

What do Pre-service English Teachers Serve? A Critical Pedagogical Perspective

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Abstract

Pre-service English teachers have been the object of many studies in the discipline of English language teaching. However, what they have served has been rarely questioned and investigated. Critical pedagogy can help researchers interrogate why English has spread dramatically. An autoethnographic research method was used in this study to present the observations, experiences and beliefs of an insider's perspective. I utilized the tenets of critical pedagogy to criticize the term pre-service. My main question was what pre-service English teachers served. I problematized this term to open broader space for the deconstruction of neoliberal policies and criticizing the colonial minds. I believe that English language teaching has been used as an indispensable part of neoliberal policies emanating from colonial minds of Anglo-America. Pre-service English teachers should be given the opportunity to criticize English-centric policies and to protect linguistic human rights. ELT departments can present platforms where pre-service itself can be resisted and opposed by the students. Aware of the colonial background, the ELT departments can radicalize student teachers through emancipatory and transformative curricula that prioritize linguistic human rights instead of English-centered linguistic practices. In addition, naming and labeling can be discussed in collaboration with ELT students instead of using the pre-service English teachers since serving may have negative connotations in relation to neoliberalism and neocolonialism.

Keywords: *critical pedagogy, pre-service, neoliberalism, autoethnography, neocolonialism*

Hizmet Öncesi İngilizce Öğretmenleri Neye Hizmet Eder? Eleştirel Pedagojik bir Bakış Açısı

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Öz

Hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenleri, İngilizce dil öğretimi disiplinindeki birçok çalışmanın konusu olmuştur. Bununla birlikte, hizmet ettikleri şeyin nadiren sorgulandığı ve araştırıldığı görülmektedir. Eleştirel pedagoji, araştırmacıların İngilizcenin dramatik şekilde yaygınlaşmasının neden önemli ölçüde arttığını sorgulamasına yardımcı olabilir. Bu çalışmada, içeriden bir bakış açısı ile araştırmacı kendi gözlemlerini, deneyimlerini ve inançlarını sunmak için otoetnografik araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Hizmet öncesi dönemi eleştirmek için eleştirel pedagojinin ilkelerini kullandım. Benim asıl sorum öğretmen adaylarının neye hizmet ettikleri idi. Bu terimi, neoliberal politikaların yapısökümü için daha geniş bir alan açmak ve sömürge zihinlerini eleştirmek için problemleştirdim. İngilizce öğretiminin Anglo-Amerika'nın sömürgeci zihinlerinden kaynaklanan neoliberal politikaların vazgeçilmez bir parçası olarak kullanıldığına inanıyorum. Hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenlerine, İngilizce merkezli politikaları eleştirme ve dilsel insan haklarını koruma fırsatı verilmelidir. ELT bölümleri, hizmet öncesi öğrencilere karşı çıkabileceği ve karşı çıkabileceği platformlar sunabilir. Sömürge altyapısının farkında olan ELT bölümleri, İngilizce merkezli dil uygulamaları yerine dilsel insan haklarına öncelik veren özgürleştirici ve dönüştürücü müfredat yoluyla öğrenci öğretmenlerini radikalleştirebilir. Ayrıca, hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenlerini kullanmak yerine ELT öğrencileriyle işbirliği içinde adlandırma ve sınıflandırma tartışılabilir. Çünkü hizmetin neoliberalizm ve yeni sömürgecilik ile ilgili olumsuz çağrışımları olabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eleştirel pedagoji, hizmet öncesi, neoliberalizm, otoetnografi, neokolonyalizm,

Introduction

It is important to question what teachers and learners serve in the era of neoliberalism that reinforces individual freedom and autonomy to maximize profits and weaken individuals and social justice. Neoliberalism is a new form of colonialism and establishes itself through new forms (Harvey, 2005, p.3). However, this system is hardly questioned in education and considered normal. One of the reasons for this lack of questioning is normalizing discourses that dominate our lives (Foucault, 2012). We are normalized and constituted as subjects by school, education, scientific, political and economic discourses. Unless we question and problematize our lives, identities, professions and what is given to us through different mechanisms and discourses, we may assume that they are the norms of life or normalized. In this study, the term 'pre-service English teachers' is such a normalized term that ELT scholars hardly question and deconstruct it. This term may be an umbrella term to perpetuate and impose their power on the subordinate and the subjugated. They name, classify, categorize and label students as pre-service teachers. However, what they pre-serve is not questioned. The main problem is ignored and left aside. I believe that the pre-service English teachers in Turkey and different parts of the globe serve neoliberalism and neocolonialism, a new and stronger form of colonialism. Radical and critical pedagogy has opened a great space for me to reflect upon these problems (Freire, 2000; McLaren, 1988). I started to question myself after I perused Pennycook's seminal book 'English and the Discourses of Colonialism (2002). This book awakened and galvanized me when I was dormant and took my profession for granted. I asked the following question to myself: Whom have I been serving for years as a lecturer in English language teaching?

After careful deliberation and questioning, I realized that English was not 'natural, neutral and beneficial' (Pennycook, 2017, p.6). I had to delve into the details of the British, American, Ottoman and Turkish history to understand the aims of the colonizing and neoliberalizing countries. Harvey (2005) followed the track of neoliberalism and showed us how neoliberalism was established by the UK and USA that used higher education, knowledge, academia and coups (Chile and Turkey) as an effective tool. Pennycook (2002) also showed me where and how ELT emerged and how English constituted itself as a cultural construction in other countries. The

problem was getting more complicated than it looked. In later stages, I became familiar with the importance of political economy (Marx, 1961/1848, 1968), the British colonialism (Pennycook, 2002), Anglo-American neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005), orientalism and occidentalism (Said, 1977; Ahiska, 2010) critical discourses developed by Foucault (1972; 1980) and Fairclough (1989), radical pedagogy and critical pedagogy. These seminal studies contributed to my questioning and self-reflection considerably. However, in this autoethnographic study I will specifically focus on the role of critical pedagogy and its tenets that guided me fruitfully.

Critical pedagogy prioritizes the emancipation of learners and teachers from what is imposed on them by the academic, political and economic elites (Apple, 2011; McLaren, 1988). Capitalism is rejected and criticized in critical pedagogy whose objective is to produce a meaningful sociopolitical change in a certain society (Fairclough, 1992; Freire, 2000). Neoliberalism has permeated almost all educational spheres (Apple, 2011; Giroux, 2002; Harvey, 2007). Discursive practices are reinforced in these neoliberal institutions to maximize their profits (Olssen ve Peters, 2005). International companies and agents endorse neoliberalism in educational institutions and downgrade Marxism to hinder collective action. (Chomsky, 2012; Gramsci, 1991; Marx, 1968).

This study aims to emphasize the importance of critical pedagogy in English language teaching based on subjective experiences and observations. Neoliberalism is seen as a serious threat to emancipatory education. In addition, schools that endorse neoliberal policies are criticized so that a more democratic approach can be applied. It is also emphasized that collective action is hampered in a neoliberal setting. Therefore, the tenets of critical pedagogy and linguistic human rights are prioritized. Learners and teachers as transformative intellectuals can collaborate with each other so as to create meaningful changes in their immediate environment. It is also maintained that unless collective action is encouraged in schools, it is unlikely that significant changes can be produced. It is important to raise awareness of what learners and teachers serve in a neoliberal world. The state of English can be displaced, and thus new languages can be endorsed so that diversity can be reinforced.

Method

This study is based on an autoethnographic research method that both depicts and criticizes sociocultural practices and experiences. This method guides researchers to reflect upon their own experiences and observations so that there could be better lives and social justice in their own immediate environment. Interrogation, self-reflection, problematizing, striving for a better society, making meaning and developing a cultural-political perspective are among the most important elements of autoethnographic research. Adams, Jones and Ellis (2015) emphasize the scope of autoethnography as follows.

Autoethnography is a qualitative method—it offers nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge about particular lives, experiences, and relationships rather than general information about large groups of people. Qualitative research focuses on human intentions, motivations, emotions, and actions, rather than generating demographic information and general descriptions of interaction. (p21.)

Since I have specific knowledge about the so-called ‘pre-service English teachers’, I would like to problematize this term from a critical pedagogical perspective. Therefore, I will specifically focus on the standard lives and practices of pre-service English teachers. After reading a considerable number of articles and research reports on pre-service English teachers, I realized that the state of English in Turkey was insufficiently questioned from a critical perspective. I decided to problematize this term for a while. A question has engaged my mind for the last four years.

- What do pre-service English teachers serve?

The answer to this question is that they are trained to serve neoliberalism and neocolonialism. This research question has been pivotal in my life based on my long-term observations and discussions with my colleagues and pre-service English teachers. This group was represented collectively in the related literature which emphasized that the pre-service English teachers served certain aims. I believe that they were objects of the study for the scholars to advance in their career and were victimized by English language departments and broader societal structures such as the Ministry of Nation-

al Education and the Turkish Council of Higher Education. Their ideas and participation in the preparation of the curriculum in neither ELT departments nor other higher educational institutions were encouraged. Learning their beliefs, views and attitudes scientifically has hardly helped a critical approach to be adopted and developed. In addition, I observed that they never preferred to call themselves 'pre-service English teachers but rather 'interns or practicum teachers'. It was academics that coined this term on behalf of them. Naming this group was mandated by the academic scholars. Therefore, the ELT scholars in Turkey also transferred this term without developing a critical perspective towards the use of this term and why it was named so. Dealing with such a prefabricated term may have facilitated their academic job and alleviated their academic burden while representing them. However, I believe that naming a specific group in academia always causes chaos, ambiguity, confusion, power relations, and hierarchical problems. Thus, the representation of naming a specific group brings a number of problems along. Adams, Jones and Ellis (2015) rightly problematize social science through autoethnography.

...autoethnography emerged in response to concerns about colonialism, the need to recognize social difference and identity politics, an insistence on respecting research participants, and an acknowledgment of different ways of learning about culture. The crisis of representation motivated researchers to recognize the limits of the knowledge claims they make about the contexts, subjects, and findings of their research. The crisis considered the limits of scientific knowledge, particularly what can be discovered, understood, and explained about identities, lives, beliefs, feelings, relationships, and behaviors through the use of empirical or experimental methods. (p.21-22)

These statements question what social science is and show how autoethnography can contribute to it. Positivism has adopted the nomothetic approach by creating dominant and powerful discourses. In autoethnography, knowledge is problematized due to its close relation to power. Naming entails knowledge and power. I also noticed that those in power in the discipline of education named and labeled students as 'pre-service teachers'. I interrogated 'pre' and 'service'. Identities, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and professional lives are influenced through naming and knowledge. A specific group, pre-service English teachers in this case, is represented through knowledge and power. They are told what to do and how to behave. Their

teaching practices, bodies, identities and experiences are guided by those in power. Can the subaltern (pre-service English teachers) speak? (Spivak, 2003) I constantly interrogated 'pre', 'service', 'English' and 'teaching'.

- Pre-what? Servicing what? Which language? Which teaching?
- Whom were we (English lecturers/Pre-service English teachers) serving?
- What is the relationship between critical pedagogy and servicing English?
- Why do ELT departments and schools of foreign languages have to use the curricula imposed on them by the global English textbooks, the Turkish Council of Higher Education and the Ministry of National Education?
- Why Is English So Dominant In Turkey?

I asked these kinds of critical questions for myself and to understand why so many scholars use this term so easily and overwhelmingly. However, my main concern was to explain whom the pre-service English teachers in Turkey serve. As an insider in ELT discipline, I believed that my perspective could contribute to the transformation of this term and its political nature. I also realized that pre-service teachers as objects of research are silenced, disregarded and depoliticized as a result of hegemonic discourses constituted by those in power. I aim to deconstruct these discourses, break the silence and oppose the hegemonic practices imposed by various policies in Turkey. Turkish culture prioritizes the English language in Turkey. From my perspective, this adoption needs to be problematized. In addition, pre-service English teachers become victims of this hegemonic perspective. Thus, I criticize this culture from my perspective as an insider.

Hegemonic Practices And Subjective Experiences

Critical pedagogy entails the discussion of socio-political issues and opposing neoliberal practices (Freire, 2000). However, based on my observations, I can say that only non-controversial topics are allowed in language teaching classrooms in Turkey. Hegemony of those in power is exerted in different forms. English-only language is reinforced through the governments' policies. English teachers give consent to these policies and teach English without questioning the state of the language. This neoliberal consent has been constructed historically through repressive and oppressive mechanisms.

The new capitalism has been discussed considerably by some American intellectuals (Apple, 2011; Giroux, 2002; McLaren, 1988). However, American universities have been unable to rid the effect of neoliberal policies. The topics to be discussed in language teaching classrooms are determined by the academic and political elites. Learners and even teachers have few or no roles in determining the content of the syllabus and curriculum. Critical subjective experiences are downgraded and neglected. What I have observed so far is that learners in English language teaching are expected to obey what is imposed on them. Even if they would like to express their views and to have an effect on their own departments, they are aware that their voices will be hardly heard. The absence of participatory democracy and critical pedagogy seems to be the main obstacle in transforming the neoliberal education into a more emancipatory education system. It is often acknowledged that English is a beneficial language for many in this world and therefore needs to be taught. However, what is excluded from this discourse escapes attention. Learners and teachers are audited and surveilled by the political or academic elites or their discourses (Foucault, 2012).

Praxis And Transformation

I have long observed English language teaching departments and schools and concluded that critical pedagogy is not allowed in the classrooms because of historical, cultural and political reasons. I decided to work with Freire in my classes because he provided me with the necessary conceptual tools to reflect upon my experiences. Freire's use of praxis, dialogue and dialect was effective and beneficial in my teaching (Freire, 2000). I have also learned a lot about the criticisms of neoliberalism and emphasis on emancipatory education (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2002; Rule, 2011). I do several things in my class. First, I establish a platform for the learners where they can express their ideas freely. We also raise socio-political problems to discuss in the classroom. I often tell them that they are free to discuss their opinions as long as we respect each other. I mention the effect of Freire on Brazil and other countries and how he created significant changes in pedagogy. I introduce some important terms such as social dialogue, praxis, reflection, action dialectic and problem-posing. I often emphasize in the class that we could collaborate with each other to produce meaningful changes in our

immediate environment. We try to develop the culture of democracy by discussing what is unspeakable or considered a taboo. I bring movies, books and theater plays that could help us transform some ideas. For example, we problematize the state of English in Turkey and in the world. I read Pennycook's ideas about colonialism and Phillipson's comments about neoimperialism and English. I comment that English is closely related to colonialism, neoliberalism and neoimperialism (Pennycook, 2002; Phillipson, 2017). Considering the effect of central academic and political institutions on the overwhelming spread of English, it is often taken for granted that English is neutral, beneficial, and natural for the world citizens. The learners and teachers trained in English language teaching departments are often disconnected from the history of colonialism and neoliberalism. Therefore, a constant forgetting is taught in ELT departments. In order to gainsay these forgetting practices, it is important to raise the origins of the English language so that the learners can comprehend how English causes other languages to be ignored. I emphasize that ELT departments and learners serve neoliberalism and the legacy of colonialism indirectly. Therefore, we discuss the importance of critical linguistic human rights and critical pedagogy. The global textbook publishers, the British Council, the academic elites, the central political and educational institutions tend to produce the discourse of endorsing English so that Turkey can be economically strong. It is emphasized that the expansion of English benefits Turkey economically on a global scale. This neoliberal perspective needs to be opposed by the English teachers and students in Turkey. The neoliberalization of the English language education system is considered the violation of human rights from my perspective because it leads to the disappearance of other languages. Therefore, I often emphasize the inclusion of participatory approach, radical pedagogy and linguistic human rights into the curriculum and syllabus. Giroux (2002) addresses that teachers have significant roles as intellectuals.

Reflective Practices And Implications

The number of ELT departments in Turkey has increased dramatically since 1980s and have been places where cultural construction of Anglo-America has been dominant and where more profits can be made through neoliberal policies. Schools, especially higher education institutions, are governed and

dictated by corporates and their members in schools (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Giroux, 2002). Institutes and actors have only changed roles. However, more repressed and oppressed individuals that can rarely create significant transformations have been hardly educated especially since 1980s (Giroux, 1984) Marx and Engels (1961/1848: 31-32) expressed this issue perfectly in the 19th century, which we are still experiencing in a changed manner.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones... The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development.

These statements can be likened to neoliberal agencies in universities because universities have become a convention center where trade is done officially and legally. What they practice commercially at universities has been normalized. Critical pedagogy emerged as a model against banking model representing neoliberal models (Freire, 2000). In addition to economic power, universities have also been politicized to impose power on their cultural workers. Therefore, hegemonic power has established itself with economic power (Gramsci, 1991; Laclau, and Mouffe, 1985). The so-called pre-service English teachers should be aware of what is determining their professional identity and what they serve. In addition, the academicians in ELT can deconstruct the discourses regarding pre-service English teachers. Thus, a radical movement is necessary for both teacher candidates and academicians to displace the overwhelming expansion of the English language and oppose the policies imposed by the central governmental institutions. Radical pedagogy can contribute to such transformative practices.

The pre-service English teachers have been educated as cultural workers that have been conditioned to think that English is a neutral, natural and beneficial for them and others. English has been seen as a lingua franca and international language. The positive sides of English have been discursively constituted by the political elites, ELT scholars and educational institutions.

The pre-service English teachers are sent to public and private schools to serve neoliberal policies and to be under the hegemonic power of the policies produced through the British Council and the World Bank.

This autoethnographic study showed that theoretical discussion of social and political issues through principles and parameters of critical pedagogy may not produce the expected and desired changes in the universities. We need more radical steps such as raising awareness of linguistic human rights, policies imposed and mandated. I believe that students and teachers who aim to create a small or significant change in their social environment may encounter failure. Therefore, theory and practicality should be accompanied by experience by trying to create only small changes. Using radical participatory approach and democracy can enable future (English) teachers to displace themselves and place them into a more ethical space. ELT departments can revise their curriculum and make radical changes to radicalize their future teachers to resist and gainsay cultural construction of Anglo-America, neoliberalism and neocolonialism. Thus, they can be transformative intellectuals that serve no ideology or no movement. Said (1996) addresses the role of intellectuals as follows.

I also want to insist that the intellectual is an individual with a specific public role in society that cannot be reduced simply to being a faceless professional, a competent member of a class just going about her/his business. The central fact for me is, I think, that the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. (p.11).

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