

Language, Power, and Pride: Transforming Teacher Education in Kuwait Through Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract: *This study examines how embedding critical pedagogy principles into a 'History of English' course can transform pre-service English teachers' pedagogical philosophies, critical consciousness, and reflective practices. Drawing on qualitative data, the research revealed significant shifts in participants' understanding of linguistic diversity, socio-political dynamics, and equitable educational strategies. Participants developed a deeper awareness of the relationship between language and power, recognizing the importance of challenging linguistic hierarchies and promoting cultural pride. The findings highlight the complexities of adapting critical pedagogy for younger learners, particularly in balancing nuanced ideas with age-appropriate methods. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need for teacher education programs to integrate these principles more comprehensively into curricula, ensuring that future educators are equipped to foster social justice, equality, and a positively aware engagement with the language in their classrooms. By reshaping how educators understand and approach their roles, critical pedagogy demonstrates the potential to create more inclusive, empowering, and equitable learning classroom environments.*

Keywords: critical pedagogy, teacher education, language teaching, reflective practice, pre-service teachers

INTRODUCTION

Teacher education programs play a crucial role in shaping future educators' philosophies, practices, and approaches to classroom challenges. In multilingual and multicultural contexts such as Kuwait, language teachers are uniquely positioned to navigate the complexities of linguistic diversity, cultural identities, and socio-political dynamics. As English continues to dominate global discourse, pre-service English teachers must grapple with the implications of their

pedagogical choices, ensuring they promote equity and inclusivity while addressing the power imbalances associated with language use. Critical pedagogy, which challenges traditional hierarchies and prioritizes social justice, offers a transformative framework for reimagining teacher preparation in these contexts.

Despite its potential, embedding critical pedagogy in teacher education presents unique difficulties, especially in contexts where traditional approaches to language teaching dominate. Engaging pre-service teachers in critical reflection about linguistic and cultural hierarchies demands innovative strategies that align with both theoretical principles and practical classroom realities. This study responds to these challenges by investigating how integrating critical pedagogy into a 'History of English' course can transform pre-service teachers' approaches to language education, emphasizing the broader relevance of this approach for fostering equality and a mutually shared positive learning experience within educational systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Broadly conceived, critical pedagogy challenges dominant ideologies in education and promotes the empowerment of learners by encouraging them to question and transform social structures (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2003). Within the field of language teacher education, critical pedagogy provides a framework for developing educators who are not only skillful instructors but also reflective practitioners and agents of social change. In recent years, there has been growing interest in integrating critical pedagogy principles into teacher preparation programs, especially in contexts where English language teaching (ELT) intersects with complex socio-political factors, linguistic hierarchies, and evolving educational landscapes (Motha & Kubota, 2020).

This literature review explores the theoretical underpinnings of critical pedagogy, examines how critical perspectives are being integrated into language teacher education, and considers the particular relevance of critical pedagogy in the Arabian Gulf region. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of reflective practice, the role of linguistic imperialism, and the significance of fostering linguistic pride. By situating the present study—which embeds critical pedagogy in a History of English course in Kuwait—within this broader scholarly context, this review clarifies how critical pedagogy can reshape teacher identities, classroom practices, and, ultimately, the linguistic and cultural experiences of learners.

Critical Pedagogy: Foundations and Principles

Critical pedagogy originates from the work of Paulo Freire (1970), who argued that education should empower learners to become critically aware of social injustices and motivated to enact social change. Central to Freire's vision is the idea that learners are not passive recipients of knowledge; rather, they are active participants in a dialogic and transformative process. Critical pedagogy thus rejects the "banking model" of education, where teachers deposit information into

students. Instead, it emphasizes co-constructing knowledge, fostering critical consciousness (conscientização), and recognizing the sociopolitical dimensions of educational practice.

Subsequent scholars such as Giroux (1988), McLaren (2003), and Apple (2011) expanded on Freire's foundational work. They underlined that critical pedagogy involves both a critique of the status quo, the pursuit of justice, and equitable educational practices. In language education specifically, critical pedagogues such as Pennycook (1994) and Norton (2013) have examined how language teaching can challenge ideologies that sustain inequitable linguistic hierarchies. By highlighting the nexus of language, power, and identity, critical pedagogy opens avenues for teaching that is culturally responsive, fair and cognizant of the global politics of English use in and beyond the classroom environment.

Embedding Critical Pedagogy in Language Teacher Education

Teacher education programs have increasingly been recognized as strategic spaces for integrating critical pedagogy principles. Rather than treating critical pedagogy as an isolated theoretical concept, pre-service teacher education courses can serve as platforms for engaging trainees in challenging deeply held assumptions related to language, culture, and teaching, thus fostering reflective and critical dispositions essential for transformative practice (Motha & Kubota, 2020). Recent scholarship underscores that critical pedagogy should not be appended to existing curricula as a superficial module. Instead, it must be thoroughly woven into the fabric of teacher preparation. This approach influences how future educators conceptualize their roles, approach classroom discourse and critically evaluate educational materials. By embedding critical perspectives in meaningful and sustained ways, teacher preparation programs can cultivate a new generation of teachers who are socially conscious, culturally responsive, and equipped to address the global politics and power dynamics that shape English language teaching.

Research suggests that educators in the Arabian Gulf region are increasingly receptive to critical pedagogical approaches that challenge traditional hierarchies and empower teachers as active agents in their professional contexts. Troudi's work consistently highlights the importance of critical reflection and teacher empowerment. For instance, Troudi (2011) discusses how engaging teachers in critical reflection fosters a sense of agency and encourages them to question established norms—an essential step in embracing critical pedagogy. Likewise, Alateeq (2020), examining EFL writing teachers in a Saudi Arabian university, demonstrates that introducing critical pedagogy at the tertiary level can reshape educators' perceptions and practices, guiding them from theoretical awareness to more reflective, socially aware teaching methods.

These studies collectively indicate that, while adopting critical pedagogy may require institutional support, professional development opportunities and the adaption for reflective spaces, there is also evidence that Gulf educators are not only open to the introduction of these principles, but can greatly benefit from them. By integrating critical pedagogy into teacher education, educators in

the region can navigate the complexities of English language teaching within multilingual, multicultural environments and work toward more equitable, context-responsive learning experiences.

For language teachers in particular, becoming critical pedagogues involves understanding linguistic diversity, the historical development of English, and the political forces shaping language use in classrooms. For example, educators need to recognize how English has often functioned as a vehicle of imperialism and cultural hegemony, overshadowing local languages and dialects (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994).

When pre-service teachers critically examine the socio-political dimensions and linguistic hierarchies underlying language education, evidence suggests they become more inclined to integrate equitable strategies that honor students' linguistic and cultural identities. For instance, Al-Rubaie (2021) found that when Kuwaiti teacher candidates engaged in reflective, debate-oriented training sessions, they began to rethink traditional assumptions and moved toward more learner-centered, inclusive pedagogies. Similarly, Hamdi (2023) reports that by cultivating critical perspectives among language educators approaches that challenge entrenched norms were fostered, thus supporting the learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds. Together, these studies indicate that critical engagement in teacher education can guide pre-service teachers toward responsive, socially just teaching practices.

At the same time, critical pedagogy cannot be transplanted wholesale without adaptation. Scholars emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity, local knowledge, and the specific socio-political contexts in which teaching takes place (Canagarajah, 2005). In locales where English is perceived as a symbol of modernization and global opportunity, such as the Arabian Gulf, teacher educators must navigate the tension between English-medium instruction and the imperative to preserve local linguistic and cultural identities (Al-Rubaie, 2010; Wright, 2024). Such context-responsive critical pedagogy ensures that pre-service teachers do not merely import theoretical concepts, but translate them into meaningful, relevant classroom strategies.

Reflective Practice and the Development of Critical Consciousness

A core component of critical pedagogy in teacher education is reflective practice. By engaging in reflective journaling, peer discussions, and mentorship, pre-service teachers can connect theoretical concepts with their lived experiences and critically examine their pedagogical choices. Such practices encourage them to question ingrained assumptions about language teaching, power relations and cultural norms, ultimately leading to more socially conscious classroom strategies.

Research shows that reflective journaling can stimulate deep, critical engagement. Farrell (2022) emphasizes that reflective practice helps teacher candidates move beyond surface level understanding to critically analyze their teaching approaches. Similarly, Masuda (2022)

demonstrates how guided reflective journaling fosters critical reflection, prompting pre-service teachers to confront assumed beliefs and consider broader socio-political implications of their instructional decisions. Dumlao & Pinatacan (2019) further illustrate that reflective journaling can serve as a tool for critical teacher development in EFL contexts, providing teachers-in-training with opportunities to identify and challenge linguistic hierarchies and cultural biases in their emerging practices.

Taken together, these studies indicate that reflective practice—especially through sustained journaling—is instrumental in developing the critical consciousness essential for transformative, equitable language teaching.

Challenging Linguistic Imperialism and Valuing Linguistic Diversity

The concept of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) has been particularly influential in shaping critical pedagogy for language education. Linguistic imperialism highlights how English, historically linked to colonial and neocolonial enterprises, continues to enjoy a privileged status over local languages. This often manifests in teacher education programs that treat English as the default medium of instruction and the benchmark of academic prestige. By integrating critical pedagogy into teacher preparation, educators are encouraged to question English's elevated position, understand how this position came about, and consider its effects on learners' linguistic identities and cultural capital.

In the Arabian Gulf, where English functions as both a lingua franca and a symbol of modernization, these issues are especially pronounced. As Wright's (2024) study in the Kuwaiti higher education context demonstrates, adhering to an "English only" policy can marginalize local linguistic traditions and cultural knowledge, ultimately reinforcing hierarchical relations between English and Arabic. By acknowledging these tensions, pre-service teachers are better positioned to critically examine language hierarchies and consider inclusive approaches that honor diverse linguistic resources. Research indicates that when teachers develop critical perspectives, they are more likely to incorporate teaching strategies that acknowledge and value learners' home languages and cultural backgrounds (Motha & Kubota, 2020; Hamdi, 2023). Such an approach encourages pre-service teachers to highlight Arabic's historical contributions to English, celebrate local dialects, and utilize students' linguistic repertoires as enriching educational resources rather than treating them as deficiencies.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine how embedding critical pedagogy principles into a 'History of English' course influenced pre-service English teachers' evolving teaching philosophies. Qualitative inquiry is well-suited to capturing the complexity of participants' experiences, reflections, and transformations, as it seeks to understand phenomena

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within their natural contexts rather than through controlled variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The emphasis on participant meaning-making aligns with the study's central objective: exploring how aspiring teachers internalize and respond to critical pedagogy principles.

A case study design was selected to enable an in-depth examination of a bounded system—specifically, the 'History of English' course embedded within a teacher education program in Kuwait (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). This approach is ideal for identifying patterns that might inform broader applications of critical pedagogy in teacher education settings.

Study Context

The study was conducted at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait, where pre-service English teachers undergo a four-year training program to prepare for teaching in public elementary schools. The curriculum of the English Department includes linguistics, literature, and education courses. For this research, the 'History of English' course was selected due to its natural alignment with critical pedagogy principles, such as exploring the evolution of English in relation to power, empire, and cultural hegemony. Traditionally, this course examined the progression of the English language from its roots to global status, with emphasis on processes like language standardization and colonial policies. To suit the study's goals, the course was redesigned to explicitly integrate critical pedagogy through reflective journaling, problem-posing discussion, and critical analyses of linguistic imperialism and hierarchies.

Participants

Fifteen Arabic-English bilingual pre-service English teachers participated in the study. They were predominantly third-year students in their early twenties and were purposefully sampled based on their enrollment in the redesigned 'History of English' course and willingness to engage in reflective practices. While most participants had limited prior exposure to critical pedagogy, they expressed openness to exploring new approaches to teaching. Ethical approval was obtained before data collection, ensuring confidentiality through pseudonyms and secure data storage.

Data Collection Methods

A multi-method qualitative data collection strategy was utilized to provide a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of participants' evolving perceptions, combining reflective journals, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Reflective journals were maintained weekly by participants throughout the semester, enabling them to document their reflections on course readings, classroom discussions, and their own linguistic experiences. These journals were guided by structured prompts designed to provoke critical thinking and self-reflection, such as questions on how the history of English challenged their previous assumptions, the perceived

relationship between English and Arabic in personal and professional contexts, the implications of linguistic imperialism for their teaching roles, and creative strategies for teaching language diversity to younger students. The journals proved essential in fostering a deeper critical awareness among participants.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted at two key points: before the course began and after its completion. The pre-course interviews were designed to establish baseline perceptions, asking questions about participants' beliefs regarding the role of English in education and their views on the relationship between English and Arabic. Post-course interviews revisited these themes to document shifts in teaching philosophies and critical awareness, with questions focusing on their transformed understanding of the history of English and their confidence in applying critical pedagogy in their future classrooms.

Classroom observations further enriched the data by providing real-time insights into participants' engagement with problem-posing activities, discussions, and course materials. These observations captured the quality of dialogue, the nature of student participation, and practical applications of critical pedagogy principles, such as students' readiness to challenge assumptions and consider alternative linguistic paradigms. Field notes contextualized these observations, linking classroom dynamics to participants' expressed beliefs and behaviors. Together, these data collection methods ensured a robust and nuanced analysis, enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings as per Creswell and Poth (2018) and Lincoln and Guba (1985).

FINDINGS

Data were analyzed using iterative thematic analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which involved identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within the qualitative data. Interviews were transcribed, and journals and field notes were reviewed multiple times to ensure immersion in the data. Familiarization with the data began by reading and re-reading all sources to identify initial patterns and recurring ideas, followed by generating codes to label meaningful segments. These codes were then grouped into broader themes that aligned with the research questions, and themes were refined through a process of comparison and continuous revisiting to ensure they accurately reflected the data. The analysis focused on patterns related to critical consciousness, awareness of linguistic imperialism, evolving teaching philosophies, and practical strategies for inclusive language teaching. Strategies to enhance credibility included member checking, where participants were invited to review emerging themes; maintaining reflexive journals to document potential biases and assumptions; and employing data triangulation by comparing findings across interviews, reflective journals and classroom observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transformation of Teaching Philosophies

Participants initially viewed teaching as a teacher-centered process focused on transmitting standardized content. Over time, they recognized teaching as a transformative, dialogic act that empowers learners to question norms and connect language learning to their identities. Besma in a post-course interview noted that she “used to think teaching was about transferring knowledge, but now I see it as empowering students to question and discover.” This shift highlights a move from thinking of the English teacher’s role as a passive instructor to an approach that values and gives agency to the student.

In her post-course interview, Laila reflected on her own speech patterns, saying “I always felt the more American I sound, the better I will speak,” but now she is making an effort to pronounce her T’s to model linguistic authenticity and inclusivity. This evolution underscores a heightened awareness that personal teaching choices carry cultural weight.

Noor’s journey exemplified a similar transformation. Initially, her first journal entry stated that: “A teacher’s job is to explain the material clearly and make sure students understand,” but after completing an assignment on marginalized voices in English, she acknowledged that “teaching is not just about content; it’s about the message you send to students about whose voices matter. Likewise, Fay, who once equated good teaching with covering the entire textbook and perfect pronunciation, wrote that she “now believe[s] a good teacher helps students see value in their own language and cultural background.”

Deema recognized the importance of connecting students’ linguistic heritage to English learning, writing in her journal that “Arabic does not compete with English. Showing my students that English borrowed words from Arabic can make them proud of their own linguistic heritage.” Shaha, who previously focused on correcting every so-called error, admitted that she now “sees accents as resources, not problems.” Sara added in a post-course interview that “It is not just about grammar. It is about helping students understand why some languages hold prestige and others don’t.”

These shifts reflect not only changes in pedagogical strategies but also in moral and cultural considerations. Noor’s later journal entry revealed this ethical dimension: “I never thought about the moral side of teaching English. But now I see how promoting one variety over others can replicate old injustices.” Together, these reflections demonstrate that participants no longer perceived teaching as neutral. Instead, they embraced a more inclusive, dialogic, and ethically grounded philosophy—one that sets the stage for deeper critical consciousness, more deliberate reflective practices, and a commitment to social justice and linguistic pride in the sections that follow.

Development of Critical Consciousness

As participants engaged more deeply with the historical and socio-political dimensions of English, they grew increasingly aware of the unequal power relations embedded in language education. Besma wrote in her journal that the global dominance of the English language was “not just a story of Great Britain, but of power and pushing others aside.” Samah, writing in her journal admitted, “I used to think African English was somehow less correct, but now I see it’s just as meaningful and rich as any other variety, and this really challenged what I assumed about ‘proper English.’” Tamara linked past oppression to present-day linguistic rights movements, noting in her journal, “Hearing that Irish and Scottish activists support Palestinian linguistic rights shows how these struggles are connected across time and place.” Haya recognized English’s privileged position, reflecting in her journal, “I never realized how much we take English for granted as the main measure of ‘good education.’ This hidden idea changes how we value other languages and the people who speak them.”

Lateefa, who had initially focused primarily on pronunciation standards, admitted in a post-course interview, “I never questioned why we focus so much on certain accents. Now I see that by doing this, we ignore the histories and struggles behind other varieties. It’s like we are praising one version of English at the expense of many others.” Similarly, Maha wrote in her journal, “I used to think speaking in British or American English was the ultimate goal. But after learning about how colonization worked and how languages were sidelined, I realize that even here in Kuwait, we often treat Arabic like it’s second class in academic settings. That’s something I need to change.”

During a follow-up classroom observation toward the end of the course, Sara posed a question to her peers: “If English got where it is through so much historical force, how can we teach it kindly, so that students know it does not have to overshadow Arabic or their identities?” Taken together, these insights highlight the participants’ growing realization that English teaching cannot be separated from its complex and often troubling history. As the students realised through this learning, developing critical consciousness means continuously examining whose language practices are upheld and whose are sidelined.

Evolution of Reflective Practices

The findings identified that reflective journaling and problem-posing discussions evolved from being perceived as mere assignments to becoming essential tools for personal and professional growth. Initially, participants were skeptical about the value of reflection. As the course progressed, the act of reflection began to reveal shifts in their beliefs and teaching philosophies.

Noor experienced a significant transformation in her approach to reflective practice. In her first journal entry, she wrote, “A teacher’s job is to explain the material clearly and make sure students

understand.” This perspective changed after engaging with critical pedagogy concepts, leading her to reflect, “This activity made me realize that teaching is not just about content. It’s about the message you send to students about whose voices matter.”

Haya emphasized the communal aspect of reflection in her post-course interview, stating, “Sometimes reading another female student’s journal or hearing her talk made me think about my own ideas. We were opening each other’s eyes.” This sentiment was echoed during classroom observations where group reflection activities fostered a shared learning environment. For example, during a session on global varieties of English, Tamara asked, “Why do we only focus on American and British English? I never considered any other variety as correct before.” This question sparked a lively discussion, leading Lateefa to acknowledge her biases: “I’ve been so focused on speaking with the ‘correct’ accent—which is American for me—but now I see how limiting that is.”

Mona, who initially remained quiet during early discussions, reflected in her journal, “Reading my classmates’ journals and sharing my thoughts helped me see that I’m not alone in feeling uncertain. Reflection turned into a conversation with myself and others, guiding me to rethink my goals.”

May elaborated on her reflective journey, noting how revisiting earlier entries allowed her to trace her intellectual growth: “I looked back at my first journal entry. My mind was very limited to the basic two varieties of English. I had no idea that a global or international English existed. Now, after all these weeks of writing and thinking, I see each entry as a step toward understanding that multiple voices and ways of speaking can thrive in one classroom.”

Deema, despite initially finding journaling tedious, described it as transformative in her final journal entry: “It’s like looking in a mirror. When I heard my classmates talk about how some languages are treated unfairly, I realized I was doing something similar without knowing it. Writing about it helped me see that I was supporting these unfair ideas.”

These evolving and reflective practices were not isolated, but intertwined with participants' growing critical consciousness and commitment to a socially political awareness in teaching. By continuously evaluating their beliefs and methods, participants internalized critical pedagogy principles, fostering a deeper understanding of their roles as educators.

Emergence of a Commitment to Social Justice

As participants developed a deeper critical consciousness, their commitment to social justice became increasingly evident. They began to view teaching English not just as imparting language skills, but as an ethical responsibility to challenge and dismantle linguistic inequalities.

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Halla, who initially viewed social justice as an external concern, wrote in her final journal entry, “I never thought about how my teaching practices could either support or undermine social justice. Now, I see that every choice I make can either challenge or reinforce societal inequities.” Laila, who initially stated in a pre-course interview that English mastery was “the key to success,” later reassessed her perspective after analyzing the socio-political implications of enforcing linguistic norms. She wrote in her journal:

I always believed that learning English was the best and only way to succeed. Learning about the Celtic languages and how they were pushed aside by the use of English made me think about how we do the same thing today with other languages. I don't want my students to feel like their first language is less important than English.

Shaha, in her journal, acknowledged the ethical dimensions of language teaching: “If the ‘best’ English makes students feel bad about their accents or Arabic words, then it is not really best.” In a classroom discussion, she passionately expressed her commitment: “It’s not just about teaching English; it’s about showing respect for where they come from.”

These reflections demonstrate that participants began to see themselves as advocates for equity and social justice. They recognized that language education could either perpetuate or challenge existing power structures, and they committed to using their roles to foster more inclusive and fair educational environments.

Recognizing the Value of Arabic and Developing Linguistic Pride

As participants examined the global rise of English at the expense of other languages, they began to reflect on the status of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Although Kuwaiti Arabic remained their everyday means of communication, MSA often seemed distant, challenging, and overshadowed by English—particularly in scientific and academic fields. Confronted with historical examples of marginalized languages, participants began to recognize parallels in how MSA struggles to maintain its footing within educational and scholarly domains.

Sara, reflecting on the decline of Celtic languages, noted, “The way Celtic languages were treated reminded me of how Arabic is sometimes undervalued today.” While this realization initially encompassed Arabic as a whole, participants soon distinguished between Kuwaiti Arabic, their familiar mother tongue, and MSA, which held a special role as the formal, pan-Arabic standard.

Laila admitted in her journal, “I’ve always seen MSA as something I studied in school but never really ‘used.’ It felt difficult, too formal, and less practical than English.” Similarly, Noor recognized that her preference for English in academic contexts was not just due to English's global reach but also because MSA felt remote: “I realized I've been avoiding MSA because it's labeled as 'hard' and not 'useful' in my studies, making MSA seem outdated.”

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Haya confessed, “I remember struggling with scientific terms in MSA, feeling like I had to turn to English resources to understand complex ideas. Now I see how that habit makes MSA look weak, as if it does not handle modern knowledge.” Deema echoed this sentiment: “It’s not that MSA can not be used to express these ideas; it is that we have stopped giving it a chance. The more we rely on English, the more MSA use slips away from everyday life.”

May articulated a growing sense of responsibility to value MSA: “I always thought of MSA for exams and textbooks we barely studied. After learning about languages that lost their status over time, I feel like I should appreciate the MSA language more—not just in terms of my heritage, but as a language that can grow with our world, if we let it.”

May shared how the everyday use of Kuwaiti Arabic in messaging and typing contrasts sharply with MSA: “When I text my friends or post on social media, it’s all in Kuwaiti Arabic. Using MSA would feel stiff and unnatural, like I’m forcing myself to speak a language that doesn’t fit everyday life. It’s strange how the language that is supposed to represent us all now sounds too rigid and formal ,compared to the dialect we actually use.”

Through these reflections, participants confronted their internalized perceptions of MSA as less accessible, less adaptable, and less suited to modern scientific and academic discourse than English. Understanding that this mindset parallels how other languages have been dismissed and eventually marginalized, participants began to acknowledge the inherent worth of the MSA language. Recognizing MSA’s potential and cultural significance marked a step towards embracing their linguistic heritage more fully, challenging the narratives that pushed them to rely solely on English for intellectual pursuits.

Challenges in Adapting Critical Pedagogy for School Contexts

While participants were enthusiastic about integrating critical pedagogy into their teaching, they envisioned significant challenges in adapting these complex concepts for young learners. Balancing the depth of critical content with age-appropriate methods required creative solutions. Deema expressed her initial struggle during a classroom brainstorming session: “How do you explain something like linguistic imperialism to a 9-year-old? It feels too abstract.” She also lamented in a different instance her concern about the curriculum saying: “In elementary schools, there’s so much focus on exams and standardized teaching.” Samah acknowledged the constraints imposed by standardized curricula: “I don’t think there is room for us to put this theory into practice in real classrooms settings.”

Despite these obstacles, participants remained committed to finding effective methods. Monareflecting in her journal, noted, “I realize that I don’t have to use the word ‘imperialism’ at all. Maybe I can just ask: ‘Why do we think some languages are more special than others?’ and let students explore that idea through pictures, songs, or simple stories.”

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Lateefa connected critical concepts to familiar playground scenarios: “If I say that one group on the playground tried to force everyone to only play their game, kids understand that’s not fair. I can then connect that to how English sometimes tries to ‘be the only game’ in school.”

The use of storytelling was a popular strategy among many students. Sara proposed using it as a means to introduce critical concepts: “We could create a story about a child who speaks two languages and learns how both are valuable. It’s a way to teach inclusion without making it too heavy.” May proposed using storytelling to highlight Arabic’s influence on English, suggesting, “I could teach my students a story about how words like ‘algebra’ and ‘cotton’ came from Arabic. It is a way to show them that their language has contributed to the world.”

Noor suggested incorporating games where students identify loanwords in English and trace their origins: “It’s a fun way to teach them about language history and make them proud of their heritage.” Lateefa proposed playing videos featuring various English accents to demonstrate that English, “ belongs to everyone, not just one accent.”

Fay, during a group discussion, considered adapting historical examples: “I could show the children old maps, demonstrating how the use of English spread and ask them to imagine how children might have felt when their own language was undervalued. This might encourage them to empathize and understand unfairness without the use of heavy terminology.”

These reflections demonstrate that participants were developing creative, age-appropriate metaphors, visual aids, and interactive stories to make critical pedagogy understandable and engaging for young learners. Even within the constraints of standardized curricula and institutional expectations, they sought incremental ways to introduce critical concepts, ensuring that the essence of social justice and linguistic equity was conveyed effectively.

Linking Reflections Across Themes

The interconnections among the emergent themes—transformation of teaching philosophies, development of critical consciousness, evolution of reflective practices, commitment to social justice, fostering linguistic pride, and adapting critical pedagogy—were evident throughout the data. Participants’ growth in one area often influenced and reinforced their progress in the others.

Besma’s engagement in classroom discussions about global Englishes inspired her to reflect deeper in her journal: “Hearing about all the different Englishes and how it is global now and not owned by anyone made me question why I’ve always focused on American English. I want my students to see English as a global language, not just one way of speaking.”

Fay connected her insights from reflective journaling to her plans for fostering linguistic pride: “Writing about the marginalization of Celtic languages made me think about how we treat Arabic dialects. My classroom will celebrate every form of language.”

May summarized this connection in her post-course interview: “Learning about the history of English wasn’t just about facts—it was about understanding how language shapes identity. I’m so happy I learned these things now.” Deema, in an additional journal entry, emphasized how each theme reinforced the others: “My critical awareness pushes me to reflect on so many givens. I am a different person now and see languages in a new way.”

These interconnected reflections highlight that participants’ transformations were holistic and synergistic. Their evolving teaching philosophies served as a foundation upon which their critical consciousness, reflective habits, social justice commitments, linguistic pride initiatives, and innovative strategies for adapting critical pedagogy all rested and grew stronger together. This integrated growth underscores the comprehensive impact of embedding critical pedagogy into the History of English course, preparing participants to create more equitable, inclusive, and empowering educational environments.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the study demonstrate that embedding critical pedagogy in a History of English course can reshape pre-service teachers’ perspectives, leading to more inclusive, reflective, and socially-conscious practices. This section interprets the results in light of the literature and offers forward-looking insights, including the necessity of dedicated critical pedagogy courses, strategies to overcome resistance, and considerations for future sustainability.

Introducing Dedicated Critical Pedagogy Courses

The findings indicate that embedding critical pedagogy within a single course can initiate transformative thinking among pre-service teachers. However, relying on a brief introduction or partial integration may not provide the depth or continuity needed for sustainable change. Pre-service teachers benefit from extended opportunities to question, reflect upon, and internalize critical concepts, particularly when those concepts challenge longstanding norms and power structures in language education.

Al Riyami and Troudi’s (2020) examination of introducing critical pedagogy in Oman reveals that engaging teachers with critical principles can be a gradual and complex process, with shifts in attitudes and understandings emerging over time. Their work suggests that meaningful engagement with critical pedagogy involves more than cursory exposure—it requires consistent reflection, dialogue, and contextualization. Drawing on their insights, a dedicated Critical Pedagogy course could offer the sustained theoretical grounding, reflective activities, and practice-

oriented support essential for pre-service teachers to deeply internalize critical pedagogy principles. Such a course would allow future educators to move beyond initial interest toward genuinely transformative teaching philosophies and classroom practices.

Overcoming Challenges and Resistance

While the findings of this study highlight the potential for transformative thinking among pre-service teachers, they also reveal that translating critical pedagogical concepts into actual classroom practice can be challenging. Educators may hesitate to fully embrace critical methodologies due to deeply ingrained norms and traditional views of the teacher's role. Hamdi (2023), for example, discusses how language educators, despite recognizing the value of developing critical perspectives, often remain influenced by established perceptions of authority and the supposed neutrality of education. These conventional beliefs can make it difficult for educators to shift away from teacher-centered approaches toward more dialogic, learner-empowering frameworks.

To overcome these challenges, sustained support and mentorship from teacher educators, along with institutional backing, may be essential. Providing spaces for ongoing reflection, dialogue with peers, and exploration of socio-political dimensions in language teaching can gradually reduce resistance. Such efforts can help teachers move beyond initial discomfort or skepticism, ultimately enabling them to integrate critical pedagogy principles more confidently and effectively into their future classrooms.

Future Directions: Sustainability and Impact

The study's findings underscore the transformative potential of critical pedagogy, while also highlight the complexity of sustaining these changes over time. Building on the insights of studies that explore teachers' evolving perspectives and challenges (e.g., Alateeq, 2020; Hamdi, 2023), future research could examine how graduates of critical pedagogy-infused programs navigate institutional pressures and maintain their critical commitments throughout their professional lives. Such longitudinal inquiries would reveal the durability of initial transformations and the support structures needed to reinforce reflective, socially conscious teaching practices.

Pilot programs introducing dedicated critical pedagogy courses targeted for English language teachers could also be evaluated, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to assess their impact on fostering educators who are both theoretically grounded and practically-oriented toward social justice; that being recognition of previous inequalities, to foster positive discourse in their classrooms. Additionally, drawing on frameworks like postcolonial theory (Canagarajah, 2005), translanguaging pedagogies (García & Wei, 2014), and critical applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001) may deepen our understanding of the interplay among language,

power, and identity, guiding more nuanced and context-responsive applications of critical pedagogy in teacher education.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how embedding critical pedagogy into a History of English course influenced pre-service teachers' teaching philosophies, critical consciousness, reflective practices, and appreciation for linguistic diversity. Participants recognized that language teaching is not neutral, and that by acknowledging power dynamics and cultural identities, they can foster more inclusive and empowering classrooms.

While these findings highlight the potential of integrating critical pedagogy, the Discussion section detailed how a dedicated Critical Pedagogy course, overcoming challenges and resistance, and ensuring long-term sustained use of new methodologies may further enhance outcomes. Such institutional commitments, professional development, and ongoing research are needed to support transformative teaching that values students' linguistic and cultural identities and challenges linguistic imperialism.

By institutionalizing critical pedagogy, teacher education programs can help future educators navigate linguistic complexity and cultural diversity, contributing to a more just and equitable educational landscape.

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