

EMBRACING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS CRITICALLY TO EXPLORE LIFE PURPOSES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: English language teacher education is not only about making students who learn to teach English focus on language teaching, learning, and use but also about how teacher educators can delve into the life purposes of themselves, their students, and their students' learners. The role of a language teacher educator is hence pivotal in orchestrating learning materials and activities that allow students to explore life purposes at individual, community, and international levels. As a scholar interested in critical language teacher education, one of my life purposes is to nurture my students' criticality. To illustrate how my student performed criticality over time, in a case study, I explored my dialogue on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a learning material with one focal student in my Critical Pedagogy & Literacy class from January to April 2019 and beyond, even after she graduated. Criticality was demonstrated when she problematized oppressive words and actions and envisioned social transformation as she learned (to teach) English. A narrative analysis of the data also suggests that the student's life purpose (e.g., to empower her fellow Papuan people) aligns with that of her instructor and her Papuan English language learners. Implications for critical language teacher education are discussed.

Keywords: criticality, English language education, life purposes, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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It never dawned on me how I eventually was enlightened by an academic encounter outside the English language education box. Thanks to Edward Harefa, then an undergraduate student of Physics Education at my institution, who invited me to be one of the judges of our university's *Pekan Ilmiah Universitas* (PIU/University Science Fair) in 2018. The Science Fair's central theme was Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) viewed from various disciplines. The winner was an undergraduate student of the Faculty of Electronics and Computer Engineering. His paper—Smart Transportation for Sustainable Cities and Communities¹—was impressively written and presented in English when I was the judge.

¹ See https://ece.uksw.edu/detail_post/news/mahasiswa-ftek-unjuk-gigi-di-dies-ke-62-uksw-2.

I was astonished at how non-English majors presented their papers in English and how PIU 2018 participants could relate SDGs to their disciplines (e.g., electronics, education, natural sciences, psychology, and agriculture). As an English language teacher educator who had offered Critical Pedagogy & Literacy (CP & L) elective course since 2007, I began thinking, feeling timid, “If my students who are English majors only know how to listen, read, speak, and write in English, what is their added value? Many non-English majors speak English fluently, too!” On the other hand, I also thought optimistically, “Aha! SDGs is the very lens through which my English language education students read the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987)!” I felt ashamed actually that I had not been aware of the notion of SDGs before I became the PIU judge, but I was like, “It’s fine. Better late than never.” In fact, there is a growing literature that recently addresses SDGs in applied linguistics (McEntee-Atalianis, 2017; Romaine, 2013), foreign language pedagogy (de la Fuente, 2022), and ELT (Fındık et al., 2021; Maley & Peachey, 2017).

One of my life purposes is to nurture my students’ criticality in the English language teaching (ELT) context (see e.g., Mambu, 2023). Put another way, I would like my students to be able to read the world through words in a critical manner. I am not the only scholar who has endorsed criticality, including critical pedagogy (CP), in ELT. For instance, most of ELT academics as research participants in Jeyaraj and Harland’s (2014, 2016) studies and scholars affiliated with Indonesia (Hayati, 2010; Larson, 2014) have seen the potentials of CP for English language teachers and students. Inspired by the ELT literature that promotes the significant role of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST) and CP in South Korea, Hayati (2010) stated, “I am also a teacher educator in an undergraduate teacher education program... who is still struggling with my identity as a NNEST but has a vision to apply critical pedagogy... to empower the aspiring NNESTs I teach” (p. 83). Likewise, in the 2020s, I believe that SDGs are replete with words that can help my language learners read the world critically (e.g., no poverty, zero hunger, quality education, gender equality, and reduced inequalities).² The question is how my life purpose aligns with those of my learners. Nicholas and Starks (2014) argued, “... the process of language teaching is not reduced to just a focus on the language, but is and must be connected with the *life-purposes* of the learners” (p. 95, emphasis added). Below I will review how the literature on language education/applied linguistics and beyond views life purposes, SDGs, and criticality, especially in critical language teacher education.

Exploring the connection between language education and applied linguistics, Nicholas and Starks (2014) suggest that learners’ “life-purposes” might range from “total integration with an assumed target community to subvert the norms of that community” when viewed through the “additional language socialization” lens (p. 95). Within a continuum of complete conformity to and total rejection of the norms of a target language community are varying degrees of learners’ interests in some spheres (e.g., spirituality [Lepp-Kaethler & Dörnyei, 2013] and social justice) and apathy in other spheres (e.g., capitalistic and hedonistic ways of life) of the community. Additional language acquisition is not a simplistically uniform process wherein all learners want to conform to a target community’s linguistic, political, ideological, or cultural norms. Hence,

² See <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

language educators play a role in optimizing additional language acquisition that allows individual learners to achieve their unique life purposes. In Nicholas and Starks' (2014) view:

a potential 'X' factor for understanding additional language acquisition is the issue of how [language educators'] perspectives interpret the life-purposes of their learners and how they see their responsibilities to both the learners and the societies in which they are embedded. (pp. 96-97)

Although language educators as applied linguists cannot always know what their learners' life purposes are at the initial stage of their encounter with the learners, they are responsible for asking these questions:

What do learners bring with them (their repertoires)?

What are learners doing and how are they doing it?

Where are learners going (their life trajectories and goals)?

What role(s) do others play in how the learners progress in the acquisition process? (Nicholas & Starks, 2014, p. 93)

Learners bring with them their histories, cultures, different levels of language skills, identities, and interests or "investment" (Norton, 2013, p. 5; e.g., reading the Christian Bible as a "sacred text" in a foreign language [Lepp-Kaethler & Dörnyei, 2013, p. 171]) that might account for their sense of life purposes when learning a foreign language like English. Only when the learners communicate their repertoires in some ways (e.g., telling a story of a miserable life experience) can language educators and fellow learners know what they bring with them and their future goals. Although Nicholas and Starks (2014) did not discuss the fourth question in depth, I contend that educators and peers play a role in learners' acquisition process due to "a potential 'X' factor" (p. 96; e.g., if they share similar concerns/life purposes or when educators can elicit their learners' repertoires and imagined purposeful futures). Furthermore, to demonstrate their responsibilities to society (Nicholas & Starks, 2014, p. 97), language educators can bring an international framework (e.g., the United Nations' SDGs) to their learners' attention. Such a framework allows both critically/spiritually oriented educators (e.g., Puspita & Mambu, 2020; Vandrlick, 2018) and learners to explore today's concerns at global and local levels.

SDGs replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015. SDGs have been praised for widening "the understanding of sustainable development to include environmental, social, economic and political concerns" (Struckmann, 2018, p. 1), which were missing in MDGs, and "capturing the complexity and interconnectedness of multiple development concerns" (Sengupta, 2018, p. 13). However, even before 2015, an applied linguist like Romaine (2013) was already interested in highlighting the place of multilingualism in achieving MDGs. In her view, becoming members of linguistic minority groups worsens people's living conditions, especially when they are women and part of a lower socioeconomic status. Catering for the needs of all multilinguals, not just those with privilege, is hence necessary to achieve quality education (SDG #4) (Lo Bianco, 2017) and promote peace and social justice (SDG #16) (Ortega, 2018). Attempts to improve quality literacy (SDG #4) grounded in indigenous cultures were initiated by a Ugandan-based NGO reported by Ngaka et al. (2016). Nevertheless, there is

still limited research into how civil society, apart from NGOs (e.g., educational institutions), incorporates SDGs into their (language) curricula. Budget cuts in the United Nations have also made it more difficult to disseminate SDGs in languages other than English (McEntee-Atalianis, 2017).

In an edited volume, Maley and Peachey (2017) have collected chapters containing lesson plans for English language teachers to explore SDGs in their classrooms. Maley, in his poem in the volume, has also stated that if English language teachers only “stick to language” and do not “help [students] think about globalization, exploitation, ... discrimination, ... how inequality brings poverty, ...” they would be “cheater[s]” not “teacher[s]” (p. D). Socciarelli et al. (2020) and Guevara (2022) have also recently proposed language activities integrating SDGs. However, little is known concerning whether a teacher educator’s interest in addressing SDGs critically in the ELT classroom aligns with the life purpose(s) of his/her students (who practice teaching) and their learners.

Criticality manifests at cognitive, attitudinal, pedagogical, and spiritual levels. At a cognitive level, criticality is demonstrated when a person exercises critical thinking or reasoning to reach a consensus, win a debate, analyze an issue, and identify biases (Banegas & Villacañas de Castro, 2016). Criticality in ELT includes critical thinking and “critical pedagogy” (Banegas & Villacañas de Castro, 2016, p. 455), the latter of which refers to “an attitude to language teaching which relates the classroom context to the wider social context and aims at social transformation through education” (Akbari, 2008, p. 276). As an attitude, the inclination toward increasing social (justice) awareness (see Hawkins & Norton [2009] in the context of critical language teacher education), endorsing activism to “work toward change” (Pennycook, 2022, p. 16), and actualizing social transformation (e.g., by combatting neoliberalism in language teacher education; see Gray, 2019), is often spiritually motivated (Vandrick, 2018).

Spiritually based criticality can be inspired by one’s religious belief. For example, Puspita and Mambu (2020) investigated Christian English teachers incorporating their faith and criticality into ELT. Meanwhile, Sharma (2018) argues that Hinduism aligns with critical pedagogy. Nevertheless, spiritually based criticality is not always associated with a particular religion. Introducing the notion of “critical spiritual pedagogy” (CSP) from a more secular standpoint, Ryoo et al. (2009) attempt to lay bare imbalanced power relations that frequently cause “fragmentation” (i.e., prioritizing [Western] intellectuality but silencing one’s spirit or indigenous wisdom), “Othering” (i.e., positioning non-Western people and their traditions as being inferior or at a periphery), and “exploitation” in students’ lives (p. 135). In the light of CSP, fragmentation is to be countered by “integrity” (or “holistic education”) that “balances spirit with mind and spirit with body” (p. 137) and “connects students to the society at large” (p. 138). With CSP in mind, Othering is to be “counteracted when students and teachers *all* play a role in an interdependent community, with every person’s well-being tied to one another” (p. 138, italics in original). The antidote to exploitation is, from the CSP perspective, *agape*, a Greek word for “a brotherly love – not based on merit or value” (p. 140) or an “unconditional love” (p. 141). Love, in this sense, “allows us to make connections and discover ourselves,” as well as “embrace... even those who we do not know or those who oppress us” (p. 141).

Discovering oneself (or critical reflexivity) can painfully expose imbalances between a relatively privileged person him-/herself and the socioeconomically less advantaged. However,

critical reflexivity is necessary to better empathize with oppressed people. For example, Vandrick (2018) quoted a secular Jewish ELT scholar who stated:

Because of how Jews have been treated throughout history, we felt an obligation to step in when others' rights were trampled on, not just Jews' but [those of] anyone who was oppressed. We were taught not to settle in comfortably to our own privilege as whites and middle-class professionals. (p. 114)

Thus, besides attention to critical awareness of oppression in society and social transformation through holistic education, community building, and love, criticality also requires inward-looking reflexivity that interrogates one's positioning in power relations.

My life purpose as a language teacher educator has been to nurture my own criticality while planting seeds of criticality for my students (Mambu, 2009, 2018, 2022, 2023). However, the degree to which language students perform their criticality in responding to some SDGs over an extended period of time is still underexplored. Jeyaraj and Harland (2016) found that none of the 13 CP-inspired ELT educator-scholars in their study "knew what happened to their students after they left their classes and graduated." They continued, "the long-term impacts of learning about political and social issues in the context of ELT... are unknown," so "exploring on these impacts on students after they graduate" is necessary if students/alumni are hoped to be "critic and conscience of society" (p. 351). Likewise, Mambu (2023) recommends that students' persistent interest in exploring SDGs critically after completing their studies still warrants further inquiry.

I was fortunate to stay in touch with one former student (from Jayapura, Papua province, Indonesia) who took my Critical Pedagogy & Literacy (CP & L) course in 2019 and participated in my initial study reported in Mambu (2022, 2023). Jayapura is very remote from the island of Java, the nation's center of economic and political activities. However, unlike some other cities and regencies in Papua and West Papua provinces, Jayapura (the capital of Papua province, Indonesia) is no longer regarded as an underdeveloped region as per the Regulation of the President of the Republic of Indonesia Number 63 of 2020 concerning underdeveloped regions in 2020-2024.³ Therefore, it is unsafe to generalize that all Papuans are academically left behind than their Javanese counterparts. It is also inaccurate to claim that all people in Papua (including Jayapura) and West Papuan provinces live in poverty. Extreme poverty is a real issue in the Papuan land (Firdaus, 2017), but my former student from Jayapura (the focal participant of the present study) is from the middle class. Continued access to her made it possible to address the gap in the literature regarding the impacts of CP in ELT after students graduate.

The guiding questions for the current inquiry are hence as follows:

- How did a female Papuan majoring in English language education perform her criticality when addressing SDGs in my CP & L class and after she graduated?

³ See <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Home/Details/136563/perpres-no-63-tahun-2020>.

- How did the Papuan student's criticality align with her own, her learners', and her instructor's (or my) life purpose(s)?

METHOD

The current paper is part of a more extensive case study (see Mambu, 2022, 2023) where a critical ELT curriculum was co-designed by me as a language teacher educator, my CP & L students in 2019, and English language learners (ELLs) in various contexts (e.g., Papuan ELLs and orphanage ELLs) where my students held their service-learning.

Context

The initial stage of the study was in the CP & L elective course at the English Language Education study program, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (UKSW) in Salatiga, from January to April 2019. UKSW is highly multicultural. The elective course represents UKSW's multiculturalism: students are of Chinese, Javanese, and Papuan descent, and I am Minahasan (from North Sulawesi). The present study also reports on a focal participant's extended conversation on SDGs two years after she completed my elective course.

UKSW is one of the largest private universities in Indonesia, with over 14,000 students in 14 faculties and more than 55 study programs. Although Protestants and Roman Catholics are the dominant religious groups (over 70%), over 30% of the student population are Muslims. Buddhist, Hindu, and Confucian students exist, but their number is minimal.

Participants

Pamela (a pseudonym), one of my former students, was selected as the focal participant in the current paper because she seemed to extend her interest in SDGs even after she graduated from UKSW in 2020. She participated in sessions of SDGs webinars conducted by UKSW's international office during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. In particular, Pamela responded to webinars on SDG #2 (No Hunger; March 26, 2021)⁴ and SDG #4 (Quality Education; April 16, 2021).⁵ I was not the speaker in both sessions, but I attended the talks delivered mainly in English.

In her early 20s, Pamela was a final-year English Language Education undergraduate student when she took my elective course. She is a Papuan from Jayapura, a city in a coastal area approximately 4,000 kilometers east of Salatiga. In the CP & L course, she did the service-learning with her peers (Rani and Fitri [pseudonyms]) by preparing lesson plans and teaching 10 Papuan ELLs. They are non-English majors studying as undergraduate students at UKSW (see Mambu, 2022). Although many Papuan students are more left behind academically than those in Java, Pamela was a high-achieving student and quite a proficient English speaker, as far as my observation is concerned. Pamela completed her studies in 2020.

⁴ See https://youtu.be/igvV91PiLDw?list=PLY4qh4N0_oMDMYUK25NwNDFWArSh5Y-IW.

⁵ See <https://youtu.be/KHOnFHNqbsw>.

Data Sources

Data for the current paper were generated from Pamela's texts and talks in several phases. First, Pamela wrote her responses to my prompts related to SDG #1 (No Poverty) in the first week of the course on January 9, 2019. Her written response was then elaborated orally in a classroom talk on the same day. The second data set was her lesson plan that she developed in collaboration with her peers (Rani and Fitri, starting from week 7) and in consultation with me (weeks 8 and 10). Together they agreed to address SDG #10 (Reduced Inequalities), although each person was responsible for delivering the lesson to the Papuan ELLs (see Mambu, 2022 for further details of the ELLs). Pamela's turn to implement her lesson plan was on Friday, April 5, 2019. The third data set consists of Pamela's lesson plan, some excerpts from her teaching session, and her written teaching reflection (individual portfolio submitted on April 12, 2019). The fourth data set contains the transcripts of her comments to webinars on SDGs #2 (No Hunger) and #4 (Quality Education) in 2021. Supplementary data include responses from me (in the webinars on SDGs) and Pamela (on May 30, 2022).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed at cognitive, attitudinal, and pedagogical levels to address the first research question of how Pamela's criticality was performed. Cognitively, Pamela's lower- and higher-order thinking skills (LOTS and HOTS; see Anderson et al., 2001) used when responding to SDGs-related written prompts in the first week were analyzed. The prompts focused on either language or meaning (Nation, 2007; see Mambu, 2023 for more details). Attitudinally, Pamela's criticality was demonstrated when she related the CP & L classroom context and SDGs webinars to what she witnessed or experienced in Papua. Data that show how Pamela practiced developing, implementing, and reflecting on her lesson were analyzed at a critical pedagogical level. Furthermore, assuming that one's life purpose is spiritually driven, I examined Pamela's produced SDGs-related utterances/texts and my responses to her through the Critical Spiritual Pedagogy (CSP; Ryoo et al., 2009) and applied linguistics (Nicholas & Starks, 2014) lenses. Unless otherwise indicated (i.e., using square parentheses for edited parts), data predominantly in English, which might contain language errors, was transcribed verbatim. Data in Bahasa Indonesia was translated into English by the author.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In the following sub-sections, criticality in Pamela's discourse will be presented regarding how it emerged and to what degree it related to her and my life purposes.

From Understanding an SDG #1 Text to Creating a Plan for Reducing Poverty

In language education, a student's critical thinking (or criticality at a cognitive level) can be measured by the degree to which s/he can activate LOTS (e.g., knowing facts, understanding a text) and HOTS (e.g., applying common sense/knowledge from one context to another,

analyzing facts, and creating new knowledge; see Anderson et al., 2001; Mambu, 2023) in an additional language being learned. Building upon this understanding, I assigned my CP & L students to read several SDG-related texts and answer my written prompts on January 9, 2019. Pamela received the SDG #1 worksheet containing SDG #1 text⁶ and prompts I created for the students to respond. Through Nation's (2007) lens, my prompts are language- and meaning-focused. Some of the meanings are already available in the text. For example, when asked about "the struggle of around 11% of the world population," Pamela correctly answered based on the text: "... to fulfil the basic needs such as health and education access to water." Pamela addressed another meaning-focused prompt (i.e., "Mention one indicator of living in an extreme poverty. How much is it in [Indonesian Rupiah]?") quite accurately: "Living on less than \$1.90 in IDR 15,000,-." Another meaning-focused prompt required Pamela to use her reasoning (i.e., "... mention some factors that can make people really poor"). Pamela's reply was copied verbatim: "Not creative or has less knowledge in created what they have like [natural resources] around them; The increasing of economic needs."

Some other prompts are language-focused and require some degree of reasoning. First, I wrote on the worksheet: "The last paragraph of the first page states: 'Right now there are 30 million children growing up poor in the world's richest countries.' Think of an English adjective to describe this phenomenon." What I had in mind was actually "ironical." However, Pamela came up with "pity," which is not an adjective, although it made sense. The other language-focused prompt was more cognitively challenging because Pamela had to apply her paraphrasing skill: "Paraphrase this statement: 'Growing inequality is detrimental to economic growth and undermines social cohesion, increasing political and social tensions and, in some circumstances, driving instability and conflicts.'" Unfortunately, this time Pamela's answer was inappropriate because her version was still too similar, lexically and syntactically, to the original text and inaccurately restated: "Growing inequality driving instability, conflicts, increasing [sic] political and social tensions. Also detrimental to economic growth and undermines social cohesion. In other words, growing inequality causes many things."

My last prompt in the worksheet was meaning-focused and required Pamela to create a plan to reduce poverty: "As young people who might become English teachers, what can you do [to reduce] poverty?" Creating is the highest-order thinking skill, in view of Anderson et al. (2001), and Pamela's written response reads: "Not just teaching them about the language but also teaching them to use the language to ignore [sic] them from the poverty... [T]hey could use the language and make money from it."

The findings suggest that criticality is nuanced, particularly at a cognitive level. It is not a black-and-white state where a person is either critical or not at all. While Pamela's written responses are overall incomplete and grammatically inaccurate, which might come across as being lack of criticality, her criticality incrementally emerged from a rudimentary stage/low-order thinking skill (e.g., being able to identify that living in extreme poverty is living on less than IDR 15,000) to a more advanced stage (e.g., her comment on Papuans' being "not creative"

⁶ I used this material:

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Goal-1.pdf>.

in handling natural resources; her statement that to reduce poverty, students should not focus only on language but also how they could “make money from it”). The latter might still sound simplistic (see further discussion in Mambu, 2023). However, her criticality did not stop here; on the contrary, it expanded in an extended conversation where SDGs were part of her and my concern in other events beyond the CP & L course, to which I now turn.

Extending the Conversation on Poverty and Hunger

After my students completed the SDG-related worksheets in week/meeting 1, I asked the class to respond to the worksheets orally. Pamela responded to me by expanding on her statement that “not creative” in handling natural resources was a factor that could make people remain poor (recall the SDG #1 worksheet). She told the class that when working on the worksheet, she recalled a situation in Papua: “[Some Papuans were] not creative to create their [natural resources] ... For example, they have some *kebun pisang* [banana plantation]. They sell the bananas to [non-Papuans], but when they get hungry, buy [sic] the fried bananas” from non-Papuans.

Similar to bananas, Pamela talked about *papeda* (a traditional porridge made from sago starch), too. The Papuans have the sago, but they sell it to non-Papuans, who then make *papeda* out of it, and the Papuans buy the *papeda*. Pamela implied that many indigenous Papuans could avoid poverty if they were smart enough to make fried bananas and *papeda* from banana plantations and sago they have (see Mambu [2023] for Pamela’s peer’s response to this story).

Two years after Pamela passed the CP & L course, she revisited the banana-sago narrative in a question-and-answer session on SDG #2 (No Hunger). Unlike her first telling two years earlier, in the second telling quoted below, Pamela’s narrative provided background information before she asked for a suggestion from the Webinar speaker and me.

There was a family. They had a banana plantation. One afternoon, the child[ren] wanted to eat fried bananas. If the family had not sold all of their bananas and bought some ingredients to make fried bananas, they would have generated a lot of incomes... They could make their own fried bananas, too. This situation happened in Papua. I am now in Papua. I am from Papua. I was Pak Joseph’s former student... So that was what happened in Papua. Now many Papuans have sago fields. Sago is the unique Papuan staple food. And the Papuans sold all their sago fields. Then they re-bought the sago in the market. As a young person, I feel concerned. And I think, what will happen in the upcoming years to the younger generation? Will they still be able to see sago trees?... But as a youth here, my question is not really heard by people here. Many of them only listen to those who are considered influential. Maybe I’d like to ask a suggestion from... *Pak Joseph, would like to give me some suggestions* [sic]. *What should I do or what should the young people do here to give a good influence in order for the people to not sell all they have but how they could be creative instead and generate incomes from what they have.* (March 26, 2021; Translated from Bahasa Indonesia, except for the italicized parts)

Pamela’s similar narratives in 2019 (in the first meeting of our CP & L course) and 2021 (during the SDG #2 webinar) showed her critical attitude toward how her fellow Papuans mismanaged their natural resources. The latter narrative even sparked new insights when I extended the dialogue. In addressing Pamela’s specific question of how the Papuans could be

creative and entrepreneurial, I was reminded of my wife's favorite YouTube channel (Dianxi Xiaoge),⁷ which depicts traditional cuisines in Yunnan, the southwestern part of China. In the webinar, I suggested that Papuan people can learn from indigenous people like Dianxi Xiaoge in Yunnan how to process local foods and create attractive, monetized YouTube content.

Although Pamela seemed to only criticize her fellow Papuans in the first telling, in the second telling, she framed the banana-sago story in her attempt to reach out to me for help. This shift suggests that Pamela's critical attitude shifted from mere criticism to humbly asking for solutions.

Thus far, Pamela's criticality was demonstrated when she responded to the SDG #1 worksheet (assigned in my CP & L course in 2019) and an oral presentation (when giving comments in a webinar on SDG #2 in 2021). In the following sub-section, Pamela honed her criticality by designing, executing, and reflecting on a lesson as part of her service-learning, a project in my CP & L course, for Papuan ELLs.

Addressing Inequality (SDG #10) in a Lesson Plan, Its Implementation, and a Post-Teaching Reflection

A component of the final major assignment of my CP & L course in 2019 was for the students to implement their lesson plans in two to three teaching sessions. Pamela and her two peers developed lesson plans that addressed inequality (SDG #10) for Papuan ELLs. Pamela was in charge of the third teaching session. Applying the revised Bloom's Taxonomy (LOTS-HOTS; Anderson et al., 2001) in her lesson, Pamela asked her Papuan ELLs, non-English majors, to remember forms of inequality that were already raised in the previous meeting (see Mambu, 2022 for more details of how Pamela's lesson plan was fleshed out). In her session (April 5, 2019), the opening remark was: "What have you learned [in] the last two meetings?" A male ELL said, "Inequality." Pamela replied, "Good. Then?" Another male ELL said, "Freedom." Reminding the ELLs of their Christian faith, Pamela continued in English: "How do[es] the Bible say to you about inequality?" One female Papuan replied: "Kayak Minggu kemarin masuk ke kitab Mazmur kan? Tuhan berkata melalui Daud, bahwa di mata Tuhan, semua sama [Like what we learned last Sunday from the book of Psalms, right? The Lord said to David that in God's eyes, all are the same]." It is unclear what biblical verse it was, but Pamela confirmed: "Ya. So, in God, we are the same."

The revised Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001) contains several cognitive phases: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating, ranging from LOTS to HOTS. Focusing on the understanding phase, Pamela asked her Papuan friends as ELLs to watch Prince Ea's *I am NOT Black, You are Not White*.⁸ Then, Pamela checked their comprehension by asking them to compare the video clip to their lives. One female ELL responded, translated to English here, "When I did my teaching practicum, because I am a pre-service teacher, the mentor teachers in the school talked about my tattoo, 'A teacher-to-be but tattooed? It's not good.' But I was like, '*This is my body*'" (the italicized part is originally in

⁷See <https://www.youtube.com/c/%E6%BB%87%E8%A5%BF%E5%B0%8F%E5%93%A5dianxixiaoge>

⁸See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0qD2K2RWkc>.

English). Responding to her ELL, Pamela commented, translated to English here, “so, tattoos were considered disturbing the soul of a teacher?” The ELL nodded. Pamela continued, “but for you as a teacher, tattoos are just tattoos.” In retrospect, Pamela designed a lesson that allowed the ELLs to understand the gist of the video clip and to evaluate critically a lived experience of discrimination in relation to the YouTube content. Subtle discrimination due to having a tattooed body also seems to add another layer of racial discrimination against the female Papuan ELL.

Later in her teaching session, Pamela asked her Papuan ELLs to analyze “... the most useful way... to reduce inequality.” One ELL attempted to respond to Pamela’s prompt, “I want to read our answer. We think smile is better than asking them why they are laughing at us. Because, when we only given [sic] them to smile, it means we can be a friend.” Although the ELL’s answer is debatable, there were no further comments.

For the evaluating phase, ELLs were to group themselves based on their agreement or disagreement with statements read aloud by Pamela. The statements were as follows: (1) “There are some inequalities that happen in UKSW;” (2) “People (students, staff, and lecturers) need to raise their awareness about inequality issues that happen in UKSW.” One male ELL who disagreed with statement #1 explained the reason, translated to English: “There is no inequality. UKSW could have rejected us, ‘No Papuans [are allowed to be admitted to UKSW]!’ ... But we can do anything here. We are given opportunities to be here and learn some local languages. It’s awesome.” Another male student responded similarly regarding opportunities to express their thoughts, although he complained about inter-ethnic relations. Female students tended to agree with statement #1. One female student highlighted the lecturers’ use of the Javanese language, which made it difficult for Papuans to understand lessons. When she said she could not understand the lesson, the lecturer remembered to switch to Bahasa Indonesia. Another female student reminded the male students that wearing *koteka* (penis sheath) during a cultural festival was deemed pornography by some people in Salatiga. Concerning statement #2, overall, the ELLs agreed because “UKSW is known as a miniature of Indonesia” (a female Papuan ELL; translated from Bahasa Indonesia).

The last HOTS phase was creating. ELLs in smaller groups were asked to draw pictures illustrating inequality among ethnic groups. Of the three pictures produced in three small groups, one picture portrays inequality between Papua and Java regarding learning how to use a computer: One student has one computer in Java at school, but many in Papua use one computer.

When reflecting on her teaching session, Pamela admitted in her written portfolio, “Because my students are not really fluent in speaking English, so as their teacher, I have to mix my language with Bahasa [Indonesia] to make them understand the lesson.” In her written reflection, Pamela also focused on a Papuan ELL’s picture of an imperfect *Garuda* bird (the national emblem of Indonesia). She stated:

One of the group[s] draw a picture of bird but the bird wings are not perfect in one side. The reason the draw [sic] like that is because what they see in the east of Indonesia is has [sic] not be perfect yet, is still developing, so the imperfect wing is show [sic] the east side of Indonesia which is developing while the perfect wing is show [sic] the west side of Indonesia that is already perfect in everything, such as in the west they have good education, the facilities are complete for learn [sic], and so on. (April 12, 2019)

Pamela's reflection on the picture of imperfect *Garuda* produced by her ELLs makes salient the unequal development between eastern (especially Papua) and western parts of Indonesia, which might account for the Papuan ELLs' relatively low proficiency in English.

An English Language Teacher Educator's and His Student's SDG-Related Life Purpose

Pamela's life purpose is not necessarily the same as mine. However, her performed criticality seems to actualize my life purpose of fostering students' criticality by exposing them to SDGs-related texts/talks and allowing Pamela to respond to them in English and Bahasa Indonesia. As shown in the previous sub-section, my life purpose was even better materialized when Pamela could emulate criticality by integrating the LOTS-HOTS scheme (or critical thinking) and critical pedagogy that focused on addressing inequality in her teaching session.

One may wonder what Pamela's life purpose was. Her life purpose became evident when she engaged in webinars on SDGs #2 (No Hunger) and #4 (Quality Education) in 2021 and her commentary on May 30, 2022. In the SDG #2 webinar, Pamela requested that I suggest how the Papuan youth could be more creative and entrepreneurial. The request implies that Pamela's life purpose was to increase the quality of human resources in Papua, including youth and teachers. She was also profoundly concerned about teacher quality in Indonesia. Posing the problem of teacher certification after a webinar speaker's presentation on SDG #4, Pamela stated:

I am now a TA [teaching assistant] in one of the international school[s] here... My question is as follows. Is teacher certification designed to improve a teacher's own competence or increase the outcome of a teacher's teaching? What I see here in Papua, especially, is that many teachers take teacher certification, but the outcome of their teaching is inadequate. (April 16, 2021; translated from Bahasa Indonesia, except the italicized words)

In other words, Pamela thought that by taking teacher certification, teachers became more competent themselves, but they could not teach well to make their students learn better.

In 2022, I asked Pamela what motivated her to join webinars on SDGs two years after graduating from UKSW when there were no rewards in terms of grades or passing a course. In her response, she remembered the final project she did in the CP & L course. She related the course to the SDGs webinars in 2021 and envisioned what could be done in Papua. As she put it:

What made me interested in participating in the webinars was that I once joined your [CP & L] class, and it broadened my horizon regarding things around us that greatly impact us. Like the [service-learning] project, it really helped my friends [the Papuan ELLs] to address social problems on campus. It also helped them to study well. And I was really interested in learning it more deeply. I even have a dream that SDGs will be socialized or there will be seminars in the village where I live. Local people need to know these SDGs. (Personal communication on WhatsApp; May 30, 2022, translated from Bahasa Indonesia)

Discussion

English language education does not end only at one's formal graduation. In Pamela's case, her growing criticality as my former student and now an alumna can reveal the degree to which her former instructor's (or my) life purpose (i.e., fostering students' criticality) is achieved. In essence, my task as a language teacher educator/applied linguist is not to make students acquire linguistic forms unrelated to life purposes. On the contrary, some of my missions include being open about why certain materials (e.g., SDGs) matter and providing space for students to explore critically to what extent the materials are also essential for them. The missions are grounded in my philosophy as an English language teacher educator whose life purpose has been primarily inspired by critical spiritual pedagogy (Ryoo et al., 2009), particularly in critical-spiritual ELT (Canagarajah, 2009). Reflecting on one's own philosophy of language pedagogy has been compellingly advocated by Farrell et al. (2020). They declare, "By reflecting on their philosophy... , TESOL professionals can reach a fuller understanding of the important question: 'Who is the self that teaches?' We teach who we are regardless of which method or approach we use" (Farrell et al., 2020, p. 345) or materials we select. A language (teacher) educator like myself can hope that their students find learning materials/activities relevant to their life purpose (e.g., actualizing quality education [SDG #4]) even after the latter graduate from an English language education program. When the SDGs-related life purpose of language (teacher) educators and students resonates with each other, they can hone criticality and "sustainability literacy" (de la Fuente, 2022, p. 2) together.

At a cognitive level, criticality can be performed by a language learner when attempting to receptively understand and productively respond to learning materials (Mambu, 2023). In the current study, cognitive criticality was exemplified by Pamela's activation of LOTS and HOTS when making sense of SDGs-related texts (e.g., by recalling events or experiences that relate to SDGs; attempting to paraphrase a word or a sentence in an SDG text; relating a text to Pamela's own common sense) and envisioning an ideal life condition (e.g., by imagining what Pamela can do to reduce poverty if she becomes an English teacher). A language educator's criticality can also expand when his/her (former) student's sense-making sparks novel insights into an issue. For example, by asking how Papuan youth could be more creative in handling food, Pamela, in an SDG webinar, pushed my thinking to offer a possible solution by relating my (limited) knowledge of inspirational indigenous cooking and food processing in Yunnan to Pamela's concern.

In response to the second research question of the present study, I contend that Pamela's criticality aligned with her own life purpose (e.g., empowering the Papuan youth to be more creative, as implied in her comment in the SDG #2 webinar in 2021). Pamela's criticality was also in line with her English language learners' life purpose (i.e., disclosing or resisting various discriminations) in her teaching session in 2019. My life purpose (i.e., nurturing criticality through SDGs as a framework) has also aligned with Pamela's growing criticality since 2019. Thus, performing criticality is not an individualistic endeavor. Sharing a similarly critical attitude toward an issue (e.g., lack of creativity in handling food) allows people like Pamela and me to utilize our cognitive criticality, especially HOTS, to create a localized solution. Moreover, with my critical attitude toward oppressive words like poverty (SDG #1), hunger (SDG #2), low

quality of education (SDG #4), and inequality (SDG #10) being exposed to my CP & L class, a student like Pamela and her Papuan ELLs made the oppressive words and their associated actions (e.g., not handling bananas and sago creatively; pursuing teacher certification without increasing students' learning quality; mocking the Papuans) our shared enemies.

Criticality also has a multiplying effect. First, the criticality of a person (e.g., an English language teacher educator) can be spread and resonate with others (e.g., students including Pamela). Seeds of criticality planted in students might emerge, if not also blossom. Second, English language teacher educators and their students can envision or concretize social transformation when channels of dialogue are open between them. In dialogues, educators and students can lay bare the oppressions permeating society. Forms of oppression include "fragmentation" (Ryoo et al., 2009, p. 135; e.g., reducing teacher professional development into pursuing teacher certification), "Othering" (e.g., a Papuan ELL being laughed at in the market; accusing the male Papuans' performance in a cultural festival of pornography), and "exploitation" which accounts for Papua being less developed than the western part of Indonesia. One way of defying fragmentation is promoting "integrity" through "holistic education" (Ryoo et al., 2009, p. 137) for the nurturance of one's spirituality to multiply empathy, community building, and *agape* love (p. 140), especially for Papuan people often marginalized in their own country.

Criticality grows over time. In Pamela's case, it started in the first meeting of my CP & L class when she made sense of the SDG #1 text and responded to my prompts. Although some of her responses to the prompts are not linguistically accurate, she kept her critical attitude throughout the course, especially in her teaching session as part of her service-learning project, in the SDGs webinars in 2021, and when I communicated with her in 2022. Ample time to nurture criticality also makes it possible for teachers and students alike to be reflexive. Notably, the current findings based on Pamela's longitudinally generated data respond to my recent call for more inquiry into language "learners' sustained investment in exploring... SDGs" critically (Mambu, 2023, p. 72). More broadly, extending Jeyaraj and Harland's (2014, 2016) related works, the present study also begins to tap into the impact of critical pedagogy relatively long after a student like Pamela graduated from the English language education undergraduate program.

Reflexivity as a form of criticality is one's ability to interrogate "our own privilege" (Vandrick, 2018, p. 114) that may impact interpersonal encounters often situated in imbalanced power relations. I am fully aware that, as Pamela's former teacher, I have been positioned as more powerful than her. I granted grades to my CP & L students and was asked to provide suggestions in a webinar. However, by interacting with Pamela and her fellow Papuan ELLs, I have been humbled by their critical responses multimodally. In particular, the picture of an imperfect *Garuda* is like a slap on my face, although I have known that Papua is less developed than Java. It never occurred to me as a person growing up in Java that the state's emblem would be painted that way. It might come across as politically incorrect, too. However, on second thought, I sense that the Papuan who drew the broken *Garuda* wing on one side aspired to have an ideal nation-state where both sides of the wings are proper, thus depicting a more just Republic of Indonesia. Growing in reflexive criticality, so to speak, is also my life purpose. Pamela's ELLs helped me to achieve this.

Reflexivity is not only about interrogating one's privilege (Kubota & Miller, 2017; Vandrick, 2018) but is also concerned with a person's humility in admitting his/her shortcoming. This was shown by Pamela, who, in a webinar, begged for a solution for her fellow youth in Papua who, in her view, was lacking in creativity and entrepreneurial spirit when it came to processing bananas and sago. The same story told two years earlier was not very reflexive. She appeared critical only to the Papuans, who were not considered creative, not to her own shortcoming in providing concrete solutions.

In view of Nicholas and Starks (2014), the characteristics of criticality discussed thus far can only be explored when language educators like myself provide room for students (and the students' ELLs) to bring their stories, concerns, and critical thoughts into class or beyond (e.g., SDGs webinars). Students' criticality is demonstrated by responding to teachers' written or oral prompts and working on multimodal tasks (e.g., listening to a YouTube link, drawing pictures, or writing a reflective portfolio) focusing on language and meaning (Hayati, 2010; Mambu, 2009). Apart from identifying students' criticality, responses to teachers' prompts and multimodal texts produced by students over time also allow teachers to better understand the students' "life trajectories and goals" (Nicholas & Starks, 2014, p. 93) or purposes. To illustrate, Pamela's concerns about Papua not only manifest in her stories or comments about Papua. Her decision to teach the Papuan ELLs made communal Papuans' life trajectories more vividly visible, thus reinforcing an impression that some of Pamela's concerns are not solely her own but also her Papuan community's. Whether Pamela's English language acquisition process is facilitated in my CP & L course and the SDGs webinars is beyond the scope of the current study. That said, the webinar speakers, her service-learning peers when teaching the Papuan ELLs, and I have provided an "acquisition-rich environment" (a phrase attributable to Stephen Krashen, as cited in Platt & Brooks, 1994, p. 497) where Pamela could be exposed to meaningful language inputs (related to SDGs and critical pedagogy) and practice expressing her critical thoughts, especially in English.

CONCLUSIONS

It is not sufficient for a language teacher educator to only ensure that their students, who are prospective teachers, acquire an additional/second/foreign language being learned (and taught). Criticality should be part of its curriculum if a language teacher education program aspires to cater to each language learner's desire to achieve his/her unique individual life purposes. One way of honing criticality is using a framework like SDGs for teachers and students to address global issues (e.g., poverty, hunger, low quality of education, and inequalities) locally or in light of indigenous perspectives. Pamela and her interlocutors (e.g., Papuan ELLs, webinar speakers, and I) showcased how criticality at cognitive, attitudinal, spiritual, and pedagogical levels was refined across sites, online or onsite over time when some SDGs were employed as shared bases for envisioning or concretizing social transformation locally (e.g., handling natural resources like food in a more creative and entrepreneurial way, identifying and confronting forms of marginalization). SDGs embody the life purposes of many people and state members of the United Nations. When students in a (critical) language teacher education program employ SDGs as a framework to achieve life purposes locally and globally, language learning and

teaching will be more meaningfully transformative as students read and confront oppressive words and injustices in the world.

In light of the current study, some pedagogical implications for an English language teacher education program aspiring to infuse criticality into its students are as follows. First, teacher educators need to expose students to real-world issues (e.g., through the SDGs lens) that they can make sense of and respond to verbally and multimodally (with critical drawings, drama performances, and music compositions) in view of their life purposes. Second, there should be more service-learning projects where critical ELT curricula are designed together by the teacher educator and the students in response to the pressing local needs of a selected learning community being served. Third, English language teacher educators should provide forums for students and alumni, like the SDGs webinars conducted by UKSW in 2021, as part of their continuous professional development to address global issues/concerns and local problems together with society (Kubota, 2023).

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