

# **Critical Analysis of the Participatory Approach in the English Language Teacher Education Program**

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## **Abstract**

*Teaching and learning of any language are inherently rooted in politics and power relations. Language education wields a double-edge sword, promising empowerment, emancipation, and transformation on the one hand, while simultaneously becoming a precarious instrument for marginalization and oppression on the other. Consequently, the dominant position of English becomes even more momentous. English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) serves as the focal point to analyze the politics of English and the implementation of the Participatory Approach and Critical Pedagogy within the ELTE program. This study delved into the critical, social, and democratic reflections of the praxis of the ELTE program in Türkiye. Primary data were collected through interviews conducted with instructors and students participating in the program. Additional data from selected program documents were analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed a conspicuous deficiency in discourse addressing social inequities and the corollary issues of power and identity associated with English. Despite the absence of explicit participatory approach principles and methods in the examined ELTE program, it demonstrated promising*

*potential to operationalize these principles and methods. This potential can be attributed to the existing critical awareness of instructors and ELTE students regarding their social realities, despite the harsh political climate of Türkiye.*

**Keywords:** *critical pedagogy, critical language pedagogy, critical language teacher education, critical language awareness, problem-posing education*

## **Introduction**

Positioned at the center of power relations, English language teaching (ELT) has historically been related to politics. Depending on the sociocultural and economic context, ELT has different connotations (Pennycook, 2016; Cummins and Davison, 2007; Kramsch, 2019; Kubota, 2021). Yet, English, recognized as the international language of power, plays a pivotal role in global communication (Tollefson, 2000; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011; Montgomery, 2013). The power of the English lies in its colonialist roots, which are reinforced by globalization and neoliberalism, and in its strong connection to popular culture and technology (Pennycook, 2016; Hsu, 2017).

English as an international language (EIL) brings about complex realities and challenges. The primary challenge that EIL brings is the hegemony of English, also known as linguistic imperialism, over other languages and cultures, which has been perpetuated by colonialism and systemic inequities. It leads to the violation of linguistic and social boundaries (Pennycook, 2007; Phillipson, 1992, 2009; Macedo, Dendrinos and Gounari, 2016; Reagan, 2018; Macedo, 2019). English as the language of powerful nations promotes a hierarchical relationship between the

weak and the strong. This dynamic is perpetuated by as all forms of imperialism, including linguistic imperialism, which are incited by the exercise of power at the transnational level, leading to geopolitical consequences (Le Ha, 2008; Canagarajah and Said, 2011; Pennycook, 2017).

Conversely, EIL fosters specific realities that provide valuable insights into global social issues. In times of crisis and emergency, the presence of a critical voice is paramount for the cultivation of appreciation for diverse cultural values and the promotion of recognition of global exploitation and inequity within educational environments. This is particularly crucial for marginalized or oppressed. In such circumstances, English can be utilized to establish an environment characterized by criticality, empowerment, resistance, emancipation, and peace by developing counter-narratives for the global public (Le Ha, 2008; Imperiale, 2023).

English language teacher education (ELTE), in its essence, has always been intrinsically intertwined with colonial and humanist discourses. Posthumanist applied linguists, such as Pennycook (2018) and Toohey (2024), argue that language cannot be considered isolated from its diverse connections to humans, non-humans, nature, emotions, place, time, race, sexuality, gender, and other factors. Consequently, the fundamental tenet of EIL, which asserts that English can be taught as though it is completely neutral and objective, lacks a logical foundation (Pennycook, 2017).

Despite the growing number of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) worldwide due to the role of EIL (Graddol, 1999; Canagarajah, 2005a; Crystal, 2012), the methodology of ELT, the sociocultural context of its implementation, and the curriculum content remain subjects of ongoing scholarly discourse (Pennycook, 2016). Indeed, Pennycook (2007) has articulated inquiries concerning

the postcolonial pedagogy of ELT, acknowledging its (neo)colonialist connotations and concurrently advocating for resistance and transformation. Despite its longstanding recognition as a highly effective approach in ELT, communicative language teaching (CLT) has been faced criticism as a tool of imperialism, asserting that it has influenced non-English speakers into acquiescing to preeminence of English-speaking nations (Le Ha, 2008). While acknowledging the strong correlation between language and culture, educators who adopt CLT in their teaching practices often encounter challenges in managing the associated implications (Corbett, 2022). Furthermore, the implementation of CLT may not align with the cultural values of certain societies (Le Ha, 2008).

The politics and power relations inherent to ELT are ubiquitous in Türkiye. Beyond that, the global community faces numerous shared social issues, emphasizing the imperative for a socially just, transformative, empowering, and emancipatory approach to ELT. ELTE holds a particular significance due to the role of educational institutions as sites for the reproduction of specific ideologies, cultural values, and social issues (Apple, 2017). Consequently, teacher educators emerge as pivotal agents of change. At this point, the participatory approach in ELT, which is predicated on Paulo Freire's (2018) dialogical and critical pedagogy (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011), becomes prominent in ELTE with the objective of effecting social transformation. The participatory approach seeks to foster critical language awareness (CLA) (Fairclough, 2013) concerning the political dimensions of language and social issues in language education. Ultimately, it entails the integration of social issues into the curriculum, acknowledging its pivotal role in fostering an egalitarian society through Freirean critical pedagogy.

## Conceptual Framework

### Critical Approaches to ELT

A diverse range of critical approaches to ELT is evident in the literature as exemplified by the following works: Reagan and Osborn (2002, 2021), Norton and Toohey (2004), Canagarajah (2005b), Sung and Pederson (2012) and Crookes (2013, 2021, 2022). In essence, these critical approaches are all grounded in the principles of critical pedagogy, which, in turn, is deeply rooted in critical social theory (Kincheloe, 2008). Critical pedagogy is a multidimensional concept that encompasses a variety of elements including, ideology, policy, social context, action, experience, mass media, discourse, and so forth (Shor, 1992). The foundational principle is that every human being is inherently a social agent who is constantly engaged in an interaction with their respective context and the focal point is the knowledge construction in regard of power relations between dominant and oppressed cultures (McLaren, 2017).

### Critical Language Pedagogy and Critical Language Teacher Education:

Critical language pedagogy (CLP) is the implementation of social justice practices into language teaching to enhance critical language awareness (CLA) of language ideologies and power relations (Godley and Reaser, 2018; Crookes, 2021, 2022). Critical language teacher education (CLTE) is a model of language teacher education (LTE) based on teachers as transformative intellectuals (Gray, 2019). Both CLP and CLTE, informed by Freirean critical pedagogy, emphasize the interplay between language, power, and social justice, foster an understanding of language practices within power dynamics, and advocate for CLA and emancipatory discourse (Norton, 2004; Hawkins and Norton, 2009; Fairclough, 2013; Janks and Ivanič, 2013; McLaren, 2017; Godley and Reaser, 2018). These

concepts necessitate a reflection on all dimensions of language education, with the objective of empowering individuals to resist hegemonic ideologies (Janks, 2010; Pennycook, 1998, 2007, 2016). They refer to training teachers who integrate critical, political, social, and democratic dimensions of language into their teaching practices. This integration enables to cultivate students who critically evaluate the politics of language learning and teaching processes, thereby emancipating these processes from their colonialist connotations (Hawkins and Norton, 2009; Gray, 2019; Banegas and Gerlach, 2021).

### Language Teacher Identity

Language teacher identities (LTIs) encompass a wide range of dimensions, including social, ideological, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Barkhuizen, 2017). The concept of identity encompasses various categories such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, language, culture, and others, shapes educational experiences and advocates for practices that challenge structural power imbalances, including marginalization and silence within the classroom (Hawkins and Norton, 2009; Norton and Toohey, 2011; Norton, 2013; Norton and Lauwo, 2024). To gain a deeper understanding of the intricate nature of diverse identity categories, it is essential to focus on the intersectionality, which characterizes these categories (Norton and Lauwo, 2024). The intersectional nature of identity has emerged as a recent area of research in ELT with a focus on social justice (Nagashima and Lawrance, 2021; Tarrayo, 2025).

### Participatory Approach

The participatory approach, which emphasizes the significance of content derived from learners' real-life experiences, can be traced back to Paulo Freire's (1970) seminal work, critical pedagogy (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Critical

pedagogy has emerged as a political movement in education, exerting a pivotal role in challenging social inequities by striving for social transformation and the empowerment and emancipation of marginalized communities through the collaborative effort of teachers and students in critically examining knowledge, justice, and equality (McLaren, 2006; Giroux, 2011a, Wink, 2011). This approach posits that language education should serve as a catalyst for critical reflection and action, thereby empowering learners to take control over their lives and raise awareness of social power dynamics. It challenges the conventional narratives surrounding the dominance of English, advocating for plurilingualism and a critical examination of the political implications of language education (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011; Wallerstein, 1983; Freire, 1985). The implementation of classroom discussions concerning meaningful social, political, and cultural issues is deemed essential (Bryers, Winstanley and Cooke, 2014b, 2014c). In ELT methodology, the participatory approach is a subject that is rarely discussed. In fact, there is a scarcity of sources that directly address this approach, with the exception of the works of Wallerstein's (1983), Auerbach (1992, 2001), Shor (1987), Wallerstein and Auerbach (2004), and Bryers, Winstanley and Cooke (2014a, 2014b, 2014c).

### **Aim of the Research**

This study seeks to examine the potential inclusion of the participatory approach in the ELTE program from critical, social, and democratic perspectives. In this regard, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What is the potential for implementing the participatory approach in the ELTE program?

- 1.1. What are the critical reflections experienced within the scope of participatory approach in the ELTE program?
- 1.2. What are the social reflections experienced within the scope of participatory approach in the ELTE program?
- 1.3. What are the democratic reflections experienced within the scope of participatory approach in the ELTE program?

## **Research Method**

This qualitative research study critically examined an ELTE program through a participatory lens. The study aimed to identify diverse patterns in the interpretation and interaction of ELTE students and instructors with the ELTE program. It sought to understand how instructors and ELTE students construct meanings from their experiences (Yin, 2016; DeMarrais, Roulston and Copple, 2024) with critical, social, and democratic reflections within the ELTE program. The research involved 6 instructors and 10 ELTE students from a state university in Ankara, selected based on specific criteria related to their engagement with courses of the ELTE program. To provide further clarification on these criteria, instructors were selected to represent a diverse range of courses currently being taught in the ELTE program. ELTE students were selected from senior-year students who had completed the majority of the courses in the ELTE program.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Individual interviews with instructors were conducted, while ELTE students participated in focus group discussions, with all sessions recorded with consent. In the individual interviews, instructors were asked questions such as the social challenges they encounter as academics and whether social issues are included in

their courses in the ELTE program. In focus group discussions, ELTE students were asked questions about the social issues they encounter as university students and how being a student of the ELTE program affects their worldview. Document analysis focused on competencies, mission, vision, and course descriptions of the ELTE program, searching for elements of participatory approach and critical pedagogy.

Data analysis involved content analysis of both interview transcripts and program documents to identify themes related to the participatory approach in the ELTE program. This included examining the content for critical, social, and democratic reflections and how these aspects are integrated into objectives and outcomes of the ELTE program. In the process of data analysis, themes were formed to derive a more profound understanding of the collected data. The emergence of the themes was accompanied by the adoption of a deductive approach. The themes were predetermined at the conclusion of the interview question development process, drawing upon the literature regarding participatory approach, CLP, and CLTE. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, instructors were coded as INS and ELTE students were coded as ELTS in the direct quotations presented in the findings. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the triangulation method was employed, incorporating multiple data sources, methods, theories, and researchers. In the preparation of the data collection tools, opinions of experts were sought, and direct quotations from the participants were incorporated into the presentation of the findings. The findings aim to shed light on the extent to which the participatory approach is embodied in the ELTE program, drawing on the perspectives of instructors and ELTE students.

## Findings

The findings of the study are presented within the framework of the following themes for the inclusion of participatory approach in the ELTE program in accordance with the research questions:

“Participatory approach experienced as critical reflections”

“Participatory approach experienced as social reflections”

“Participatory approach experienced as democratic reflections”

The thematic structure was delineated by sub-themes and categories falling under respective themes.

### Participatory Approach Experienced as Critical Reflections

The findings under this title represent the initial overarching theme regarding critical reflections, emerging from the analysis of the collected data during the coding process. This theme comprises three sub-themes, to be specified herewith: instructional processes, students in the program, and program elements. The sub-theme of instructional processes consists of the category of individual differences. The sub-theme of students in the program consists of the category of personal development. The final sub-theme is program elements, which consists of the category of courses. In this regard, the presence of critical reflections in instructional processes and program elements of the ELTE program, as well as in the role of ELTE teachers in the program, were of particular interest.

The category of individual differences, which falls under the sub-theme of instructional processes, was developed to investigate instructors' conceptions of ELTE students' individual differences regarding the diverse spectrum of differences and identities within a community and the manner in which these

conceptions influence their instructional practices. Two of the instructors provided following perspectives on individual differences:

...they have different types of intelligence, learning styles, motivations, aptitudes in foreign languages, different interests, and needs. These affect the learning process.

(INS3)

...students who participate actively in student clubs, read a lot, come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, or have high self-confidence can be more active in presentations or in the teaching profession, but this does not mean that introverts cannot do this or are less successful, they have very different skills, they can be really good at writing essays, expressing their own emotions, or they can make very different contributions that we may not expect. (INS5)

It is imperative to prioritize the guidance of ELTE students in delving deeper and more profoundly into their LTIs. The exploration of diverse identities constitutes the fundamental basis of language teaching and LTE (De Costa and Norton, 2017). However, as indicated by INS3's statement, ELTE students' personality traits, experiences, and social, political, and emotional identities are disregarded. The sole consideration is their cognitive identity with the exception of INS5, who cited personality traits and social class as relevant factors in this regard. Despite the pronounced emphasis on cognitive differences of ELTE students expressed by instructors, no remarks were made concerning disability or mental illness. The scope of individual differences extends beyond cognitive or learning differences. Variations in race, socioeconomic background, cultural milieu, linguistic repertoire, religious affiliation, ethnic identity, gender roles, and sexual orientation are also hallmarks of human diversity. In CLTE, such identities are recognized historically and socially integral parts of language education (Norton, 2008; Kubota, 2017) and mechanisms of social and educational stratification and

marginalization that harm students who are marginalized socially, sexually, linguistically, racially, and economically are rejected, given that students from marginalized groups are compelled to relinquish their ethnic, individual, and cultural identities to thrive within the current system of education. This phenomenon has been described by Kincheloe (2008), as the stripping students of their cultural, linguistic, historical, and individual values. Li, Hinojosa and Wexler (2017) revealed that the ELTE program lacks discourses surrounding diversity, thereby engendering a sense of inadequacy among ELTE students in regard to their future real-life teaching experiences. One of the instructors offered the following statement:

The concept of "native-speakerism" has become obsolete. In a recent study, "non-native speaker" was used. In response, a colleague based in Newcastle noted that "non-native speaker" is no longer used. This shift in language reflects a broader social perception that distinguishing between native and non-native speakers may be perceived as a racist approach. Türkiye, on the other hand, has not yet reached this point. (INS5)

INS5's statement encapsulates the current state of affairs regarding LTI in Türkiye. Türkiye is not yet in the initial stages of the discourse surrounding LTI, let alone exploring diverse LTIs. In ELT, a pervasive dehumanizing social stigma is associated with NNESTs. NNESTs are subjected to criticism, discrimination, marginalization, and comparison to their native counterparts (Selvi, 2014; Oral, 2015; Nagashima and Lawrance, 2021). This 'native speaker fallacy,' characterized by the aforementioned attitudes, is a manifestation of a broader forms of linguistic imperialism, racism, and ethnocentric ideologies, reflecting the still-existing imbalanced power structures worldwide in ELT (Phillipson, 1992, 2009; Canagarajah, 1999; Tupas, 2022; Cordova, López-Gopar and Valtierra-Zamudio, 2025). In this regard, Ndura (2004) highlights the prevalence of stereotypical

figures in ELT and the lack of effective representation of native speakers. Guest (2002) contends that the relegation of intercultural perspectives to basic norms and standards of British and American native speakers devalues and extinguishes interculturality. Consequently, the inclusion of popular stereotypes in language teaching and LTE should be avoided, as they may evoke negative connotations regarding multiculturalism due to their tendency to disregard local cultures and establish a dichotomy between local and dominant cultures (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Reimann, 2009; Addison, 2011).

The category of personal development, which falls under the sub-theme of students in the program, was developed to investigate how ELTE students perceive their personal development in the ELTE program. An ELTE student offered the following statement on personal development:

...it contributes to my self-confidence as well as leadership, of course with its shortcomings. Thanks to the courses we took and our professors, it contributed to my ability to think critically both for our field, for our profession and general critical thinking. (ELTS6)

ELTE students cited positive effects of the ELTE program on their personal development. Given the profound impact of contemporary technology and popular culture on the engagement of young adults with language (Dovchin, Pennycook and Sultana, 2018), it is unsurprising that they have positive experiences. Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that non-native ELTE students are satisfied with the program (Flores, Santos, Fernandes and Pereira, 2014; Macalister, 2017). However, ELTE students attribute their positive personal development to their engagement with English, rather than solely to their

education. This is probably because neoliberal policies implemented in teacher education. The not-so-hidden neoliberal agenda of dehumanization fosters the illusion of a discourse on humanizing pedagogy and individuality, leading ELTE students to perceive that their interests are being prioritized. In this sense, English must be approached with caution, as it is not a neutral medium of communication. In fact, it serves as a vehicle for the dissemination of specific ideologies and policies, which should be addressed in LTE (Tollefson, 2011; Bartolomé, 2010). The theories and practices of hegemonic powers exploit Western local phenomena of communication and culture, including English and Anglo-American popular culture, to globalize local phenomena and thereby subvert alternative epistemologies (Santos, 2016).

In the category of courses, which falls under the sub-theme of program elements, the inclusion of courses that promote critical awareness, inquiry, and social and democratic values, which are the basic practices of the participatory approach, was examined. These courses are “Foreign Language, Literature and Language Teaching,” “Critical Reading and Writing,” “English in Mass Communication,” “Effective Communication Skills in English,” “Community Service Practices,” “Discourse Analysis and Language Teaching,” “Teaching Practice,” “Special Education and Inclusion,” and “World Englishes and Culture.”

The inclusion of these courses within the ELTE program suggests that it possesses a robust capacity to implement participatory approach practices. It is posited that the courses entitled “English in Mass Communication” and “Effective Communication Skills” in English may be suitable for the identification of carriers of power such as, discourse and meaning in social relations by means of English. “Community Service” and “Teaching Practice” courses might engender a more

profound awareness of the social realities and the concrete, current situation in which ELTE students live. “Discourse Analysis and Language Teaching” course is of great importance for the development of CLA, as discourse analysis constitutes one of the participatory approach practices in language teaching. “Special Education and Inclusion” class has the potential to empower and transform individuals with disabilities, a marginalized group in society. Moreover, “World Englishes and Culture” course addresses the prevailing hegemony of English over other languages and cultures. The course might assist students in acquiring the skills necessary to adapt English to local cultures and multicultural contexts. However, it is thought that all these courses within the ELTE program should be made compulsory.

#### Participatory Approach Experienced as Social Reflections

The findings under this title represent the initial overarching theme regarding social reflections, emerging from the analysis of the collected data during the coding process. This theme comprises three sub-themes, to be specified herewith: social dimension of education, society in the program, and non-program elements. The sub-theme of social dimension of education consists of the category of personal issues. The sub-theme of society in the program consists of the category of social issues. The sub-theme of society in the non-program elements consists of the category of mission and vision. In this regard, the presence of social reflections in the ELTE program, non-program elements, and pedagogical views of participants, were of particular interest.

The category of personal issues, falling under the sub-theme of the social dimension of education, was developed for two primary purposes: first, to identify the challenges encountered by instructors and ELTE students in society; and

second, to investigate the ways in which they correlate these social issues with the education in the ELTE program. One of the instructors articulated the following on personal issues:

...the biggest problem is the lack of science... there has been a serious increase in the recruitment of research assistants in recent years. I think that people started to see this as a meal ticket and started to enter this job... the motivation to enter academics has started to turn into that. We don't see people, young academics who come, sometimes at least say "I am burning with the love of science." (INS6)

The prevailing viewpoint among instructors' statements is the notion of ignorance or disconnection from science gaining prevalence in society. Academics serve as the nexus between the realm of science and society; therefore, when the connection between academics and society is disrupted, the connection between society and science is also compromised, resulting in social regression. Despite the significance of these issues, there was a lack of discourse regarding their specific personal issues in society. The hesitancy of instructors to voice their social issues could be attributed to a fear of professional repercussions or deleterious impact on their professional identity, which is rooted in the absence of institutional and national support. The pervasive culture of fear surrounding the act of speaking out in any way, shape, or form within academia has been associated with the suppression of academic freedom under neoliberalism (Giroux, 2006, 2011b, 2024; Darder; 2012; Davis, 2017; Schleck, 2022). INS6's reproach is a direct consequence of the adverse effects that neoliberal ideologies and practices on academia, particularly the commodification and marketization of higher education. However, there are numerous additional issues that directly impact instructors,

including constraints on their freedom of expression that hinder their ability to address these matters.

The following statement is from one of the ELTE students on personal issues:

...it is more difficult to be a student in the conservative section. You must pay more attention to the way you dress, the way you talk, going out at night... It affects you psychologically. It also can be economical. House rent can be difficult, and bills. The students are considered as employees instead of actual students, they are thought as if they get paid the same in terms of money. (ELTS2)

ELTE students identified a broad array of social issues that they encounter, including the absence of discourse surrounding these issues within the classroom setting. In accordance with Freire's (2018) assertion, educational or political action curricula should be grounded in the present, existential, tangible circumstances confronting society. The concrete reality of society should be defined as a problem within educational environments so that individuals develop solutions at both the intellectual and practical levels. The ideological climate significantly influences social issues, which impact ELTE students' personal issues. These issues are often rooted in the lack of representation in the (neo)conservative world order, as it is evident by ELTS2's statement. There is a conspicuous absence of representation for diverse identities and social realities in the ELTE program, as it has already revealed. However, the emphasis on diversity and inclusion in ELT from a critical perspective contributes to the decolonization of curricula and the integration of local pedagogies (Beacon, Berbain, and Banegas, 2021).

Nevertheless, ELTE students are expected to approach university life with a sense of ease and nonchalance, as if there are no social issues that could hinder their

educational or professional endeavors, or even jeopardize their identities, fundamental rights, or lives. This meticulously orchestrated project aims to render future generations oblivious to their own social realities, thereby fundamentally dehumanizing them to reproduce the existing social issues through education. This project holds particular significance in the neoliberal and neoconservative world order, wherein educational institutions under neoliberal governance worldwide are designed to function as instruments of indoctrination, cultivating citizens who are to serve the economic interests of the prevailing order (Hill, 2007; Clarke and Morgan, 2011; Darder, 2012; Gray and Block, 2012; Gray, 2019; Mizikaci, 2019). The neoliberal interpretation of language, characterized by idealism and empiricism, reinforces the notion of language as homogeneous, positivistic, abstractive, and individualistic. This perspective perpetuates alienation, commodification, and scientification of language, as well as the technical and rationalist views of education. Consequently, it distances LTE from the discourses of power, privilege, discrimination, and access, rendering it seemingly objective and natural (Clarke and Morgan, 2011; Gray and Block, 2012; Reagan, 2004; Pennycook, 1995; Macedo, 2019).

The category of social issues, which falls under the sub-theme of society in the program, was developed to identify the placement of social issues within the ELTE program from the perspectives of both instructors and ELTE students. Statements made by participants are outlined separately below:

The field courses are distant and disconnected. If the teacher has their awareness, maybe even in the methods course, a comment was made, but other than that, it is disconnected. Neither the needs of society nor the needs of the students are fully explained. (ELTS6)

ELTS6 established a correlation between the disconnection of the ELTE program courses from social realities and instructors' awareness. As previously discussed, the prevailing power relations within the status quo play a significant role in shaping behaviors concerning social issues. As bell hooks (1994) recounts from her experiences, emancipatory education, which necessitates active participation from both students and instructors, faces significant opposition from numerous faculty members. This dynamic may be observed in ELTE programs in Türkiye. ELTE students stated that the program does not address social issues and lacks a connection to real-life contexts. This may be attributed to the prevailing social and political environment of Türkiye. As outlined by Clarke and Morgan (2011), implementing critical practices into the LTE may present challenges for language teacher educators due to ideological and institutional barriers that may hinder such integration. However, language teachers can be trained to teach language in an emancipatory, critical, and dialogic manner while adhering to language standards concurrently (Osborn, 2006). Existing pedagogical methodologies embody substantial ideological and cultural value, which can have political-economic consequences. Given that English is not apolitically neutral, the underlying issues of its instruction, namely, power and social inequity, which constantly manifest as sexism, classism, and racism in the classroom, must not be disregarded (Canagarajah, 2002).

In Türkiye's current climate, there is a more sterile teacher training. We are afraid of being blacklisted. There is also a world that is becoming more conservative in some ways even though it is becoming very liberalized in some ways. It has become very easy to lynch people, there is a cancel culture now... I have a class called Critical Reading and Writing, we inevitably talk about gender stereotypes, social stereotypes, wrong ways of thinking, logical fallacies... (INS6)

A thorough analysis of the statements made by instructors reveals that only a subset of instructors exclusively addresses social issues only in their thematic courses. However, analysis uncovered a discernible absence of participatory approach practices, specifically problem-posing and dialoging. Most instructors' statements suggest an alienation from the political dimensions of language and the participatory approach practices. The rationale provided by instructors for excluding social issues from the ELTE program is as follows: "concern about completing the course content in time," "perception of social issues as extracurricular subjects," "characterization of social issues as sensitive topics," "inability to address social issues in the courses," and "fear of being blacklisted or lynched." The source of the apprehension experienced by instructors who are fear being blacklisted or lynched if they address social issues in their courses may be considered a social issue in itself. Because it is directly related to freedom of expression. The same is true of those who characterize social issues as sensitive topics. Ultimately, CLTE is about achieving empowerment and emancipation on both a personal and a social level through education. Therefore, the lack of access to one's freedoms by being left tongue-tied may be seen as the root of the hesitation and fear of instructors to address social issues in the classroom. As Janks (2010) asserts, the majority of teachers are apprehensive about adopting critical approaches in language studies due to the emphasis these approaches place on the political nature of language learning and teaching.

Those who perceive social issues as extracurricular subjects must acknowledge that integrating democratic principles and the notion of emancipation into education does not necessitate the abrogation of rigorous academic standards (Freire and Faundez, 1989). Teacher educators must develop critical approaches to language standards, encouraging students to think critically and raising their

awareness of the influence of powerful on language usage without the need to directly address complex concepts such as hegemony and ideology (Osborn, 2006; Reagan, 1997). However, by its very nature, a language curriculum cannot be neutral, objective, or unbiased, as it is inextricably linked to the ideological tenets of particular groups or nations and the economic, political, and cultural intricacies of individuals. (Van Lier, 1996; Reagan and Osborn, 2021).

Consistent with these findings, certain studies disclosed that the predominant apprehensions associated with the integration of critical pedagogy into ELT pertain to institutional power relations, the implementation of the methodology in practice (Vanegas-Garzón and Bedoya-Ríos, 2023), feeling ill-equipped to tackle social issues in class, concerns regarding prescribed curriculum and time constraints (Norooziasiam and Soozandehfar, 2011), curriculum fidelity and, teaching for assessment (Nkealah and Simango, 2023). In this regard, hooks (1994) emphasized that it is not only the students but also the teachers who will achieve empowerment as a result of education that aims to emancipate. Teachers should embody social transformation and political engagement and act as critical agents of change in their teaching processes, adopting a transformative intellectual stance (Guilherme, 2002; Byram, 2008). Eventually, the nature of education renders it inherently biased and political, with its primary objective as either reaching a consensus or liberating society through reconstruction (Shaull, 2018).

The following statements from instructors provide their perspectives on the ownership and political aspects of English:

...English has a lot of political connotations. Once a student asked, "Don't you think you are serving imperialism?" I replied, "As long as the language of science is English, we

will learn it to do science if science is our basis.” English has become the language of those who do not speak it as their mother tongue. We make students write essays on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and talk about native-speakerism. People whose mother tongue is English are often monolingual; they only have English in their lives. In fact, we have richness. When we go in this way, I honestly think that we purify English from its colonialist connotations. (INS6)

The predominant perspective in Türkiye, as opposed to my personal viewpoint, is that... the ownership of English is determined by the extent and frequency of its utilization. (INS5)

INS5 and INS6, made noteworthy comments regarding the issues surrounding English. INS6’s approach to the colonialist/imperialist connotations of English is a concept known as plurilingualism (Larsen and Freeman, 2011), which is one of the fundamental tenets of the participatory approach. However, as a teacher educator, asserting that “our plurilingual identity negates all issues surrounding English” is disturbingly unfathomable. This assertion is inaccurate because resolving an issue requires addressing it first. As Pennycook (2016) emphasizes, criticisms of linguistic imperialism often overshadow the need for the critical examination of the role of English language teachers/teacher educators in issues surrounding English. The language teaching process should be problem-posing to cultivate critical literacy skills, and teachers should discuss the political dimensions of language in the classroom (Freire, 1985). The assertion that "English as the language of science" is another highly controversial point in the INS6’s statement. The question arises: why does an individual presume that they are incapable of engaging in scientific inquiry within the scope of their own language? Montgomery (2013) poses a similar question in the title of his book; “Does Science Need a Global Language?” The author argues that, the dominance of English in scientific inquiry

creates inequitable barriers and linguistic bias, which, in turn, undermines the publishing processes for non-native English-speaking researchers. ELT is, in fact, one of the reasons for the dominance of English as the so-called “language of science” (Kaplan, 2001).

INS5’s statement encapsulates Türkiye’s stance on the ownership of English. The ownership of English has been a subject of extensive discussion in ELT (Widdowson, 1998; Norton, 1997, 2018; Higgins, 2003). Discussions regarding the ownership of English and World Englishes are central to the participatory approach, as it suggests addressing the political dimensions of English (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). The Anglocentric notion that English is exclusively owned by its native speakers has undergone a significant shift thanks to critical approaches to ELT (Seidlhofer, Breiteneder and Pitzl, 2006; Moussu and Llurda, 2008). Given that the ownership of English is directly related to the language teacher identity (Norton, 2018), it should be taken more seriously in the ELTE program, where NNESTs are being trained. While English serves the dominant ideology, its learning facilitates the survival of the oppressed in the struggle for social power (Freire, 1985). EFL teachers can be categorized as either traditional teachers who impose the dominance of elitist ideology upon their students or emancipatory teachers who empower their students by illuminating the political dimensions and ideological elements of teaching English. The latter type of EFL teachers merely provide students with the standard use of English that is necessary for survival (Shor and Freire, 1987). ELTE students are being prepared to align with the former type according to the findings. However, Villacañas de Castro (2017) demonstrated that emancipatory EFL teachers could be trained in non-native ELTE contexts. It is imperative that educators align their pedagogical practices with their political convictions. An educator who consistently acts in

opposition to their personal beliefs will never be able to function as an emancipatory educator (Shor and Freire, 1987).

In accordance with instructors' assertions, the ELTE program has also been identified as exhibiting characteristics of linguistic imperialism. During the interviews conducted in Turkish, instructors frequently employed English words or short expressions in their conversations despite the availability of Turkish equivalents. This concept, known as "bilingual borrowing (Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams, 2014; Poplack, 2018)," poses a significant threat to the integrity and survival of native languages of foreign language learners, especially those learning English (Kowner and Rosenhouse, 2008). However, language learning should not be undertaken at the expense of other languages; rather, it should be viewed as an opportunity to enhance one's linguistic repertoire (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). The language of the colonizer, also known as *lingua franca*, should be utilized for the purpose of radical and democratic education, with local culture serving as the central focus. Radically bilingual individuals exhibit a profound connection to their ethnicity and learn the dominant language to challenge the dominant ideology and colonialism (Mayo, 2008).

The analysis of the mission and vision statements of the ELTE program revealed a prominent absence of any statement regarding the participatory approach. The primary objective of education that employs a participatory approach is to foster the development and transformation of individuals in a critical, social, and democratic manner. In this particular instance, it is imperative that the mission and vision statements align with this overarching objective.

### Participatory Approach Experienced as Democratic Reflections

The findings under this title represent the initial overarching theme regarding democratic reflections, emerging from the analysis of the collected data during the coding process. This theme comprises one sub-theme, to be specified herewith: democracy in the program. The sub-theme of democracy in the program consists of the categories of social justice, worldview, and the section of wish, request, complaint, opinion. In this regard, the presence of democratic reflections in the pedagogical views and worldviews of participants as a stakeholder of the ELTE program, as well as in the website of the ELTE program, were of particular interest. The category of social justice, which falls under the sub-theme of democracy in the program, was developed to examine how social justice practices are adapted in the ELTE program from perspectives of both instructors and ELTE students. The following statements were made by an instructor and an ELTE student:

...it sounds utopian but creating a standard that provides an environment that will constantly raise the pedagogical conditions within the academics themselves, it will make them see their own mistakes. (ELTS6)

...I'm fair with the grade or the assessment, and the behavior in the classroom, I'm open to giving them another chance after they come to me and try. (INS2)

Social justice is defined by two core tenets: the establishment of an equitable environment for individuals of diverse identities in society and the engagement in social transformation through participatory, democratic, inclusive, and collaborative processes. Thus, the starting point of social justice education is the understanding of oppression, which manifests in various forms such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and so forth (Bell, 2016). LTE for social justice constitutes a nuanced and multifaceted endeavor (Hawkins, 2011). Therefore,

teaching for social justice should be approached from both theoretical and practical standpoints (Freire, 2018). Teacher educators strive to equip students with the necessary skills to address the prevailing inequities that marginalize students within the contemporary education system (Zeichner, 2011). The responsibility of teacher educators lies in providing opportunities that have the potential to bring about social justice for students, enabling them to deliberate on their transformative roles as critical social agents in society and empowering them (Hawkins and Norton, 2009; Janks, 2019). In language classrooms, the incorporation of critical pedagogy, multicultural education, and critical media literacy is pivotal to foster intercultural competence and promote linguistic human rights in the context of social justice education (Reagan and Osborn, 2021). The issue appears to extend beyond its apparent scope, as the perception of social justice within the ELTE program is remarkably limited. The heightened focus on evaluation and presentation of course content by ELTE students and instructors indicated the impact of traditional education. Leiva, Miranda and Riquelme-Sanderson (2021) revealed that non-native ELTE students are unaware of the significant impact teaching for social justice can have on their future students. The emphasis placed on standardization contradicts the participatory approach, which is characterized by its inclusive, democratic, and participatory nature. As Freire and Faundez (1989) have noted, educational practices that are standardization-based and predetermined are susceptible to bureaucratization and anti-democratic tendencies.

Social justice education encourages students to take an active role in their own education and supports teachers to create empowering, democratic, and critical educational environments (Hackman, 2005). Educators are obligated to combat the weaponization of education and schooling, which entails safeguarding the value of

human life, the common dignity of oppressed individuals globally, and a milieu of peace (McLaren and Giroux, 1997). In the ELTE program, there was no mention of any opportunities or activities provided for the marginalized or underrepresented instructors and students to improve their experiences in the program. Bieler and Burns (2017) emphasizes the need for English language educators to realize true social justice and equity in their roles as researchers, practitioners, colleagues, and citizens, they need to value diversity and include multiple voices, honor intersectional identities that are discriminated against, and avoid unfounded consensus bias. Given the political nature of language teaching, the ELTE program falls short in ensuring social justice.

The category of worldview, which falls under the sub-theme of democracy in the program, was developed to ascertain to which extent participating in the ELTE program, therefore, engaging with English, influences the worldviews of instructors and ELTE students. One of the instructors provided the following statement on worldview:

I don't have a problem with being informed about the rest of the world. Maybe it helps that it's in English, that it's the lingua franca... There are beautiful people all over the world. It made me realize that. (INS2)

The opportunities of ELF are what influences instructors' worldviews most. None of the instructors indicated that their involvement in the ELTE program exerted a negative influence on them. However, as previously discussed, the extensive use of English expressions in the explanations of instructors suggests that the English-speaker identity, a central concern of the participatory approach, may result in the loss of some or all their native language skills. Phillipson (2023) regards the notion

of English as a “world language” as an Anglo-American project of cultural and linguistic exploitation. Canagarajah (2005c) states that English as the dominant language has severe effects on its learners in a number of social, psychological, linguistic, and political domains. The author argues that English may even pose a risk of loss of the mother tongue, culture, and identity. Phillipson (1992) argues that the conception of professionalism in English language teaching pedagogy excludes broader social issues and the problem of Anglocentrism, explicitly or implicitly devaluing other languages.

Two ELTE students offered following statements on worldview:

Since English is a global language, it is even more accurate and easier to access articles and news. It affects my perspective in a good way. (ELTS3)

...when you get to know different cultures, you see your shortcomings as an individual. And when you start from the individual, you see social deficiencies. In other words, studying in our field gives you the ability to make comparisons between societies. (ELTS6)

ELTE students' statements regarding the impact of the ELTE program on their worldviews are problematic in regard of the participatory approach. While all ELTE students' statements are positive, they do not grasp negative impacts of EIL on their language and culture. ELTE students may develop an internalized neutrality of English, perceiving learning English as exclusively beneficial without considering global power dynamics. As posited by Hatch and Groenke (2009), a salient issue of critical teacher education pertains to students' inadequate educational experiences or background knowledge, rendering them unable to be

adequately supported by teacher educators in the acquisition of critical understandings.

The positive perceptions exhibited by the participants with regard to English are anticipated. Piller (2016) notes that English is highly influential in reshaping individuals' perceptions of intelligence, success, and global sense of belonging, occasionally resulting in adverse self-perception in non-Western contexts. ELTS3's statement illuminated a range of issues surrounding English and higher education, including academic capitalism (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Münch, 2014) and soft power (Nye, 2009), within the ELT program. ELTS3 indicated that their involvement in the program enabled their direct access to academic resources, including articles, because of their internalized notion regarding the position of English as a "global language." Phillipson (2023) explicitly asserts that the conceptualization of English as "global" is a fallacious proposition, as it disregards the substantial global population that is not proficient in English.

The issue of access to academic resources must also be addressed. Dichotomies, including Global North/South, Center/Periphery, and East/West, as well as neoliberalism, Westernized universities, Anglo-American educational traditions, and the hegemony of English in publishing processes result in inequitable academic resources distribution, unequal researcher recognition, and marginalization of local epistemologies and cultures (Rojo, 2021; Dołowy-Rybińska, 2021). As demonstrated by the findings to this point, ELTE students exhibit a blatant lack of CLA. Pennycook (1994) states that Western academia standardizes language teaching theory and practice by its dominance, leading to the encouragement of language teachers to implement practices that are inappropriate for diverse contexts.

ELTS6's assertion suggests that they misinterpret multiculturalism. Anglo-American culture, reinforced by ELT, leads to a false sense of superiority among cultures and the perception of safe expansion (Hadley, 2008). The notion of "comparing societies" contradicts critical education, as each society has unique context. ELTS6's statement aligns with the scenario where the target language and culture dominate the mother tongue and culture. Brown (2000) argues that language teaching and learning should maintain cultural continuity and not be disconnected from local practices, but the ELTE program apparently deviates from this principle. This mindset stems from the aforementioned Anglo-American project of cultural and linguistic exploitation by Phillipson (2023).

The category of wish/request/complaint/opinion, which falls under the sub-theme of democracy in the program, was developed to identify what kind of opportunities the ELTE program provides on its website for everyone, without exception, to express their needs. In the category of wish/request/complaint/opinion, an examination was conducted to determine the existence of a designated section on the ELTE program's web page where the stakeholders can articulate their wishes, requests, complaints, and opinions. The investigation revealed the presence of an opinion, request, and evaluation section on the ELTE program's web page.

However, this section is not unique to the ELTE program; rather, it is a feature of each department's web page. Furthermore, no data were collected from ELTE students or instructors regarding the response rate to the messages disseminated through this section.

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrated that ELTE has a substantial amount of work to do in order to adequately address not only the prevailing social issues in Türkiye, but also broader issues associated with EIL. There is a conspicuous disparity between the willingness of instructors and ELTE students to

engage in participatory approach practices and CLTE. While students are quite enthusiastic about implementing social issues through a political lens into their courses, instructors are more apprehensive about doing so. However, neither the instructors nor the ELTE students have CLA. Yet, the disparity in approach to critical practices may be attributed to the harsh political climate in Türkiye, which may lead to unexpected and unprecedented events with legal consequences on institutional level. A pervasive *culture of silence* (Freire, 2018) has been persisting in Türkiye for a long while now. As the participant statements reveal, the right to freedom of expression is systematically stripped away, resulting in a state of collective amnesia either/or anticipatory avoidance, and self-censorship, as instructors often choose to remain silent due to the fear of backlash and legal retaliation. Eventually, the neoliberal ideologies are the primary factor contributing to this result, as Davis (2017) posits that neoliberalism exploits fear in the academy to promote self-policing. Notwithstanding the plethora of challenges confronting instructors and ELTE students in Türkiye, there is a considerable potential for the integration of the participatory approach and CLTE into the ELTE program, given that some of the elements of the program, such as certain courses, pedagogical views and instructional processes of some instructors, and interests of ELTE students emphasize criticality in terms of the participatory approach.

## Conclusion

As this study demonstrated, all forms of critical, transformative, emancipatory, empowering, democratic, and participatory educational practices are profoundly context-sensitive, they unequivocally necessitate suitable adjustments to pedagogical practices to address the prevailing circumstances. As Freire (2018) notes, there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to education. There must

always be an emphasis on the social and historical context. Despite the challenges they encounter in the social and historical context of Türkiye, instructors and ELTE students' critical awareness regarding their concrete realities and their willingness to bring their realities into the ELTE program are rays of hope and stepping stones on the way to emancipation and empowerment. However, the implications of this study indicate that instructors need to begin implementing methods and techniques that inform ELTE students regarding the political dimensions of language teaching, specifically ELT to prevent potential social issues that ELTE students might encounter in their future classrooms, it is essential to implement a critical approach, so that ELTE students are enabled to develop CLA, equipping them with the necessary skills to address issues related to power and identity in the classroom. Ultimately, cultivating ELTE students as future teachers who embrace criticality does not have to mean to address phenomena beyond their comprehension, it simply means enable them to reflect on the world around them through their education by emphasizing justice, democracy, participation, diversity, and inclusion in the process.

## Notes

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