



Decolonising EFL Education: A Critical Pedagogical Perspective

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Abstract:

English is widely taught as a foreign language, often privileging British and American norms rooted in native-speaker ideologies. This orientation reinforces neocolonial power structures and undermines learners' cultural and linguistic identities. EFL classrooms frequently neglect the diverse realities of global English users. This paper argues for decolonising EFL education through critical pedagogy, advocating a shift from passive instruction to dialogic, problem-posing methods. Incorporating learners' lived experiences enhances relevance and inclusion. Such practices foster critical awareness, learner empowerment, and active citizenship. It is recommended that EFL educators adopt this decolonial approach to promote democratic, inclusive language education and support social justice.

Keywords: *critical pedagogy; decolonising EFL education; lived experiences*

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to critically examine the concept of critical pedagogy with the aim of contributing to the decolonisation of EFL education. Crookes (2012, p. 1) asserts, “Critical pedagogy in language teaching is a perspective in language curriculum theory and instructional practice that supports and advances teaching and the study of languages in ways that would promote social justice.” In this sense, critical pedagogy represents an approach that can be harnessed to decolonise EFL classrooms by linking classroom instruction with broader political, cultural, and social contexts. Such a pedagogical orientation aspires to cultivate learners who are committed to transforming existing societal conditions in pursuit of a more equitable world. Shor (1992, p. 23) maintains that “Human beings are capable of overcoming limits if they can openly examine them. The participatory class offers that possibility.” Accordingly, EFL instruction ought not to be confined solely to the transmission of grammatical rules or preparation for standardised examinations. Rather, it should provide learners with opportunities to critically engage with contemporary issues, fostering the potential for social change. In a similar vein, Giroux (2014, p. 496) argues that “learning is not about memorising dead knowledge and skills associated with learning for the test, but engaging in a more expansive struggle for individual rights and social change.”

Nevertheless, education is frequently perceived as a means to secure employment and, consequently, a comfortable future. This perception leads to the prevailing view of educational institutions as sites for preparing students for the labour market. While it is undeniably important to equip students with the requisite skills for employment, such a focus must not overshadow the equally critical task of preparing students to function as active members of society. As Giroux (2011, p. 101) observes, “education is not only about issues of work and economics, but also about questions of justice, social freedom, and the capacity for democratic agency, action, and change, as well as the related issues of power, exclusion, and citizenship.” In this regard, Giroux (1979, 1988, as cited in McLaren, 1995) draws a distinction between two types of classroom objectives: micro and macro. Micro objectives primarily aim to ensure mastery of course content and are often narrow in scope. Macro objectives, by contrast, seek to connect course content to the wider socio-political context, thereby enabling students to cultivate a critical consciousness.

However, fostering critical consciousness among learners poses a challenge to the interests of dominant groups, who often favour the reproduction of a compliant and subservient citizenry. To this end, education is frequently co-opted as a tool of domination, with the oppressed being encouraged to conform to prevailing social norms. In such contexts, the narratives of the time are shaped by elites “the oppressors” and disseminated as authoritative prescriptions to the wider population “the oppressed.” Freire and Macedo (1998, p. 69-70) contend that the oppressed are not “marginal persons”; rather, they exist within structures that define them as “being for others” instead of “being for themselves.” In order to restore the humanity of the oppressed, educational environments, and EFL classrooms in particular, need to be reconceptualised as spaces for liberation. As Darder, Torres, and Baltodano (2017, p. 455) argue, “An anti-oppressive approach to education informed by critical pedagogy” should be integrated into language teaching and learning. The purpose of critical pedagogy, therefore, is to empower the oppressed, raise their awareness, and enable them to become active agents. As McLaren (1995, p. 32) posits, “critical pedagogy is dedicated to self-empowerment and social transformation.” Classrooms that adopt this approach can function as platforms that bridge day-to-day learning with broader global realities. To achieve this, classroom discourse is expected to build upon the prior knowledge and lived experiences that students bring with them. Dewey (1938, p. 89) emphasises that “Education in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and for society must be based upon experience-which is always the actual life-experience of some individual.”

Thus, education plays a crucial role in shaping students’ experiences and responding to social challenges. At its core, the issue is twofold. Education can either empower students to become critical thinkers who actively engage with social, economic, and environmental concerns in the pursuit of a fair and sustainable society, or it can produce passive learners who see their surroundings as unrelated to wider issues. These students are often taught to conform to existing norms. Shor (1992, p. 13) explains, “Education can socialise students into critical thought or into

dependence on authority, that is, into autonomous habits of mind or into passive habits of following authorities, waiting to be told what to do and what things mean.” This transformative potential of education can be achieved through critical pedagogy, which encourages dialogue and challenges traditional, authoritarian approaches to teaching—such as the ‘banking’ model that discourages active participation.

1. Problem-Posing Education

Education plays a fundamental role in fostering a more just and equitable society. This objective can largely be achieved through the adoption of pedagogical approaches that cultivate learners’ critical consciousness and equip them with the knowledge and competencies essential for citizenship. Giroux (2011) emphasises that education is essential to the survival of democracy, arguing that democratic societies depend on an educational culture that nurtures critical, reflective, and informed citizens who are prepared to make ethical decisions and contribute responsibly to society. The problem-posing model of education, most prominently associated with the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, seeks to create the conditions necessary for citizens to critically engage with and transform prevailing social structures. According to Freire (1972, p. 74), “Problem-posing education does not and cannot serve the interests of the oppressor. No oppressive order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: why?” This approach encourages both educators and students to interrogate their lived realities and to engage in meaningful dialogue about their experiences and concerns. Education, in this context, is not detached from the wider world but is rather situated within it. Consequently, EFL educators are expected to establish meaningful connections between language learning and societal realities. Shor (1992) contends, isolating the classroom from the external world inhibits the development of learners as active and engaged citizens.

Within the framework of problem-posing education, both teachers and learners are considered active participants in the learning process. Knowledge is not monopolised by any single individual; rather, all participants may serve as sources of insight and understanding. Educators are encouraged to remain open to learning from their students and to adjust their instructional plans in response to learners’ reflections. Freire (1972, p. 68) affirms, “the problem-posing educator constantly re-forms his reflections in the reflection of the students. The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher.” In this spirit, while the teacher may initiate discussions by selecting a topic, it is imperative that the topic aligns with students’ interests to ensure meaningful engagement. As learners reflect on the proposed issues and draw from their personal experiences, teachers are expected to listen attentively to extract themes for subsequent sessions. In this model, the curriculum becomes a collaborative construct, developed jointly by teachers and students. Shor (1992, p. 54) notes, “To make problem-posing work, the teacher needs to listen carefully to students to draw out the themes and words from which critical curricula are built.” This collaborative approach enables EFL learners to practise the target language through the articulation of their experiences, while simultaneously acquiring new knowledge in a cooperative context. Learners thus move from passive recipients to active contributors, while the teacher assumes the role of facilitator. Shor (1992, p. 8) observes, “I learn a lot about them, but they are always capable of surprising me with something new.”

Following classroom discussions, participants are encouraged to take concrete action. The central aim of problem-posing education, as articulated by Wallerstein and Auerbach (2004, p. 13), is “to inspire a continual cycle of reflection and action, or participatory praxis.” Action may commence within the classroom through further research or the integration of relevant media, such as images or videos, that represent personal or collective engagement with the issue. These artefacts can serve to elicit deeper dialogue. Eventually, learners and educators may extend their actions beyond the classroom, for instance, by seeking legal support or contributing to community projects aimed at addressing the discussed concerns. Insights from these actions may then be reintegrated into the classroom for collective interpretation, and, if initial strategies prove ineffective, alternative solutions may be proposed. In this way, the classroom is conceptualised as a gateway to social transformation. According to Giroux (2011, p. 14), critical pedagogy

involves “encouraging students to take risks, act on their sense of social responsibility, and engage the world as an object of both critical analysis and hopeful transformation.” Drawing on Freire’s work, Crawford (as cited in Crookes, 2012) delineates the following principles of critical pedagogy:

- Education should foster critical thinking by presenting learners’ circumstances as problems to be interrogated and acted upon.
- Learners are responsible for producing their own learning materials.
- Curriculum content should emerge from learners’ lived realities, as expressed through generative themes.
- Curriculum planning involves organising these generative themes and connecting relevant subject matter to them.
- The teacher’s primary role is to pose problems.
- The teacher learns alongside students.
- The teacher contributes to dialogue with their own ideas and experiences.
- Students hold the right and power to participate in decision-making.

While the problem-posing approach provides a powerful means for engaging students in classroom dialogue that reflects their lived conditions, several limitations must be acknowledged. Micheletti (2010, p. 1) argues that Freire overlooks the inherent “imbalanced power structure between the teacher and the students. For all interests and purposes, the teacher is always an authority, no matter what.” Furthermore, granting learners complete autonomy in choosing what to study may result in a lack of structure, potentially undermining educational progress. In response, Shor (1992, p. 16) clarifies, “Empowerment here does not mean students can do whatever they like in the classroom. Neither can the teacher do whatever she or he likes. The learning process is negotiated, requiring leadership by the teacher and mutual teacher-student authority.” Freire’s model also places significant emphasis on eliciting students’ personal narratives, which may not be comfortable or appropriate for all learners. Some students may view the classroom as a sanctuary from their everyday realities and may therefore resist engaging in such discussions. Additionally, Freire’s model does not fully account for individual personality differences; for example, introverted students may be less inclined to participate actively. Moreover, his focus on the binary relationship of “oppressor-oppressed” neglects the complexities of life issues.

In response to such criticisms, Wallerstein and Auerbach (2004) maintain that, rather than focusing on Freire’s limitations, educators should draw inspiration from his work while adapting it to contemporary complexities. Educators are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and to collaboratively examine pressing societal issues with their learners. Importantly, the problem-posing approach does not concentrate on isolated personal problems, but rather on “generative themes” rooted in shared social conditions. For students who perceive the classroom as a refuge, this broader focus may foster a sense of solidarity and shared experience. Similarly, introverted students may gradually become more willing to participate through sustained engagement in cooperative inquiry. Moreover, problem-posing education needs not be devoid of enjoyment; humour may serve as a valuable tool in creating a safe and engaging learning environment. Wallerstein and Auerbach (2004, p. 25) affirm, “laughter and analysis of generative themes are not antithetical, and in fact may help create a safe environment to deal with loaded issues.”

In light of the above, it is advisable for educators-particularly those working in EFL contexts-to adopt the problem-posing approach. This pedagogy not only facilitates language practice but also encourages critical engagement with real-life issues. Ultimately, problem-posing education entails more than the mere promotion of student participation; it requires educators to take responsibility for identifying shared concerns, fostering critical dialogue, and creating opportunities for strategic action.

1.1. Dialogic Pedagogy

Freire (1972, p. 167) argues that “In the dialogical theory of action, subjects meet in cooperation in order to transform the world.” Indeed, “Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (ibid, p. 81). The origins of dialogic education are often attributed to the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), who emphasised the significance of historical, social, and cultural contexts in child development. Rather than viewing children’s actions in isolation, Vygotsky focused on how their interactions with families, peers, and teachers shaped their development (Lyle, 2008). He asserted that “what a child can do with assistance today, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87), underlining the formative role of social support.

Vygotsky was also concerned with the interplay between language and thought. He posited that language influences cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1962), stating, “Prior to mastering his own behaviour, the child begins to master his surroundings with the help of speech” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 25). Thus, he rejected the notion that cognitive development is purely an individual endeavour, instead proposing that it is shaped significantly by environmental conditions and social interactions. Importantly, Vygotsky did not claim all learners possess equal innate capacities, nor did he attribute their failures solely to teachers. Rather, as Mercer (1995, p. 72) explains, Vygotsky believed that “a learner’s actual achievement is never just a reflection of that individual’s inherent ability but is also a measure of the effectiveness of the communication between a teacher and a learner.” Accordingly, he encouraged teachers to engage dialogically with their pupils to nurture their intellectual growth and knowledge construction.

Similarly, Freire (1921–1997) upheld the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. Like Vygotsky, who believed that “all the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57), Freire stressed that dialogue cultivates critical consciousness: “Every human being, no matter how ‘ignorant’ or submerged in the culture of silence he may be, is capable of looking critically at his world in a dialogical encounter with others” (Freire, 1972, p. 13). While Vygotsky was the first to foreground the role of interaction in learning, Freire advanced the concept of a specific form of interaction: dialogue. For this reason, Freire is widely regarded as the pioneer of dialogic pedagogy: “without Freire there would be no theory of dialogic pedagogy” (Skidmore & Murakami, 2016, p. 1).

Derived from the Greek word *dialogos* (dia: through, logos: word, speech, reason) (Watkins, 2005), dialogue signifies a mutual exchange of ideas between interlocutors. Freire and Shor (1987, p. 100) define it as “the sealing together of the teacher and the students in the joint act of knowing and re-knowing the object of study”. Rather than statically transferring knowledge, dialogue facilitates a dynamic approach to understanding, involving both teachers and learners as active participants. This approach is particularly valuable in the EFL contexts, where it enables learners to develop linguistic proficiency, critical thinking, and communicative competence, what Mercer (1995, p. 80) calls “ways with words”. Dialogic pedagogy contributes to democratic participation by fostering norms of deliberation and equipping learners with skills in argumentation and public discourse (Snell & Lefstein, 2014). According to Freire (1973, p. 45), dialogue grounded in mutual respect, trust, and humility enables participants to progress from naive to critical consciousness. For teachers, this means creating inclusive learning environments in which all voices are valued: “dialogue... helps to create a more equitable and inclusive classroom learning environment” (Juzwick et al., 2013, p. 4). Alexander (2008, p. 38) outlines five essential components for classroom talk to be considered genuinely dialogic:

- **Collective:** Teachers and students tackle tasks together, whether as a group or as a whole class.
- **Reciprocal:** They listen to one another, share perspectives, and consider alternative views.
- **Supportive:** Students express ideas without fear of ridicule and help each other to build understanding.
- **Cumulative:** Contributions build upon previous ideas and form coherent lines of enquiry.

- **Purposeful:** Teachers guide discussions with clear educational intentions.

When these elements are present, dialogic teaching can yield numerous benefits, including improved learning outcomes, performance, and behaviour (Watkins, 2005, p. 48). It also fosters civic engagement by encouraging learners to deliberate on everyday issues, both within and beyond the classroom. Juzwick et al. (2013, p. 8) note, “Learning to dialogue and deliberate with diverse others in school can prepare citizens to capably participate in community and societal dialogues about the pressing issues of our time.” Classrooms that embrace dialogue are often described as “learning communities” (Watkins, 2005, p. 55), where learners co-construct knowledge, challenge ideas, and develop the skills to articulate, justify, and reconsider their beliefs. Fisher (2007, p. 616) asserts, “It is through dialogue that we develop consciousness, learn control over internal mental processes and develop conceptual tools for thinking.” Teachers play a vital role in facilitating this process. By encouraging learners to reason and provide evidence for their claims, and by offering constructive feedback, they enable learners to “negotiate and construct new meanings” (Reznitskaya, 2012, p. 447). Dialogue, then, serves as a platform for discussing themes rooted in students’ lived experiences, with the ultimate goal of empowering them to transform their realities. Shor and Freire (1987, p. 99) put it, “Through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don’t know, we can then act critically to transform reality.”

Despite its pedagogical potential, dialogic teaching is often underutilised in EFL contexts due to teachers’ lack of training or the dominance of teacher-centred approaches (Lyle, 2008). Furthermore, although teachers possess greater subject expertise and are responsible for guiding the learning process, their authority in dialogic classrooms should not be authoritarian. Freire states, “I cannot be authoritarian. I have to be radically democratic and responsible and directive. Not directive of the students, but directive of the learning process, in which the students are with me” (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 46). Teachers must also strike a balance between granting students’ freedom of expression and maintaining classroom order. Dialogue is not a laissez-faire discussion, nor a monologue dominated by the teacher. Shor (1992, p. 85) explains, “Balancing the teacher’s authority and the students’ input is the key to making the process both critical and democratic.”

Another criticism of dialogic pedagogy is that some students may choose to remain silent, either because their views have already been expressed or because they are hesitant to contribute. While Freire and Shor (1987, p. 103) acknowledge students’ right to silence, they advocate for ‘situated pedagogy’ to encourage participation. This entails addressing themes relevant to learners’ lived realities, which can motivate them to engage in critical reflection and dialogue. In EFL settings, everyday issues that resonate with students’ concerns can foster deeper engagement: “In situated pedagogy we discover with students the themes most problematic to their perception” (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 104). Crucially, such themes should not be returned to learners as predetermined truths but presented as problems to be critically examined. Shor (1992, p. 88) asserts, “I learn from students the centrality of certain themes in their lives, and re-present them as problems for reflecting on the ordinary in an extraordinary way.”

Dialogue is important not only for academic development but also for nurturing learners as autonomous thinkers and active citizens. Since it is “An essential element in their development as future independent learners and active citizens” (Fisher, 2007, p. 618), it must be intentionally cultivated in the classroom to realise its full transformative potential.

2. The Banking Education

For students learning English in non-English-speaking environments, the classroom represents a crucial site for developing communication skills, given that English is rarely spoken outside the educational setting. In this context, it is imperative that classroom discourse is rooted in themes drawn from students’ interests and lived experiences, thereby encouraging them to engage in meaningful dialogue and exchange perspectives. Shor (1992, p. 5) argues, “Finding a generative theme, that is, a theme generated from students’ conditions which is problematic enough to inspire students to do intellectual work, can produce a wealth of student expression.”

Nevertheless, in many EFL contexts, educational practices are shaped by a top-down approach. In such systems, classroom topics are often prescribed by central authorities and disseminated hierarchically. This model aligns with what Freire (1972) calls the “banking concept” of education, where teaching is viewed as a process of depositing information into students, who are treated as passive recipients, while the teacher assumes the role of the depositor. In such classrooms, the teacher dominates the talk, and students are treated as empty vessels, entering the classroom to be filled with information deemed valuable by their instructors. Success, in this view, is equated with the capacity to memorise and reproduce deposited knowledge when required. Freire (1972, p. 57) contends that “Education is suffering from narration sickness,” wherein the classroom becomes the domain of “a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening object (the students).” As a result, even content that addresses pressing contemporary issues can become “lifeless and petrified.” Freire further asserts that this form of education “mirrors the oppressive society” (1972, p. 59), and he outlines its defining characteristics as follows:

- The teacher thinks, and the students are thought about.
- The teacher chooses and enforces their choices; the students comply.
- The teacher knows everything; the students know nothing.
- The teacher teaches; the students are taught.
- The teacher talks; the students listen meekly.
- The teacher disciplines; the students are disciplined.
- The teacher acts; the students merely appear to act through the teacher.
- The teacher is the Subject of the learning process; the students are mere objects.
- The teacher equates their professional authority with the authority of knowledge, placing this in opposition to students’ freedom.
- The teacher determines the content; the students, without consultation, are expected to adapt.

In the banking model, the teacher’s responsibilities are largely limited to two stages: preparing lesson content with students viewed as passive objects, and subsequently delivering this content in the classroom (Freire & Macedo, 1998). Within this paradigm, the teacher occupies a central and authoritative role, functioning as the sole possessor of knowledge to be transmitted to unquestioning learners. Consequently, students are denied the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills or engage in transformative learning. Boerckel and Barnes (1991, p. 1) observe, this approach benefits oppressive systems that seek to mould compliant individuals who can be easily governed. Freire (1972, p. 60) reinforces this view, stating, “The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world.” That is, students who are socialised into passivity within educational contexts are unlikely to challenge societal injustices or envision alternatives to the status quo. Michelletti (2010, p. 1) therefore describes the banking model as “a system of oppression and control,” designed to persuade individuals that existing conditions are adequate, and their only role is to absorb the narratives imposed by those in power.

The knowledge imparted to learners through this model is often drawn from what Shor (1992, p. 32) terms the “central bank of knowledge”—that is, the standardised curriculum followed by schools and universities. Teachers are expected to deliver content strictly from this official syllabus, passing it on to students without space for interrogation or adaptation. This “central bank,” Shor describes it as a shared culture that is meant to belong to everyone, even though not all individuals have had the same opportunity to contribute to it, benefit from it, challenge it, or fully participate in it. Unsurprisingly, the banking approach has attracted significant criticism. Although Freire was a pioneer in denouncing this model in the 1970s, earlier thinkers such as Dewey had already questioned the efficacy of passive learning. Dewey (1916, p. 38) contended that “education is not an affair of ‘telling’ and being told, but an active and constructive process.” Whereas Freire refers to this mode of teaching as the “banking” concept, Dewey characterised it as “pouring in.” Despite widespread criticism, both terms continue to describe practices that remain entrenched in contemporary classrooms.

Indeed, Dewey queried, “Why is it, in spite of the fact that teaching by pouring in, learning by passive absorption, are universally condemned, that they are still so entrenched in practice?” (1916, p. 38). Decades later, some EFL classrooms continue to be shaped by teacher-centred discourse. For instance, Dehkordi and Talebinejad (2017) examined the challenges Iranian EFL learners faced in acquiring fluency and accuracy in English. Their findings attributed learners’ underperformance to teacher-dominated classroom talk, which limited students’ opportunities to engage with the language beyond “rehashing after the teacher or reacting quickly” (p. 186). Nevertheless, proponents of teacher-centred approaches argue that this model facilitates the effective transmission of structured and systematic knowledge. Charlton (2006) maintains that teacher dominance can ensure clarity in conveying complex ideas. It is also argued that instructors, acting as information providers, can comprehensively cover essential content, ensuring learners do not miss key concepts. Moreover, structured classrooms may offer a quiet environment conducive to attentive learning. However, this perspective overlooks the diversity of learners’ prior knowledge. Students do not arrive in classrooms as blank slates; they bring with them individual experiences and cultural understandings. Klipfel and Cook (2017, p. 115) point out, “Instead of viewing ourselves primarily as experts in information, our first task is to be curious about others’ inner lives.”

Furthermore, when teachers exercise complete control over content and classroom interaction, they may overestimate the value of their authority. Shor (1992, p. 14) notes that many students reject the prescribed knowledge and roles assigned to them, opting instead for withdrawal, silence, or disengagement. To counter this, Freire proposed the ‘problem-posing’ model of education, in which both teachers and students actively participate in the learning process. Unlike the banking approach, which reinforces existing power hierarchies, the problem-posing model fosters a dialogic and liberatory learning environment. Freire and Macedo (1998, p. 74) assert, those committed to realising social justice and human freedom “must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relation with the world.”

The banking concept of education—where learners are treated as passive recipients of official knowledge—remains prevalent in many educational settings, despite longstanding criticism. Although it may enable the efficient delivery of technical content, this model ultimately undermines critical thinking, meaningful dialogue, and learner agency. In EFL classrooms, such an approach not only silences student voices but also risks perpetuating colonial dynamics by imposing linguistic and cultural knowledge rather than fostering its co-construction. As a result, the banking model can serve as a mechanism of epistemic colonisation, marginalising local identities and indigenous ways of knowing. A defining characteristic of this model is what Freire (1972) termed “antidialogics”, a form of interaction that suppresses genuine dialogue and critical engagement.

2.1. Anti-Dialogic Pedagogy

In contrast to dialogic educational settings, where students are invited to contribute to classroom enquiry and are free to remain silent if they have nothing to offer, anti-dialogic environments compel learners to respond upon being selected by the teacher, regardless of their readiness or willingness. In dialogic classrooms, students are encouraged to voice their views and construct meaning collaboratively. Conversely, anti-dialogic settings reduce learners to passive recipients of pre-established knowledge, where correctness is privileged over critical thought. This asymmetrical relationship between teacher and student reflects what Freire (1973) terms an authoritarian, vertical dynamic, where one party (A) dominates another (B). Freire critiques anti-dialogue as arrogant, loveless, hopeless, acritical, and mistrustful. It “does not communicate, but rather issues communiqués” (p. 46). A prevalent example of anti-dialogic practice is the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) sequence, conceptualised by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), wherein the teacher initiates a question, the student responds, and the teacher provides evaluative feedback. This model typifies monologic discourse, which Bakhtin (1984) contrasts with dialogic engagement. Unlike monologism, which treats knowledge as fixed and transmitted from teacher to student, Bakhtin argues that dialogue recognises truth as emerging through collaborative, interactive exchanges among individuals seeking mutual understanding.

Monologic classrooms rest on the assumption that knowledge resides solely in the teacher, and that students must receive, memorise, and regurgitate this knowledge without question. Many learners, shaped by such environments, struggle to adjust to dialogic approaches, having internalised the belief that the most successful students are those who follow the teacher's instructions without questioning. Similarly, many educators, products of monologic instruction themselves, tend to adopt the IRF structure, perceiving it as effective. However, even those who seek to foster dialogic teaching encounter significant challenges. Shor (1992) observes, "the effects of non-dialogic classrooms spill over into participatory ones" (p. 93). He further describes monologic teaching as "direct instruction", wherein the teacher dictates what students should memorise (p. 96), and as "frontal pedagogy", where the teacher delivers content from the front of the room to rows of silent pupils. This frontal pedagogy, according to Lyle (2008, p. 225), "focuses power on the teacher; it stifles dialogue and interactions between pupils and their ideas". In such contexts, students are treated as vessels to be filled, devoid of prior experience, background knowledge, or cultural identity. In response to this reductive view, Hooks (1994, p. 88) insists:

You can't deny that students have experiences, and you can't deny that these experiences are relevant to the learning process, even though you might say these experiences are limited, raw, unfruitful or whatever. Students have memories, families, religions, feelings, languages, and cultures that give them a distinctive voice.

This recognition is central to decolonising EFL education. Decolonisation entails dismantling the colonial legacy that privileges Eurocentric knowledge systems, teaching methods, and linguistic norms. Traditional monologic practices often replicate colonial dynamics, wherein Western epistemologies are imposed upon learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. By contrast, a decolonial pedagogy seeks to value and integrate students' lived realities, linguistic repertoires, and socio-political contexts into the learning process. Freire (1972, p. 58) affirms that "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other". Thus, knowledge is not a static entity to be delivered by teachers but is constructed collaboratively within a learning community. Skidmore (2000, p. 293) emphasises, "knowledge is not a private possession but the product of a collective enterprise". Mercer (1995, p. 9) similarly asserts that classrooms should be understood as "real-life settings in which knowledge is jointly constructed and in which some people help others to develop their understanding".

Consequently, the IRF structure should be replaced, or at least complemented, by dialogic teaching. One practical step is to substitute habitual praise with feedback that not only encourages but also extends and deepens learners' thinking (Alexander, 2008). Wells (1999) argues that frontal pedagogy can indeed be transformed into dialogic interaction if teacher feedback builds upon and elaborates student responses. Teachers may also ask students to justify their answers, prompting deeper reflection and engagement. Despite widespread critique of the IRF model, its dominance remains evident in many educational contexts. Goodlad's (1984) study revealed a minimal level of student engagement, suggesting that colonial legacies-embedded in transmission-based pedagogies and hierarchical structures-continue to influence classroom practices, including EFL instruction. However, while monologic teaching can undermine critical engagement, it may at times serve a pedagogical function, particularly when introducing unfamiliar concepts or terminology. Reznitskaya (2012, p. 449) cautions that "dialogic teaching should not be dogmatic. There are contexts in which other methods may be more appropriate." Juzwik et al. (2013, p. 5) similarly argue for a more nuanced approach: "Rather than categorising instruction as either dialogic (good) or monologic (bad), it is more helpful to consider which dialogic tools will engage students in talking to learn." Incorporating learners' lived experiences and contemporary socio-political struggles into EFL classrooms can foster greater engagement and promote dialogic interaction. This approach also contributes to decolonising EFL education by centering learners' voices, resisting authoritarian pedagogies, and challenging Eurocentric norms in language instruction.

II. Conclusion:

EFL education is often framed around the acquisition of linguistic and communicative skills, with an emphasis on enabling learners to effectively use the target language. However, this approach frequently aligns with what Freire terms the “banking model” of education, where knowledge is “deposited” into passive learners, disregarding their cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and socio-political contexts. Such a model reinforces “antidialogue”, silencing student voices and perpetuating a one-directional flow of information. In contrast, the “problem-posing” model advocated by Freire promotes a dialogic approach, where education is co-constructed through critical engagement with learners’ realities. Dialogue, in this sense, becomes a means of mutual learning and collective transformation. This pedagogical shift is particularly vital in EFL settings, where decolonising approaches can challenge Eurocentric assumptions and value local knowledges, languages, and identities. By fostering authentic dialogue and embracing learners as active agents, EFL education can move toward more inclusive, meaningful, and emancipatory outcomes.

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