
Empowering Future Teachers: Cultivating Critical Thinking in Student-Led Sociolinguistic Classrooms in Kuwait

Reem AlRubaie and Badria Alhaji

English Department, College of Basic Education, The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, Kuwait

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Abstract: *This study explores the role of student-led classrooms in developing critical thinking, sociolinguistic awareness, and collaborative skills among pre-service English teachers in Kuwait. Employing a qualitative case study design, it examines the application of active learning in a sociolinguistic educational context. The results indicate that this approach enhances critical engagement with sociolinguistic issues, fosters analytical abilities, and promotes collaboration through peer feedback. However, challenges such as resistance to new methodologies, varying language proficiency, and institutional constraints underscore the need for structured support and alignment with institutional objectives. With the necessary adjustments in place to support teachers and students alike, the findings highlight the transformative potential of active learning. With consideration of the challenges highlighted, as well as room for flexibility to respond to issues arising throughout the course, this paper proposes strategies to tailor the active learning model to the specificity of Kuwait's educational environment. Furthermore, proposing that future studies should examine its long-term effects and explore cross-cultural and digital adaptations.*

Keywords: Student-led classrooms, critical thinking, sociolinguistics, teacher education.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching sociolinguistics to pre-service English teachers requires engaging methods that explore the relationship between language and society. Traditional lecture formats often focus on memorization, thus mitigating the importance and necessity of dialogue as a key tool for progress, and consequently evade opportunity to foster a deeper understanding of linguistic and cultural issues (Freire, 2007; Brookfield, 2013). Globalization's impact on education is particularly relevant in Kuwait, where English dominates academic and professional spheres, often side-lining the use of Arabic (Wright, 2024). These linguistic imbalances can perpetuate hierarchies that influence education, workplace dynamics, and cultural identity, thus it is essential for educators to address these issues (Johnson, 2020).

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This paper demonstrates that, as an alternative approach, the more student-led classroom encourages active learning through discussions, peer engagement, and reflection. This constructivist strategy fosters collaboration and deepens understanding of sociolinguistic topics and thus impacts on the student's ability to become a more confidently reflective, active educator within their classroom settings.

Despite the necessary increased cognitive effort that has been associated with the strategy, active learning has been shown to improve academic performance, engagement, and analytical skills (Deslauriers et al., 2023; Prince, 2004). Peer feedback further enhances learning by allowing students to refine their ideas through dialogue, helping to overcome challenges like language proficiency and hesitancy toward participation (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review explores the theoretical and practical foundations of the research, focusing on three themes: constructivist learning principles, the integration of analytical skills in sociolinguistics education, and challenges of student-driven teaching methods in multilingual settings.

Constructivist Learning Principles

Constructivist learning theory underpins the teaching methods used in this study, emphasizing that students actively build their knowledge through hands-on experiences, meaningful interactions, and reflective practices. This challenges traditionally passive learning models and places students at the centre of their educational journey (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996). Through this approach, learners gain autonomy, collaborate effectively, and engage more in-depth with course material. Furthermore, active learning strategies proved particularly successful to improve student learning outcomes, affecting the students' cognitive-behavioural engagement, and thus fostering analytical thinking and stimulating meaningful discussions and ultimately enhancing their learning (Lim et al., 2023). The key theoretical principles of constructivism guide this transformation. Active engagement ensures students connect learning to real-world contexts, applying their knowledge practically (Bruner, 1996). Collaborative dialogue enriches understanding through peer and instructor interactions, encouraging the shared creation of ideas (Vygotsky, 1978). Guided support from educators' scaffold learning, to then gradually step back from the learning as students grow more independent (Wood et al., 1976). Reflective analysis helps students solidify their understanding by evaluating their thought processes and experiences (Brookfield, 2013).

These are principles, manifested in classroom practices, that shift from teacher-centred to student-centred learning. Students lead discussions, facilitate presentations, and actively participate in shaping their educational experience, thus promoting accountability and engagement among learners. In sociolinguistics education, this method enables students to tackle complex topics such as linguistic diversity, language planning, and the societal impacts of language hierarchies, preparing them to address these issues with greater insight and understanding (Ricento, 2020). Thus, providing further evidence that student-led interactions foster critical thinking and deeper learning (Weimer, 2013).

In sociolinguistics education, analytical and reflective skills are crucial for teachers, in order to understand and address the socio-political aspects of language in multilingual contexts. These skills allow learners to critically evaluate assumed knowledge, to engage practically with evidence, and reflect on a range of viewpoints and perspectives. Thus, giving them the tools to challenge linguistic hierarchies and promote inclusive practices (Brookfield, 2013).

Critical thinking helps educators engage with complex issues like the socio and political impact of globalization on local languages and how language hierarchies operate. Teachers trained with these skills are able to identify inequities in language policies and propose inclusive solutions (Phillipson, 2018), while studies prove that integrating critical thinking in sociolinguistics can enhance the student's engagement and ability to reflect on their understanding (Brookfield, 2013; Zhao et al., 2023).

Evidence suggests that social interactions between peers and teachers can shape learning and foster deeper engagement for both parties, allowing students to question beliefs and reflect critically on their broader learning experience (Hanna et al., 2010). In sociolinguistics, concepts like linguistic rights, language and identity, require reflective engagement to understand their relevance in educational contexts (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013; Phillipson, 2018) Teacher education programs that prioritize such skills support future educators to critically examine language-related issues, thus fostering more inclusive and equitable practices-and thus co-operative learning amongst students - in multilingual classrooms (Brookfield, 2013; Gillies & Bowle, 2008).

Student-Centred Classrooms as a Catalyst for Cognitive Engagement

Student-centred classrooms evidently foster a more enhanced, cognitive engagement through active learning. Learner-driven discussions encourage students to articulate ideas, engage with differing perspectives, and critically analyse evidence presented to them, thus deepening their understanding of sociolinguistics (Weimer, 2013). Peer feedback is crucial in this process, as it encourages the student to reconsider their views and engage more meaningfully with the material (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

A student-centred approach further supports the development of higher-order thinking skills. In such instances, students are required to not only maintain information, but also apply, evaluate, and synthesize this knowledge into real-world contexts. By taking ownership of their learning, the student can move beyond passive absorption to active enquiry, asking questions and exploring connections between theoretical concepts and practical applications. For example, in sociolinguistics, students might analyse the implications that language policies have on cultural identity, linking abstract theories to tangible societal issues (Phillipson, 2018). This process aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of active knowledge construction, where engagement with real-world problems enhances cognitive development. By doing so, students

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK cultivate a deeper intellectual curiosity and a greater ability to approach complex problems with a critical and reflective mindset (Brookfield, 2013).

Additionally, student-centred classrooms create an inclusive and dynamic learning environment that values diverse perspectives. As students from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds share their experiences, they contribute unique insights that enrich collective understanding (Brookfield, 2013). Structured activities like peer-led debates or group projects on sociolinguistic phenomena further promote active participation and collaboration, helping students refine their analytical and communicative skills (Weimer, 2013). Such collaborative exchange not only enhances individual learning but also fosters a sense of community and mutual respect. Furthermore, feedback mechanisms, as emphasized by Hattie and Timperley (2007), ensure that students reflect on their work and that of their peers, fostering growth and deeper understanding. Ultimately, this model equips learners with the cognitive tools needed to navigate and address sociolinguistic challenges effectively in their future professional contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed an action research methodology to explore how classroom practices engage pre-service English teachers with sociolinguistic issues and promote higher-order thinking. The iterative, participatory nature of action research allowed for continuous adaptation and collaboration between participants and the instructor-researcher (Stringer, 2014). The design for this study followed a cyclical approach, addressing practical challenges within a sociolinguistics course, while emphasizing the learning benefits of participatory collaboration, reflective practices, and context-specific solutions (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Approaching the scenario as a form of critical social science, through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, the instructor refined strategies to meet participants' needs while addressing the bilingual realities of the education system (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), with feedback-driven adaptations deepening engagement with sociolinguistic concepts.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

- How do interactive learning strategies promote engagement with sociolinguistic concepts among pre-service English teachers in Kuwait?
- How does peer interaction support these methods and enhance comprehension of sociolinguistic topics?
- What challenges arise in implementing active learning strategies, and how can they be effectively addressed in a sociolinguistics course?

Participants

The study involved 35 pre-service English teachers at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in linguistic backgrounds, academic abilities, and teaching aspirations (Patton, 2005). Each participants acted as co-researchers, identifying challenges, proposing solutions, and reflecting on outcomes, thus contributing to their learning process (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). The instructor facilitated discussions and guided reflection, fostering a supportive environment for inquiry.

Data Collection Tools

A multimodal approach was used, combining semi-structured interviews, reflective journaling, classroom observations, and document analysis. Critical reflection and use of triangulation to compare evidence from multiple sources to assess the students' learning captured the diverse perspectives and fostered comprehensive insights (Mertler, 2021).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted at various stages to document participants' evolving experiences. While consistency was necessary, a certain flexible structure allowed exploration of emergent themes, while ensuring the ability to respond to any issues, should they emerge throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Key questions included:

- "How has your background and experiences influenced your understanding of sociolinguistic issues?"
- "What structural, methodological or practical improvements would you suggest for the overall learning experience?"

Transcripts were thematically coded to explore participants' reflections.

Classroom Observations

Observations focused on engagement patterns, problem-solving behaviours, and challenges with new learning approaches. The instructor, acting as participant-observer, facilitated discussions while maintaining a reflective stance (Stringer, 2014). Notes highlighted engagement with sociolinguistic topics, collaborative problem-solving, and challenges during the transition to new methodologies.

Reflective Journals

Weekly journals allowed participants to document experiences, insights, and challenges, providing a tool for self-assessment and collaborative inquiry. Analysis of the journals revealed recurring themes such as personal growth in leadership, the impact of peer interactions, and strategies for overcoming language challenges.

Document Analysis

Student-generated materials, including discussion plans, presentations, and peer feedback notes, were analysed to assess critical engagement with sociolinguistic issues. These documents provided tangible evidence of participants' learning and informed reflective discussions during the action research cycles.

Data Analysis

The study utilizes thematic analysis and a flexible qualitative method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process began with initial coding, where data was organized into distinct patterns such as “collaborative dialogue” and “adaptation to multilingual dynamics.” These patterns were then synthesized into broader themes, including “empowerment through active learning,” which highlights how participants gained confidence and autonomy as the trial progressed; “navigating linguistic diversity” reflected upon the student’s engagement with multilingual challenges; and “overcoming challenges in collaborative participation” focuses on how students addressed obstacles in group dynamics. To ensure reliability, the findings were validated by sharing them with participants for collaborative interpretation and refinement, promoting a co-constructed understanding of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The cyclical nature of action research grounded these themes in the participants’ experiences, offering actionable insights to enhance collaborative learning practices in multilingual settings in the future.

RESULTS

The findings offer a comprehensive understanding of how innovative teaching strategies influenced the professional development of pre-service English teachers.

The study involved 35 participants, with seven maintaining reflective journals that provided further insights into their learning experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 participants, capturing their evolving perspectives. The remaining students contributed through active participation in classroom discussions, highlighting the dynamics and challenges of the pedagogical approach.

By integrating interviews, observations, journals, and document analysis, the study could explore the use of constructive knowledge in key areas such as enhanced analytical reasoning,

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK alongside approaches to support adaptation to new learning methodologies, also looking at how to address the challenges faced when working towards implementation.

Theme 1: Advancing Analytical Reasoning in Sociolinguistic Contexts

Active participation in classroom discussions foster the development of analytical reasoning among pre-service English teachers. By engaging with complex sociolinguistic issues such as linguistic imperialism and bilingual education policies, a shift occurred in the students' interpretation from surface-level understanding to the ability for deeper critical analysis. Data from interviews, classroom observations, reflective journals, and student work consistently highlighted this transformation, with students increasingly able to examine topics from multiple perspectives and connect abstract theories to real-world implications.

The students' roles as discussion leaders were particularly impactful in enhancing critical engagement. One participant described the experience as transformative: *"I thought language policies were just rules, but this discussion helped me to see how they affect people, like students in bilingual schools. I realized that these policies could support one group more than another"* (S1). Similarly, another student reflected on how examining diglossia deepened their understanding of language as a tool for identity: *"When I was learning about the use of diglossia in learning, I started thinking about how the different Arabic dialects I speak are part of my life."* (S3).

Peer interactions also played a critical role, as students challenged each other's perspectives, promoting self-reflection and intellectual growth. One student noted: *"When my classmates disagreed with my ideas, I started questioning myself. It wasn't always comfortable, but it helped me improve as a learner"* (S4).

The collaborative nature of peer-led discussions further emphasized the students' role in fostering intellectual growth. One student described this experience: *"Leading a discussion is not just about talking, but also about listening to others. When my classmates questioned my views, it made me think again about things I thought I already knew"* (S6). Another reflection highlighted how these discussions bridged theoretical understanding with cultural identity: *"When I was talking about bilingual education policies, it helped me realize how culture and language are connected. I didn't realise before how much these policies shape our identity"* (S7). These testimonies exemplify how the students were able to use sociolinguistic themes as a lens to explore broader cultural and identity-related implications, solidifying their grasp of abstract concepts.

Classroom observations revealed similar dynamics, where discussions brought theoretical ideas to life through practical debates. For instance, during one session on linguistic imperialism, a student questioned: *"By focusing on English, are we not ignoring the cultural value of Arabic? What does this teach younger generations about their identity?"* (S2). This sparked a lively debate, with another student arguing: *"I know that Arabic is important, but English is helpful for getting better jobs"* (S8). Discussion on code-switching and diglossia

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK further demonstrated students' ability to connect sociolinguistics concepts to their lived experiences. One student reflected: *"Using both English and Arabic is normal, but it also raises the question of whether one language is more important than the other"* (S9).

Students further examined the impact of educational practices, with one student asking: *"Who decides which languages are used in education?"* (S15). The conversation then shifted to the challenges within bilingual education policies: *"There aren't enough resources for both Arabic and English, so it feels like we have to choose one over the other."* (S17) Finally, discussions addressed the effects of globalization on language and identity: *"Are we meeting global needs, or are we losing something important about our identity?"* (S25).

The recognition of the socio-political aspects of language were echoed in peer debates on linguistic imperialism: *"At first, I didn't want to question my ideas, but after hearing others made me rethink what I knew. It wasn't easy, but it made me feel more confident to see certain experiences differently"* (S19). Reflections on bilingual education further expanded this understanding: *"When I was growing up, I didn't think about why we learned both Arabic and English. After this course, I now see it is because of global pressures and the need to balance our identity with what is practical"* (S22). Furthermore, in the same vein, the peer-centred discussion on the use of diglossia added another layer to the students' insights on the topic of linguistic imperialism: *"When I was studying diglossia, I realized I use Modern Standard Arabic and my dialect in different ways."* (S31), thus encouraging students to question certain norms in current educational policy. Ultimately, these reflections collectively illustrate how the course enabled students to connect personal experiences with academic concepts, fostering a nuanced understanding of sociolinguistic dynamics. In addition, these dialogues collectively showcased the students' evolving analytical skills and their ability to interlink theoretical concepts with the practical implications in the learning environment.

A review of the students' reflective journals provided further insight into students' intellectual growth. Documenting how the experience of engaging with sociolinguistic themes reshaped their assumptions and understanding of language practice, one student reflected: *"I used to think code-switching was to sound fancy, but now I understand that it helps people to show their identity in different social situations"* (S5). Another entry highlighted the political implications of language policies in Kuwait: *"When I was preparing for my discussion, I learned that language policies in Kuwait are not only about education. They are also political and show how global trends decide which languages are important"* (S11).

The progression in students' peer feedback provided a tangible record of their analytical growth over the course. Early on, comments were mostly general, for example: *"The presentation was good."* By the end of the study, feedback reflected deeper engagement and analytical skills: *"Your analysis of code-switching is good, but it would be better if you connect it to equal access in education"* (S5). Furthermore, towards the end of the course the peer feedback continued to display higher-order thinking: *"Your point about bilingual education is good, but have you considered the problem of ensuring you give enough resources to make it work?"* (S31). As the students' academic work, in and out of the classroom, evolved over the course,

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there was also a clear shift from summarization to nuanced analysis, with students able to connect theoretical concepts to practical, societal challenges and offer thoughtful critiques and solutions to their peers.

Scaffolding methods were used to ease students into leadership roles, with essential guidance being provided at the beginning of the course. Thus, all students were more able to participate through written and spoken work to advance their analytical reasoning capabilities. A student noted that, *“Receiving a vocabulary list was helpful. It gave me the words I needed to explain difficult ideas during discussions”* (S26). Another shared, *“The templates didn’t just help with organization—they gave me a way to start thinking”* (S27). As these supports were gradually reduced, students began to take ownership of their learning. One observed, *“At first, I felt like I needed the examples, but by the third discussion I realized I could come up with my own ideas without depending on them”* (S29). The instructor’s feedback was another key element, with tailored support offering constructive methods for improvement, as one student writes: *“When I struggled, I got help to work on my weak points, and it made a big difference”* (S35). These strategies not only reduced students’ anxiety around the learning and their ability to present in class, but also prepared them to handle increasingly complex topics with confidence and independence.

Theme 2: Navigating Methodological Shifts

Adapting to a participatory classroom structure initially presented challenges, but ultimately led to significant behavioural and cognitive transformations among participants. Students evolved from reluctant to active engagement, with noticeable growth in confidence and independence throughout the course.

Early observations revealed a hesitancy among students to assume leadership roles. One student confessed, *“I didn’t want to speak because I thought my ideas weren’t good enough”* (S10). Another admitted, *“It was easier to stay quiet and let others lead because I wasn’t sure if what I said would be correct”* (S11). However, as the course advanced, behavioural shifts became evident. A student reflected, *“At first, I just listened, but when others shared personal examples, I realized I had similar experiences to share”* (S13). During a session on language attitudes, a student contributed for the first time and later explained, *“I decided to share my story about my language use at home, and it felt like my classmates really understood me”* (S14). By mid-semester, participation had become more equitable when working alongside their peers and offering their opinions. One student remarked, *“I finally understood that even if I didn’t have all the answers, asking questions could still keep the discussion going”* (S18). Consequently, by the end of the course, students expressed a sense of ownership over their learning journey. One reflected, *“Being part of these discussions showed me that every point of view adds something important, even if it’s not perfect”* (S20). These accounts underscore the gradual behavioural and cognitive shifts that transformed the classroom into a more collaborative and engaged learning environment.

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The reflective journals offered further insight into the experience of student participation, with the writer's revealing valuable insights into their evolving perspectives and growing confidence. One student wrote, *"At first, I thought leading discussions would show my weaknesses, but it actually showed me how much I already knew"* By the end of the course, entries reflected a sense of accomplishment. A student noted, *"Taking the lead made me feel more confident speaking in front of others and standing up for my ideas"* (S22). Another articulated a personal transformation, stating, *"Before this course, I would avoid sharing my thoughts, but now I enjoy it"* (S31).

In some journals, students reflected on how writing their journal entries helped them to process their experiences and thus enhance their ability to become active learners in the classroom thus evidencing the impact of the methodological shift impacting on individual learner experience. A student noted: *"Writing about what I learned helped me see those connections that I had not previously noticed during the discussions"* (S32). Another highlighted a pivotal moment, saying, *"After writing about linguistic rights in my journal, I realized how much politics affects education"* (S34). The journals captured both challenges and breakthroughs for each student who contributed their personal thoughts to the experiment, illustrating how students were able to navigate and overcome their initial doubts, gaining analytical and expressive skills in the process.

The transition to a more participatory learning approach required careful handling of cultural norms and expectations. One student reflected, *"At first, I was shy, but I learned that our participation made the discussions better"* (S1). Another stated, *"I wasn't used to challenging others' ideas in class, but with help, it got easier over time"* (S4). Peer collaboration emerged as a critical factor in the adjustment process. A student noted, *"When I didn't know how to handle a topic, working with my group gave me ideas and made me feel more confident"* (S13). Another shared, *"During one discussion, my classmates gave me tips on how to ask my questions better, which helped the conversation go smoothly"* (S16). The supportive environment also fostered resilience. One participant remarked, *"When I made a mistake during my presentation, my peers didn't criticize—they helped me know how to do better next time"* (S20). Another reflected on the emotional impact, saying, *"After knowing others had the same struggles, I felt less alone and was motivated to keep trying"* (S27). The instructor's sensitivity to cultural dynamics was instrumental in easing the transition. One student observed: *"Hearing about why this new approach was being used helped me to understand why it was important to join in and share my thoughts"* (S34). This blend of collaboration and cultural awareness created an environment where students could thrive despite initial challenges.

Theme 3: Challenges in Language Proficiency

The exploration of language proficiency variability and peer feedback highlighted notable challenges in the use of English, revealing areas where both students and the instructor had to adapt. Disparities in English proficiency levels often created barriers to equal participation of the students. Observations captured moments where proficient English speakers dominated discussions, leaving their less confident peers hesitant to contribute. One student reflected:

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“Sometimes, I feel like my vocabulary isn’t good enough to keep up with others, so I stay quiet unless I’m sure of what to say” (S22). Similarly, another student shared, *“When someone uses hard words, I want to join in, but I’m embarrassed” (S23).*

Entries in the reflective journals provided further insight on this issue. One student wrote, *“I am always worried about my grammar. In smaller groups, I felt more comfortable sharing my ideas because it was less nerve-wracking!” (S19).* Another student expressed frustration, stating: *“It’s not that I don’t have ideas, but I have difficulty in finding the right words in English. This sometimes makes me feel left out” (S22).*

To address this, several strategies were implemented that student found helpful. One example being sentence starters, as one student noted: *“After getting sentence starters, I felt more confident to speak because I didn’t have to worry as much about making mistakes” (S31).* Another student commented on the benefit of smaller group discussions in gaining confidence in sharing one’s opinions: *“In smaller groups, I didn’t feel as much pressure to be perfect, and I noticed that even the quieter classmates started sharing their ideas” (S32).* One student reflected on the value of vocabulary lists, saying, *“Knowing key terms prior to the learning helped me to understand the topic and made it easier to prepare and join the discussions. It also gave me more confidence to speak” (S34).*

In summary, language proficiency variability emerged as a significant challenge throughout the course and evidently influenced the participation vocal dynamics within discussions. However, targeted interventions such as sentence starters, vocabulary lists, and small group activities created opportunities for less confident students to contribute meaningfully. These strategies not only eased anxiety but also fostered an inclusive learning environment where diverse voices could be heard, enabling all participants to engage more effectively.

Peer Feedback Quality

The varying quality of peer feedback posed another challenge, with initial feedback often lacking depth. A student noted in their journal: *“At the beginning, I didn’t know how to give feedback other than saying ‘Good job’ or pointing out obvious mistakes” (S5).* One student echoed this sentiment, writing, *“It’s not easy to give feedback to someone, because it’s hard to know how to say it in a helpful way. You don’t want to sound rude or mean” (S11).* Midway through the course, the introduction of rubrics significantly improved the specificity and usefulness of feedback. A student remarked, *“The rubric helped me to understand exactly what to look for when checking my classmates’ work. It made giving feedback easier and less stressful because I knew what to focus on, and my comments felt more useful” (S12).* Another observed the impact of this change, stating: *“After we started using the rubric, the feedback I got was much clearer. My classmates told me specific things I could do to make my arguments better, which really helped me improve” (S17).*

The journals revealed nuanced perspectives on how students navigated the challenges of giving and receiving constructive feedback. A student noted: *“At first, I was afraid to give feedback because I didn’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings. But when I used the rubric, it showed me how to give advice in a way that was helpful and not too harsh. It made me feel more confident*

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about sharing my thoughts” (S5). One student shared: *“Writing feedback in English was difficult for me, but it made me think more deeply about the topic. I had to choose my words carefully, which helped me to understand the ideas better”* (S11).

Some entries reflected on the personal impact of receiving feedback. One student wrote, *“When someone pointed out a mistake in my argument, I felt embarrassed at first, but then I understood they were right. It made me want to improve and do better next time”* (S19). Another student described how peer feedback changed their approach to discussions, stating: *“After getting detailed comments on my outline, I began to think more carefully about how to organize my ideas. It helped me see where I needed to improve and how to make my arguments clearer”* (S22).

The journals also revealed the growth in language proficiency through practice. One student remarked, *“Giving feedback was helpful for both talking and writing in English”* (S32). A student reflected on the collaborative process, saying, *“Feedback wasn’t just about fixing mistakes. It was also about learning from what others said and how they think. By listening to them, I could understand things better and improve my own work”* (S34).

By engaging with the challenges of giving and receiving feedback and to consider this through personal reflection in their journals, the students developed not only their language skills but also a greater appreciation for constructive collaboration and self-improvement.

SUMMARY OF RESULT

The study revealed that, by shifting classroom practices, introducing methodologies that created a scenario for active, student-led learning, deeper intellectual engagement and enhanced analytical abilities were attained among pre-service English teachers. Students were encouraged to develop advanced reasoning skills, while language proficiency and the quality of peer feedback was nurtured and supported, resulting in positive teacher and student results as recorded in interviews and journal writing. Initially, students exhibited hesitancy in taking active roles, often deferring to peers or instructors. Over time, however, they became more confident navigating complex sociolinguistic topics, reflecting significant growth in their capacity to analyse and evaluate real-world issues both in their learning and in their reflection.

One key finding was the disparity in language proficiency, which often led to an imbalanced participation in discussions. Students with stronger English skills were often more vocal in the classroom setting, while less proficient peers were, at first, often hesitated to contribute. Structured strategies, such as vocabulary lists, sentence starters, and the use of a smaller group discussion format helped create a more inclusive environment for learning and enabled equitable participation.

The evolution of peer feedback emerged as another area of significance. Early comments tended to be vague and general, but the introduction of rubrics improved the specificity and depth of critiques and as a result, leading to more generally active, student-led learning. The quality of student work improved significantly, which was identified as resulting most

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significant from the collaborative learning environment, which significantly fostered by mutual accountability and shared growth.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of tailored interventions to address the challenges faced by educators during the course. This coincided with an emphasis on fostering independent thought, collaboration, and analytical rigor among learners.

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the findings within the frameworks of constructivist pedagogy and sociolinguistics education, focusing on the role of participatory teaching strategies to foster engagement with complex sociolinguistic concepts. It highlights the successes, challenges, and implications for teacher training within multilingual contexts.

The study demonstrates that learner-driven methodologies effectively enhance students' engagement with sociolinguistic issues, such as linguistic rights, language policies, and linguistic imperialism. Through active involvement in discussions and debates, students were able to critically analyse and challenge these concepts. This aligns with the views of Brookfield (2013), who emphasizes the importance of dialogic learning environments when attempting to foster deep critical engagement. Furthermore, the observed improvements in the depth of student arguments aligned with Bruner's (1996) theory that active participation enhances knowledge construction. The findings also show that students gradually adapted to leadership roles, illustrating the effectiveness of scaffolding and supportive guidance, as proposed by Vygotsky (1978). This process was facilitated by structured templates and guiding questions, which helped ease resistance and build confidence.

As evidenced, challenges arose from variations in language proficiency and inconsistent peer feedback, which are consistent with Cummins' (2000) research on multilingual education. These challenges were addressed through structured support mechanisms such as feedback rubrics and pre-discussion vocabulary aids, which improved the quality of peer evaluations. This approach also aligns with Zhao et al.'s (2023) research on the role of structured guidance in enhancing peer feedback.

The importance of addressing linguistic hierarchies in sociolinguistics education was also highlighted. Collaborative discussions allowed pre-service teachers to critically examine issues such as the dominance of English and the marginalization of minority languages, preparing students to advocate for more inclusive language policies. These discussions, including critiques of Kuwait's bilingual education system, demonstrate how reflective teaching can challenge existing norms and promote linguistic inclusivity.

Finally, the findings underscore the value of constructivist pedagogy in multilingual educational contexts. By engaging students in active, collaborative learning, participatory classrooms align with best practices for fostering critical thinking in diverse settings. These findings align with Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions theory, which suggests that transitioning from hierarchical to participatory learning systems requires cultural sensitivity and strategic support. Strategies such as differentiated instruction and collaborative learning

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK can help educators manage linguistic diversity and better prepare them for the challenges of multilingual classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The evidence demonstrates the potential of student-led classrooms in fostering critical thinking among pre-service English teachers in sociolinguistics education. By involving the whole class in leadership roles, peer feedback, and collaborative learning practices, students were enabled to critically analyse concepts such as linguistic hierarchies, language policies, and identity. Active participation and reflective learning methods helped students gain confidence in participation, thus offering a more nuanced and sophisticated engagement with theories, which further enhanced a deeper understanding of complex sociolinguistic issues.

Despite initial resistance, the students successfully transitioned to leadership roles, illustrating the effectiveness of scaffolding in promoting engagement and improving academic performance. While language proficiency variability and inconsistent peer feedback posed significant challenges, targeted interventions like pre-discussion scaffolding and feedback rubrics helped mitigate these obstacles. The findings align with constructivist principles, emphasizing autonomy, collaboration, and reflection in teacher training. Also highlighted was the need for culturally sensitive, context-specific strategies to implement participatory methodologies in multilingual and multicultural educational settings, thus tailoring the model to the specificity of the educational environment. Consequently, with the necessary adjustments to support teachers and students alike, the student-led active learning model can have a transformative positive impact, offering students the multivarious tools required to be the educational leaders of the future.

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