August 27th, 2021). The teacher assumed that his students would achieve certain privileges like the White do by performing the same speaking feat. This indicates that he considered White mainstream English as the only legitimate and authorized variation. The notion underlies his pedagogical practices of directing students to do whatever it takes to achieve performance similarity to the Whites in speaking.

Grammar for ensuring correct languaging

“Grammar lessons were taught throughout four prerequisite courses: Basic Structure, Intermediate Structure I, Intermediate Structure II, and Advance Structure. Similar to the other language skill classes, grammar classes are so formalistic and prescriptive that they did not give any room for knowledge-making activities. The class activities were relatively the same for each class. Teachers explained theories, and students did some test-like exercises. However, grammar classes are quite meaningful for me because they significantly influenced my teaching trajectory and helped me survive financial hardship during my undergraduate study.” (Critical Incident 8, October 17th, 2021)

Although grammar classes were very tedious and positivistic, I did enjoy the class. I found myself really good at it. My eminence in grammar inspired me to be a grammar teacher. So in the early days of my teaching career, I taught English grammar informally. I began teaching grammar and proofreading manuscripts for other undergraduate students when I was a first-year student

and kept continuing what I had started after I became a teacher at the university level. When teaching grammar, I used “to instill the idea that grammar could provide significant improvements in all (English) language skills” (Critical Incident 9, October 23rd, 2021). I considered grammar as the gatekeeper for better languaging activities. Due to my exposure to Krashen’s (1982) monitor model theory, which situates the rules of a language as a monitor to inspect self-languaging activities, I deemed grammar to be the heart of a language. I expected my students to employ my grammar lessons as a tool to monitor their writing and speaking activities and as a supportive skill set for understanding the various discourses in listening and reading.

Considering its positivistic nature, grammar is often used as a tool for evaluating the legitimacy of one’s languaging activities. It is not merely a gatekeeper for better languaging activity, but a gatekeeper watching out for language rules based on the rules set by the dominant groups. The rules are that one’s violation of the language rules indicates one’s illegitimacy of the language. This is what makes the African American Vernacular English (and other Englishes beyond the White mainstream English), which has distinct sets of language rules, considered illegitimate and nonstandard. Even worse, its users are often deemed “stupid”, “illiterate”, and “uneducated” for infringing on the rules set and defined by the dominant groups (Alim & Smitherman, 2012).

DISCUSSION

Language-skill subjects and critical pedagogy

In the introduction of the 30th anniversary edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Donald Macedo asserts that many people misrepresent Freirean critical pedagogy as “teaching methods” instead of a philosophical orientation for teaching (Freire, 2000). As a philosophy, critical pedagogy generally aims to end oppression by creating an institutionally more just and democratic learning space (Bartolome, 2010; Giroux, 1997). It is a philosophical orientation that touches directly on the grassroots level of education, encompassing students, teachers, and their academic interactions. Critical pedagogy can be applied across all fields of study to remedy the biases informing how teaching is implemented and how knowledge is constructed (Hooks, 2010). In critical pedagogy, all teachers need to do at the initial stage is to be critically conscious of the power dynamics inside and outside of the classroom settings before taking action in their own teaching practices. Inside the classroom, teachers should be aware of their power and privilege when dealing with their students. This is why Freire (1970) and Freire (2001) explicates various concepts and measures for more liberating classroom practices: banking concept of education vs. problem-posing of education, knowledge transferring vs. knowledge constructing, *conscientização*, dialogical teaching, etc. Meanwhile, outside of the classroom, teachers need to be cognizant of the power dynamics furtively influencing how and why certain kinds of knowledge is constructed, accepted, and perceived as more legitimate as well as more scientific over others.

Knowledge is not an independent, neutral entity. It is constructed, reconstructed, and disseminated in light of its intimate relationship with power. Knowledge and power are intricately linked. According to Foucault (1979), knowledge always derives from power, and power always functions as knowledge. As teaching activity entangles its participants—teachers and students—with knowledge (and power), the participants should ideally be able to construct, reconstruct, and disseminate knowledge. However, as Freire (1970) suggests through the banking concept of education, teachers are the only participants with the power and privilege to disseminate knowledge. While students are often considered helpless in this educational approach, I believe teachers are in the same situation because their privilege lies only in the extent to which they can disseminate preexisting knowledge. Also, their power only applies inside the classroom. They are academically disarmed once they leave the classroom context in the banking concept of education. Teachers (and also students) should move beyond the banking concept of education that limits their pedagogical activities to merely disseminating knowledge within the class because teaching is not about transferring knowledge, but about opening up opportunities for (re)constructing a new one (Freire, 2001). Therefore, critical pedagogy offers empowerment not only for students but also for teachers in academia.

When it comes to the English language-skill classes, which are highly positivistic, prescriptive, and formalistic, teachers need to formulate their own pedagogical praxis—an iterative practical action derived from a critical reflection on past teaching experience—as an active action and transformation of the old, existing teaching practices. This measure needs to be taken both for empowering themselves and their students and for decolonizing English instruction, so that their teaching, learning, and languaging activities do not support the neocolonial agenda and the Empire. In the context of multilingual countries where students’ first language is not English, one of the ways to infuse critical pedagogy is by cultivating students’ awareness of the dominant language ideology. This way, students can critically interrogate the normativity of the dominant local and/or foreign languages. It can also help students anticipate the potential drawbacks for their diverse linguistic and ethnoracial identities. This extends [Bartolome’s \(2010\)](#) ideas, which center around pre-service teachers who often “uncritically and unconsciously” embrace stances and attitudes aligning with the harmful dominant language ideology (p. 508). While opening teachers’ eyes up on the reality behind the English teaching industry is important for empowering (marginalized) students of color, giving immediate heads-up to students about it is also salient because the endeavor for achieving social justice can be embarked on early at the grassroots level.

I found [Bartolome’s \(2010\)](#) strategy of situating particular studies into some sociohistorical contexts really useful for instilling critical pedagogy, especially in the context of Indonesian English as an additional language (EAL) teaching, which stresses more on language skills mastery and performance similarity. More specifically in language skills studies, teachers can situate the activities and discussions into the sociohistorical contexts of worldwide English learning and realities to inform students about the reality behind English teaching and experiences of English speakers (of color) globally. In addition, offering alternative narratives can also be a good option to broaden students’ understanding of Englishes around the world. This way, the pedagogical orientation is not merely to direct students to what to do or what not to do to be as closely resembling a native speaker. Rather, it can cultivate students’ critical awareness and inform their language learning activities. It is a form of praxis that teachers can do as a response to the tension between critical pedagogy and EAL in non-English-speaking countries.

Providing sociohistorical contexts

In language skill classes that train students’ language production, such as speaking and writing classes, teachers can situate learning within specific sociohistorical contexts. For example, in speaking classes, teachers can discuss how idioms, proverbs, and adages come into being and are widely used; or how and why African American English speakers use ‘ain’t’ as the substitution for the mainstream auxiliary verbs. In writing classes, for instance, teachers can introduce narrative or autoethnography writing as another form of academic writing which commonly begins with an introduction, consists of at least three body paragraphs, and ends with closing ideas in the conclusion section. They can further explain, sociohistorically, how narrative and autoethnography can shift marginalized voices to the center, rather than the voices of positivistic, White, middle-class, Euro-American men ([Adams et al., 2015](#); [Yazan, 2020](#)). Providing sociohistorical contexts to particular lessons acts as a conversation opener to embark on a critical dialogue about the normalization of language (skills) instruction since teachers cannot simply jump into a dialogue about dominant language ideology in language-skill classrooms. Dialogue is one of the most staple teaching elements in critical pedagogy because it can stimulate students’ critical consciousness ([Kaufmann, 2010](#)). Thus, situating language-skill lessons in sociohistorical contexts can be used as a stimulus to intrigue students’ critical thinking.

The most important thing in these types of language-skill classes is that teachers do not impose on students to perform similarly to whoever the teachers want them to be. Teachers should respect students’ ethnoracial identities embodied in their language production, given that students do not have to acquire American, Australian, or British accents to communicate in English; nor do they have to write all the time methodically by following the rigid preexisting writing guidelines.

Herding students to White mainstream English (Baker-Bell, 2020), both in speaking and writing, not only reflects native speakerism (Holliday, 2006) that has been substantiated to undermine the legitimacy of non-native English-speaking teachers, but it also perpetuates ethnoracial hierarchy that situates the Whites as the apex and the Color as the nadir, happening since colonial era (Veronelli, 2015; Weber, 2015). Thus, teachers need to let students construct their own understanding of how they can speak English fluently and when they need to write their ideas methodically by a gentle touch on the tip of their boats through a critical, meaningful dialogue.

Offering alternative narratives

When it comes to classes which aim to cultivate students' receptive aspects, such as listening and reading classes, teachers can provide alternative narratives as learning sources in addition to the mainstream ones. Introducing students to the diverse non-dominant English variations as well as to their speakers, cultures, values, and belief systems can be useful for broadening students' learning experiences and disenchanting them to the reality that English, which is used around the world, is entangled with its users' ethnoracial identities. This way, students will critically realize that their ethnoracial identities matter and that there is nothing wrong with performing English spiced by linguistic features, cultures, values, and belief systems coming from their ethnoraciality.

Teachers can generate these alternative learning resources from various online sources and compose their own modules. For example, teachers can find countless videos on YouTube about Singlish–Singaporean English–, its speakers, and cultures and employ these videos as resources in listening classes; or teachers can select various articles for reading classes from the internet which do not spotlight the mainstream English speakers (this site is a good starting point to explore: <https://www.nicoletakeda.com/world-englishes.html>).

Exposing various grammatical conventions of world Englishes

Giving students exposure to diverse grammatical conventions of World Englishes is important. It can assist students to detach themselves from the harmful dominant-language ideology that White mainstream English is the only correct form of English for their languaging activities (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Baker-Bell, 2020). Thus, it is also important to do contextualization when teaching students grammar. Although English teachers need to embrace the idea that all English variations, along with their grammatical conventions, are legitimate, they also need to acknowledge that the prevailing rules set by the Empire remain unchanged and widely believed. That is, White mainstream English is the only correct, standardized, formal language form, which frames other variations as incorrect, non-standard, and informal, even though they offer more economic and academic advantages. Therefore, English teachers should contextualize their grammar instructions. For instance, English teachers can simply explain that “the White mainstream English grammar they are teaching now is as correct, standard, and formal as the African American Vernacular English grammar they were teaching a week ago. However, due to the Empire and neoliberal constructs, most people desire the White mainstream English grammar more, leading to more demand on its teaching compared to other variations, and therefore, students can use both critically and strategically to achieve what they need.”

As a teacher who used to teach grammar, I realize that grammar teachers will not have sufficient time shall they focus on all grammatical conventions of the World Englishes because they are also bound by the institutional demands on teaching students the White mainstream English grammar. Discussing some grammatical conventions of World Englishes amid the scheduled discussions of White mainstream English grammar will not be harmful. It is the most realistic way to cultivate awareness of the diversity of grammatical conventions while cultivating students' critical thinking to interrogate the dominant language ideology.

Finally, I personally believe that the most important aspect of infusing the philosophy of critical pedagogy into English language-skill classes as praxis is creating a safe space for students to explore various possibilities of knowledge construction. In this case, teachers' attitude,

judgement, and evaluation to students' class performances should be in a special measure. Students are sometimes afraid to do out-of-the-box activities that reflect their critical thinking because of the possible effects on their grades. Therefore, teachers should also be mindful of the grading process. Labor grading (Inoue, 2019) is one of the best options for maintaining equity in the grading process in additional language learning. Another point worth considering in this praxis is that these teaching strategies should be implemented at a later stage of learning. Assuming students need to take three to four courses in each language skill, the strategies can be embarked upon in the second or third course when the students are academically more mature. Implementing the strategies earlier can easily confuse the students.

The above conceptualization of teaching strategies (and resources) is a form of praxis for decolonizing English language-skill classrooms. I consider the teaching methods applicable in multilingual countries where students' first language is not English and in postcolonial countries in which the trace of colonialism still influences their educational practices. The conceptualization is inspired by the postmethod perspective, which emphasizes the dimension of *particularity*, *practicality*, and *possibility* when designing and implementing teaching methods (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The postmethod perspective as an "alternative to method" Kumaravadivelu (2003) offers a flexibility of instruction suitable for individual teachers of individual institutions in their individual contexts. There are no suitable teaching method, resource, and philosophy that can be instructed from the outside (Canagarajah, 2012), and therefore, I encourage all English teachers around the world to establish their own pedagogical practices with the same spirit of decolonizing English and dismantling the Empire and with critically "informed judgment" toward the effects of teaching English using particular methods for their students (Kubota, 2019).

One thing that should be borne in mind is that decolonizing English is not merely about avoiding teaching language skills based on so-called standardized language variation. As English teachers, we need to realize that we cannot evade contact with neoliberalism, which emphasizes individual responsibility for developing employable, standardized English skills and shapes institutional demand (Kubota, 2015, Kubota, 2019; Motha, 2014). Thus, what is important is to cultivate awareness among both teachers and students of the relationship among neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and language while taking advantage of it. Put it simply, it is not about embracing neoliberal-informed English but, as Kumaravadivelu (2003) explains, using it as a vehicle for expressing local sociocultural norms and networks (p. 539).

CONCLUSION

Responding to concerns about the scarcity of English teaching materials (and methods) within the philosophical orientation of critical pedagogy, this study shows that infusing critical pedagogy into language-skill classrooms is feasible. Through this study, I offer a formulation of English language-skill instruction, consisting of providing sociohistorical context, offering alternative narratives, and exposing various grammatical conventions of World Englishes, not only as a praxis of decolonizing English, but also as a means of cultivating students' awareness and critical thinking. As a critical autoethnography piece, this study highlights my experiences as both an English student and an English teacher-educator, and therefore the findings are not generalizable. This is the study's main limitation. Despite its limitation, I hope this piece can provide verisimilitude that resonates with other English students, teachers, and teacher-educators, so that more autoethnographic work in the same vein can manifest. Finally, I would like to make a call and reminder to fellow English teachers and teacher-educators as a closing statement. English should be taught cautiously unless we don't mind paving a better way to perpetuate colonialism and racial injustice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest is reported by the author.

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