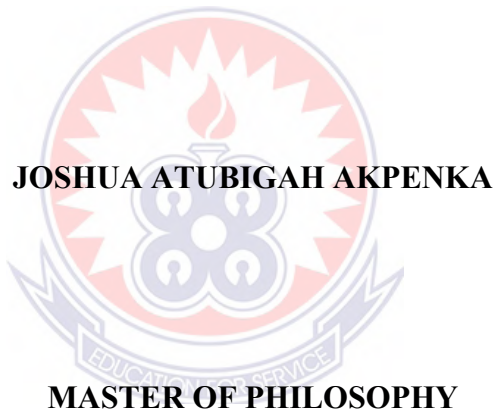


UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AS A PRACTICE OF FREEDOM IN
GHANA: AN ANALYSIS OF SHS STUDENTS' VIEWS AND OPINIONS**



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(220022737)**

**A thesis in the Department of English Education, Faculty of Foreign
Languages Education and Communication, submitted to the School of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(English Language)
in the University of Education, Winneba**

FEBRUARY, 2025

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

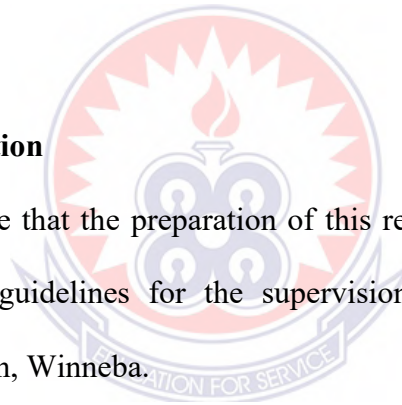
I, Joshua Atubigah Akpenka, declare that this thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE.....

DATE.....

Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation of this research work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for the supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



SUPERVISOR'S NAME: PROFESSOR SEFA OWUSU

Signature:

Date:

DEDICATION

To my late father, Mr. Akpenka Amali, my mother Asumasim Azure, my wife, Azure Safia and Melissa, Barack , Omoya.and Winsanlim



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Sefa Owusu of the department of Applied Linguistics for his professional guidance, encouragement, tenacity of purpose and goodwill with which he guided me in this work. I am forever grateful.

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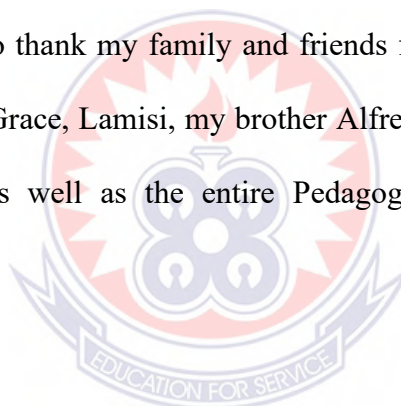


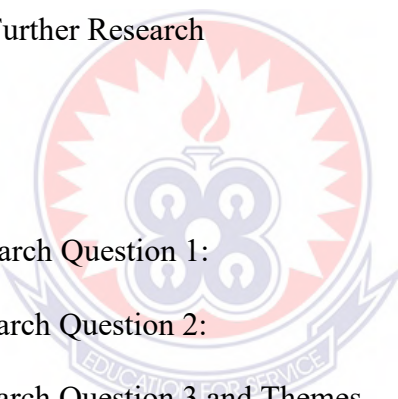
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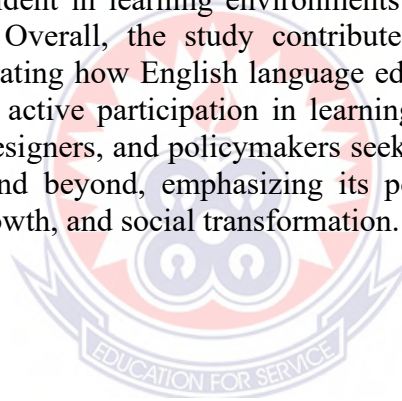
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ABSTRACT

The lack of research exploring students' opinions as a possible practice of freedom has created a significant gap in understanding how language education can be transformed into a more liberating and participatory process. This study was therefore undertaken to address this gap by examining the opinions of English Language Learners (ELLs) regarding the empowering role of English language learning in their academic and personal development. Anchored in the principles of critical pedagogy, the study adopts a qualitative case study focusing on Senior High School students at Sunyani Senior High School in Ghana. Data were gathered from a purposively selected sample of 90 final-year students across three classes through classroom observations and focus group interviews. The observations explored students' language use, classroom participation, and critical engagement during English lessons, while the interviews provided data into their experiences and perceptions of English language learning as a liberatory practice. Their views were analyzed thematically, with emergent patterns coded and interpreted in alignment with the study's research questions. The study reveals that learners perceive English language learning not merely as a pathway to academic achievement but as a transformative process that fosters self-expression, critical reflection, and social interaction. These outcomes are most evident in learning environments that are inclusive, democratic, and student-centered. Overall, the study contributes to the discourse on critical pedagogy by demonstrating how English language education can serve as a medium for empowerment and active participation in learning. The findings seek to inform teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to reform English language education in Ghana and beyond, emphasizing its potential as a tool for personal agency, intellectual growth, and social transformation.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

This study examines the intricate connection between learning English and the idea of freedom within the Ghanaian education system. Based on critical pedagogy, especially Paulo Freire's key concept of education as a "practice of freedom," the research looks at how students in Ghana view learning English, not just as a means for academic or career success, but as a way to gain personal, cultural, and social empowerment.

In Ghana, English functions as both the official language and a lasting vestige of colonial rule. Its dominance in formal education, governance, and national communication renders it a powerful force in shaping educational and socio-economic opportunities (Seagrim, 2022). However, this role is inherently paradoxical. While English serves as a gateway to global participation and upward mobility, it also carries with it the risk of marginalizing indigenous languages and disconnecting learners from their cultural identities. The study seeks to interrogate this tension by centering students' voices: How do they conceptualize their relationship with the English language? Do they experience it as liberating, enabling critical thought, self-expression, and access to wider knowledge systems, or as alienating, reinforcing linguistic hierarchies and postcolonial dependencies?

Students' cultural differences in the classroom should not be seen as a deficit in their language learning. Teachers should rather use these cultural differences to promote interactions and make learners take an active role in the learning process. Teachers appropriately seeking the views and opinions in the application of critical pedagogy will enable students to draw on and demonstrate what they have learned

from their own experiences to analyze situations and choose the most appropriate out of several possible solutions. It would also enable the students to embrace the problem at hand and take responsibility for their learning. This is done by inculcating in them a strong sense of social and economic awareness. Teachers appropriately applying CP in the classroom would also enable students to make use of the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes acquired to contribute effectively towards the socio-economic development of the country and on the global stage. Students would be able to build skills to critically identify and analyze cultural and global trends that enable them to contribute meaningfully to the global community.

The study gathers diverse student perspectives from varied socio-economic, regional, and cultural backgrounds. These insights provide a ground-level view of how English language learning is experienced and perceived in daily academic and social contexts. By emphasizing students as active participants instead of passive recipients of instruction, the study highlights how language learning relates to identity, power, and aspiration.

Several key motivations underpin this research. First, it responds to a growing need to foreground learners' experiences in language education research, which has often been dominated by policy-driven, teacher-centered, or curriculum-based analyses (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Second, it addresses the significant disparities in English language instruction and access across urban and rural regions in Ghana, examining how these inequalities shape students' sense of linguistic empowerment or marginalization. Third, it contributes to ongoing debates around decolonizing education by questioning the inherited structures of language policy and exploring how English education can be reimagined to affirm students' cultural and intellectual autonomy.

As Ghana continues to reform its education system to align with both national development goals and global standards, understanding how students experience and interpret English learning becomes increasingly important. Their views offer critical feedback to educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers about what aspects of English instruction are empowering and which ones may be inadvertently exclusionary. Moreover, encouraging students to reflect on their language learning journeys is itself an emancipatory act, one that positions them as co-constructors of knowledge and participants in the shaping of a more inclusive educational landscape.

In this light, English language learning is not merely a technical skill or academic requirement. It is a socio-political practice with the potential to either sustain or disrupt existing power relations. By situating this inquiry within the Ghanaian context, the study not only contributes to local understandings of language and education but also adds to global conversations about the role of language in fostering critical consciousness, democratic participation, and freedom in postcolonial societies.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In Ghana, English language learning is predominantly approached as a utilitarian skill aimed at enhancing communication and academic performance. However, this instrumental view often overlooks the transformative potential of language learning as a means of empowerment. Drawing from Freire's (1970) notion of education as a practice of freedom, language acquisition should not only serve functional purposes but also enable learners to critically engage with their environment, express themselves freely, and participate meaningfully in democratic discourse.

Despite the empowering potential of English, there exists a significant gap between this ideal and the actual experiences of learners, particularly within rigid, exam-focused, or teacher-dominated classrooms. While some students benefit from democratic and student-centered teaching approaches, others are constrained by restrictive classroom practices, unprofessional teacher behavior, and high levels of language anxiety (Gao, 2024). These conditions often hinder learners' ability to think critically, express themselves creatively, and develop autonomy which are core elements of language learning as a liberatory practice.

Factors such as teaching methodologies, classroom dynamics, teacher-student relationships, and learners' self-perceptions profoundly influence students' engagement with the language. Although some educators attempt to foster inclusive and supportive classroom environments, many students still perceive the language classroom as undemocratic, which undermines their confidence and inhibits their participation. Teachers who exhibit patience, encouragement, and flexibility have been found to create more conducive atmospheres for student empowerment (Weimer, 2013). However, such practices are not consistently implemented across classrooms.

Furthermore, in a sociolinguistic context where English serves as the official language and primary medium of instruction, proficiency in English greatly affects students' access to academic success, civic participation, and broader social opportunities (Salomone & Salomone, 2022). Thus, understanding how students perceive English language learning as a practice of freedom is crucial in evaluating its true impact on their academic and personal development.

Although existing studies in Ghana, such as those by Lomotey (2021) and Nkansah (2021), have highlighted the importance of critical pedagogy in English

language instruction, these studies primarily focus on the perspectives of teachers, neglecting the voices of learners. This omission presents a significant gap in the literature, as teaching and learning are inherently interactive processes. To address this gap, the present study seeks to analyze the views and opinions of Senior High School students in Ghana, particularly how English language learning influences their ability to express themselves, think critically, and exercise autonomy. By centering the student perspective, this study aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of English language education as a vehicle for empowerment and democratic engagement.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the opinions of Sunyani Senior High School students on the learning of the English language as a practice of freedom in the language classroom in Ghanaian.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this research work seek to

1. Investigate SHS students' beliefs about how English Language Learning empowers them to express their thoughts and opinions freely.
2. Examine the role of English Language learning in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and autonomy SHS among students.
3. Analyze SHS students' beliefs about how English Language Learning expands their access to knowledge and information.

1.4 Research Questions

This research work seeks to answer the following research questions;

1. Why do ESL learners perceive English language learning as a means of expressing their thoughts and opinions more freely?
2. How does English language learning foster creativity, critical thinking, and autonomy among SHS students?
3. How does English language learning expand SHS learners' access to knowledge and information?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study, when successfully carried out, will be significant to all stakeholders in education, especially teachers of all levels of education in Ghana. It will be more useful to language teachers of Senior High Schools across the country, such that their approach to language teaching may take a different shape.

Again, this study will serve as a useful resource for researchers interested in conducting research in language teaching and critical pedagogy. Teachers in general will be exposed to the roles and benefits of critical pedagogy for the teacher and learning of all school subjects. Not only will teachers derive the benefits of the applicability of CP, but it will also enable them to amend their methodology in teaching. Students will be well equipped to raise questions about oppressive structures in the classroom that may hinder their progress in learning.

In the area of curriculum, this study will provide curriculum designers' views of students and their perceptions of CP, which may call for the need for the integration of approaches through critical awareness. Policymakers will also be made aware of the need for equal and inclusive participation in the design of the educational policy.

1.6 Delimitation

This study analyzes a variety of views and opinions of Sunyani SHS students in Ghana on the practice and teaching of the English Language using critical pedagogy as an approach to promoting autonomy, freedom, critical thinking, and democracy in the learning of the English language.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Some limitations that went beyond the control of my research work include: first of all, getting participants to honestly respond to the questionnaire at the initial stage of the research was a challenge since that was their first time responding to questionnaires of that sort. The researcher, having explained the idea behind the questionnaire, participants willingly filled out the questionnaires given to them. However, if any participant gives any incomplete responses or answers, it might alter the findings of the research work.

Also, the possibility of some participants not fully understanding the demands of the questionnaires, even though well-crafted and well-explained, may not be detected. This may result in the researcher observing with a bit of bias.

Again, the cost involved in moving from place to place to get participants to respond to questionnaires is demanding and can serve as a limitation to the researcher.

1.8 Organization of the Study

The first chapter presents a general introduction to the thesis. The background provides information about the topic. It further delves into the key areas of interest in English Language Learning as a practice of freedom, which is its impact on learners' personal and intellectual development. The objectives, research questions, purpose of the study, and the problem statement all form part of this chapter. Chapter two focuses on related literature for this thesis. It discusses the constructivist paradigm as a

philosophical worldview guiding this thesis. Discussions on the concept of critical pedagogy, the banking model of education, the concept of conscientização, problem-posing education, critical pedagogy, and language learning all constitute the framework of this thesis.

Chapter three discusses the methodology of the study. It renders explanations of the research design, the research site, the sampling and sampling techniques, and the selection of participants. In addition, this chapter explains the sources of data and data collection procedures. Chapter four presents and analyses the data. The focus is answers to the research questions based on the themes identified. The final chapter provides a summary of major findings, recommendations, suggestions for further research, and conclusions, emphasizing how the study contributes to the academic and practical understanding of the topic.

1.8.1 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduces the research topic and establishes the foundation for the study. It outlines the background, clearly stating the context and rationale for the research. The chapter also presents the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and defines the research objectives and questions guiding the investigation. Additionally, it discusses the significance of the study, its scope (delimitations), and potential limitations. The chapter concludes with an overview of the entire study's structure. The subsequent chapter offers a comprehensive review of relevant theoretical and empirical literature related to the research topic.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with a comprehensive review of related existing literature on critical pedagogy. Important topics are also well discussed, which provides an overview of current knowledge and gaps in the various works. Various methodologies used by researchers in this area of research are also looked at, serving as a guide to the methodology employed in this research work. Related conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature which provides a critical understanding of the research problem are also looked at.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In analyzing the views and opinions of English language teachers on the applicability of critical pedagogy in Ghana, Lomotey (2021) adopted Moorhouse's (2014) model of critical pedagogy in analyzing the views and opinions. The model encapsulates three main thematic ideas: giving students a voice, providing them with an education relevant to their life experiences, and raising students' awareness of social justice.

This research work is concerned with an analysis of the views and opinions of SHS students on the application of critical pedagogy in English Language Learning in Ghana. The study adopted the connectivism Critical Digital Pedagogy (CDP) model (Stommel, 2018).

According to Stommel (2018), CDP is an open and diverse pedagogy that goes beyond the classroom, focuses upon “community and collaboration” and demands the invention of new ways of crossing “cultural and political boundaries “to welcome a “cacophony of voices “from all around the world (p. 9). The basic principle of this

model is taking students' experiences into account and engaging them in critical thinking about social oppression. In a CDP classroom the teacher and learners do not only engage in a dialogic exchange of opinions and make use of their agency to the fullest extent, but they also critically analyze the characteristics and impacts of using any technological tool in the language classroom. Technological tools, learning management systems (LMS), and social media do not dictate to teachers and students how each of these should be used in a classroom, rather teachers and learners invent possible ways, strategies, and manners of using these tools to suit their purpose, beliefs, practices, and philosophy (Stommel, 2018).

The principal emphasis of CDP is on creating an open and liberating digital space for learning which will assign the roles of critical co-investigators of knowledge to both learners and teachers to break free from the age-old traditional banking education system where the teacher is the only knowledgeable individual in the classroom and the students are knowledge-gatherers. The digital platform is an ideal empowering space that gives learners free access to deconstruct, elaborate, and critique any sort of knowledge.

McLaren (1999) came out with six learning principles from Freire's works that can work as a set of guidelines for researchers and practitioners. The six principles are as follows:

- i. Learners should aim at learning about the world through their efforts and their interpretation of knowledge should be centered on their individual experiences, necessities, circumstances, and objectives.
- ii. Learners should approach the history and the culture of the world as an ever-changing and prone to transformation reality that is under construction and continuously changing according to human ideology and their contribution.

- iii. Learners should internalize the strategies of making connections between their circumstances and the existence and construction of reality actively.
- iv. Learners should acknowledge the potential of reconstructing reality and the prospective outcomes that can be derived from such a reconstruction. They should be determined to make their voices heard and take part in building a novel empowering and rejuvenating history in collaboration.
- v. Learners will learn the significance of putting their collaborative projects into print. Acquiring the competence and literacy to publish their ideas, experiences, and interpretations in public domains through “active construction and reconstruction” will help learners realize the importance of their voice as human beings.
- vi. Learners will further realize the existing myths in popular discourses along with the ones that “oppress and marginalize” them which can be overcome and transformed through their change-making actions (p. 51).

The model is chosen for this study because of its appropriateness and the currency in a recent paradigm shift in language teaching and learning. This model recognized learning as a network influenced by Technology and socialization which is influenced by four basic components.

2.1.1 The connectivism model in the English language classroom

This model recognizes language learning as a network that is influenced by technology and socialization. It can be applied in any digital pedagogy because it is practical and relevant in promoting learning as a community endeavor (Goldie, 2016, p.1). This model comprises four basic components of a strong learning network: diversity, autonomy, openness of perspectives, and connection between the learning community and other sources of information.

The connectivism model recognizes that knowledge is not located in any particular source; rather knowledge is gained through interactions between societies and individuals. Technology or digital tools play a crucial role in establishing these connections between individuals and societies.

The linkage between this model and critical pedagogy in language learning is that they interconnect in ensuring that learners practice the learning of language with freedom. They do this by interacting freely with technology and digital tools at their disposal within the learning environment.

The CDP model advocates for zero use of the lecture-based or assessment-led curriculum as well as doing away with the traditional lecture methods by replacing them with modern approaches such as critical pedagogy and critical digital pedagogy. Critical pedagogy and critical digital pedagogy will promote students' critical thinking and digital skills. The following discussion shows a way of applying the CDP model in the English language classroom.

1. Learning outcomes/objectives: according to Stommel (2018), learning outcomes cannot be predetermined in a CDP classroom. Objectives or learning outcomes are something students will decide through critical thinking and reflection as they go through the dialogic process of learning.
2. Curriculum: on the aspect of the curriculum, Bali (2014), posits that there is no fixed curriculum in a CDP classroom and that curriculum in whatever form must be flexible and negotiable. Teachers and students in CDP classrooms work together to produce their curriculum through dialogic exchanges. The curriculum is subject to adjustments as teachers and students go through the learning process.

3. Content: critical pedagogy classroom follows the problem-posing education model where teachers and students co-create knowledge (Freire, 1970). The problem-posing model is similar to that of problem-based learning, which requires learners to find answers to questions critically think about real-life problems and work towards solving them by determining their actions. This model is interested in the discussion of social injustice and asking questions to provide learners with the opportunity to articulate their opinions on oppression based on their social, cultural, political, and individual experiences. With the help of the teacher through interactions, they can get a holistic picture of the issue at hand (Freire, 1970).
4. Language skill: Waddell and Clariza (2018) have it that EFL teachers have the opportunity to implement CDP in their classroom without necessarily being concerned about meeting the course requirements. This model can apply to all four language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening, by allowing students to voice their opinions and share their experiences orally and through writing as they read about the prevalent oppressions and social injustices and listen to different opinions to understand the ideas expressed through critical thinking.
5. Collaboration: Collaboration and learning as a community are the essence of CDP. When there is unity through diversity in the classroom, it empowers students to create a community with their peers from different cultural and social backgrounds and helps them learn from each other. Peer discussions and peer feedback are significant parts of a CDP classroom as they provide autonomy of learning to learners. The teacher then becomes a part of this collaborative endeavor and takes part in this educational movement equally

with learners. Critical digital pedagogy is, first of all, a social justice movement and also an educational movement; therefore, community and collaboration are compulsory components of it (Stommel, 2018).

6. Assessment and evaluation: As advocated by critical pedagogues, there is very limited space for assessments in a CDP classroom, and neither the curriculum nor the classes can be led or structured by assessments. Learners' progress in a CDP classroom is self-evaluated by learners through reflection and critical thinking. Learners will reflect upon their progress from the first day of the course till the last day and determine what learning outcomes they have achieved as they continue their classes. Teachers will help them in reflecting and participating with them throughout the process of self-evaluation (Stommel, 2018).
7. Digital tools: The use of digital tools in a CDP classroom mostly depends on the discretion of the teachers and learners. As Bali (2014) suggested, learners and teachers have to be critical about the use of digital tools in the classroom and determine the implementation of these tools by themselves and not be driven by the tools. Being critical about the use of digital tools is an integral part of CDP, and teachers and students must ensure that they are using platforms that allow "a free flow of knowledge" (Kellner and Kim, 2010, p. 5). Among the new media, blogging, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter, and video conferencing software provide learners with the opportunity to articulate their opinions freely and openly without being restricted by their institutions or curricula. In addition, it provides learners with an international audience, and unlike the closed environment of a physical classroom, they get a real opportunity to voice their

stance against social injustices and exercise their power and authority coming out of all types of social restrictions. The aforementioned model is an open and adjustable model proposed for interested practitioners and researchers to provide them with insight into the core concepts of a potential CDP classroom. In alignment with the philosophy of Freire's CP, it is adaptable according to the requirements and needs of different contexts, and its implementation entirely depends on teachers' and learners' collaborative discretion in a CDP classroom.



2.2 Conceptual Framework

It refers to the representation of the various variables of my research work. They are those variables that are reviewed and linked to my research work. The views variables and the opinions variables have been presented in the following diagram.

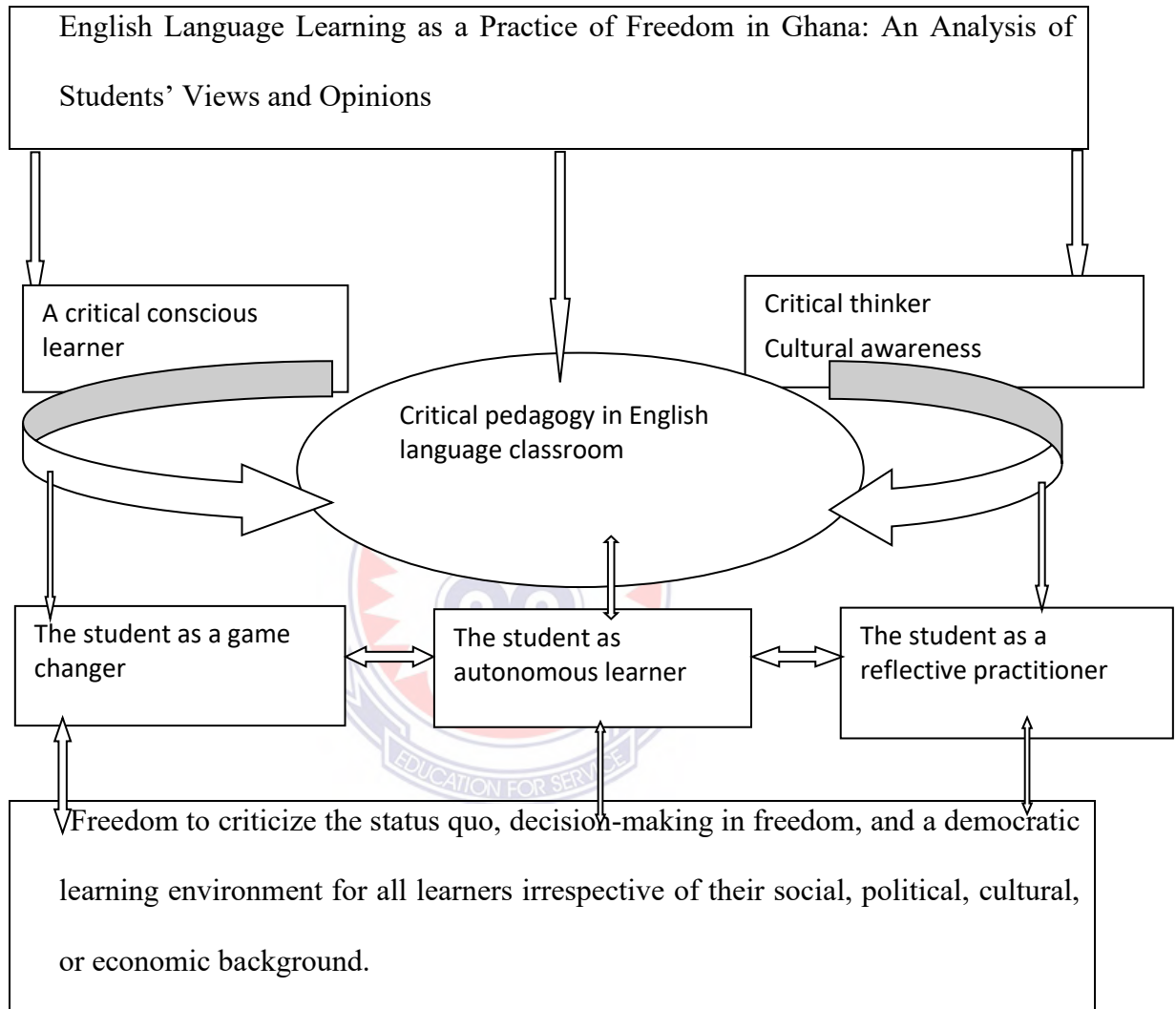


Figure 2.2.1: Conceptual Framework

This framework was prepared by the researcher in such a way that the variables and factors relate to each other. All variables are related and well-connected to ensure that the learners derive maximum benefit from teachers who deploy CP in their lesson plans.

2.3 The Concept of Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogies, the brainchild of Freire (1970) in Brazil, aim towards pursuing a fuller humanity, social emancipation, and transformation, led by the oppressed, such as the poor and women. This is through a dialogic, reflective approach wherein the teacher is no longer authoritative but, as an intellectual, enables students to develop critical consciousness (*conscientização*) of their oppression and to act on the world as they learn to change it. The large-scale reforms in South America, such as Escuela Nueva in Colombia and the Guatemalan Nueva Escuela Unitaria, can be seen to be based on critical pedagogy.

Critical Pedagogy in education and English language education is key to making educational curriculum child-centered and making teachers of the English language adopt critical thinking approaches in teaching and learning. It is a pedagogy of possibility and hope that provides educators with a set of theoretical tools to enable them to uncover the power relations that exist in schools and society at large (Giroux, 2013).

Critical pedagogy enables students to question and challenge domination, beliefs, and practices that dominate in the English language classroom and also motivates the learners to be more successful language achievers. Kumaravadivelu (2006) stated that critical pedagogy joins teaching and learning activities to teachers' and students' real lives to ensure that there is social relevance in classroom practices and to stretch classroom boundaries.

In recent times, approaches to teaching the English language have mainly been influenced by constructivism and critical pedagogy. In this instance, learners are seen as individuals with different belief systems, background knowledge, and

different learning styles. Some of these pedagogical schools of thought follow the post-method principles, in which the ultimate goal of educational systems is to train learners to become independent individuals who can think critically. This goal requires curriculum developers and practitioners to plan, instruct, and practice efficiently in designing a curriculum that ensures critical consciousness among students.

Critical pedagogy is like a tree with some central branches. Students' empowerment is one of the main branches that is of great importance in lesson delivery. Its main focus is promoting students' and teachers' self-esteem to question the status quo and the power relations in society (McLaren, 2016)

Vygotsky (1978) regarded learning as being ingrained in social events and it happens when the learner is interacting with people, objects, and events within the environment. Vygotsky's proposal of the sociocultural theory increased concern with the influence of sociocultural contexts in motivation and education more broadly. Critical pedagogy is a movement involving relationships between teaching and learning so that learners get critical self-consciousness and social awareness and stand against oppressive forces (McLaren, 2016). Using critical pedagogy in teaching or learning helps not only learners to learn better but also increases learners' motivation, cooperation, and social action as well as promoting freedom of expression.

2.3.1 English Language Learning as a Practice of Freedom

The status of teachers as professionals over the years has declined due to current global curriculum reforms. Teachers are comprised of a body of knowledge to draw on and as experts with professional academic freedom, which is challenged by reforms that place more demands on them. This limits their participation and autonomy resulting in teachers' status being degraded rather than increased over the

past few years (Robertson, 2012). That body of knowledge is faced with several challenges such as increased numbers of unqualified and undereducated teachers passing through alternative routes to the classroom. Teacher characteristics as they enter teacher education are heterogeneous and include gender; background in terms of location within a country (urban/rural); educational experience and qualifications; teaching experience; attitudes and beliefs around teaching and learning. Newly trained teachers need to learn their practice consciously while avoiding cognitive overload (Abadzi, 2009). The role of reflection in altering and improving practice has strong currency in teacher learning for overcoming ritualization and can be seen as moving teachers from just thinking about how a lesson went, to more immediate reflection-in-action (Osterman, 1990), to the more radical approach of getting students to learn critically on their own as a practice of freedom and democracy in the language learning context.

Critical Pedagogy is all about striving for a better, fairer, and more democratic world and for the ultimate liberation of the individuals who are part of it. If Freire was concerned with the oppression and liberation of entire social groups, like oppressed and marginalized ethnic communities, Giroux goes as far as to advocate for the liberation of middle-class individuals in Western societies. Our classrooms should be able to individualize the group. For when we talk about poverty, we talk about lifestyles; when we talk about homelessness, we talk about character; when we talk about racism, we talk about ignorance.

This, among other problems of our times, is what Critical Language Education aims to show and to change. Canagarajah (1999) stated that critical pedagogy could be interpreted by two different models, models of reproduction and resistance. Models of reproduction look for “how students are conditioned mentally and behaviourally by

the practices of schooling to serve the dominant social institutions and groups” (p.22) whereas resistance models explain “how there are sufficient contradictions within institutions to help subjects gain agency, conduct critical thinking, and initiate change” (p.22). Adopting critical pedagogy in the teaching and learning of the English language may depend on the teacher’s pedagogical knowledge and the views and opinions expressed by students in the language classroom. The 2019 new English curriculum of Ghana proposed six core competencies to be developed by the learners and one of them is critical thinking and problem-solving. When students’ views and opinions are taken into consideration in the implementation of critical pedagogy as an approach to the teaching and learning of the English Language, it will promote critical thinking and problem-solving attitudes among learners.

2.4 Review of Theoretical Literature

This section of the review addresses the concept of pedagogy, focusing on the theoretical perspectives and models that explain how teaching practices influence learning processes and outcomes. Pedagogy is understood as a conscious and sustained activity aimed at enhancing learning and developing knowledge, skills, and conduct through interaction between teacher and learner (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999; Hugo & Wedekind, 2013). Drawing on Bernstein’s framework, two contrasting pedagogical models are highlighted the Performance model, which emphasizes structured, explicit instruction with clearly defined outcomes, and the Competence model, which promotes more informal, learner-centered approaches that respond to individual needs. Together, these models provide a theoretical lens for understanding how different pedagogical orientations shape learners’ engagement, autonomy, and knowledge construction.

Pedagogy involves activities that evoke changes in the learner. Watkins and Mortimore (1999, p.3) define pedagogy as any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another. According to Hugo & Wedekind, (2013) pedagogy is a sustained process whereby somebody(s) acquires new forms or develops existing forms of conduct, knowledge, practice and criteria from somebody(s) or something deemed to be an appropriate provider and evaluator. Bernstein contrasts two models of pedagogy that focus on the teacher's organization, management, discourse and response to the students and which provide a useful theoretical framework with which to understand different pedagogic approaches. This model is the Performance model which stresses visible pedagogies where the teacher explicitly spells out to the students what and how they are to learn, with a recognizable strong framing or lesson structure, collective ways of behaving with standardized outcomes, and the Competence model which concerned itself with invisible pedagogies with weaker framing that result in an ostensibly more informal approach where the teacher responds to individual children's needs, with hidden or unfocused learning outcomes (Hugo & Wedekind, 2013).

Alexander (2001) considers pedagogy as the most helpful; he sees teaching to be an act while pedagogy is both an act and discourse (p.540). Pedagogy comprises teachers' ideas, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and understanding about the curriculum, the teaching and learning process, and their students, which impact their teaching practices, that is, what teachers think, do, and say in the classroom. Teacher beliefs are contextually based, and Alexander's definition also encompasses social, cultural, and political aspects.

Critical pedagogy, first introduced by Paulo Freire through his work "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," is an approach to education that seeks to help students

question and challenge posited domination in education. Critical pedagogy in education aims at raising students' critical consciousness about various forms of domination and oppression and helping students to become agents for social change (Canagarajah, 1999).

“Critical pedagogy asserts that the students can engage their learning from a position of agency and in so doing can actively participate in narrating their identities through a culture of questioning that opens up a space of translating between the private and the public while changing the forms of self and social recognition”. (Giroux, 2013, p.14). CP gives students the chance to question and be active in the classroom. For this, Giroux (2013) suggests that critical pedagogy could afford students the opportunity to read, write, and learn from a position of agency to engage in a culture of question that demands more than competing in rote learning.

Pennycook (2010), posits that critical pedagogy involves a constant skepticism and it demands a restive problematization of the givens of applied linguistics that seeks to connect it to questions of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology and discourse”.

In addition, Norton and Toohey (2004) in their edited collection entitled “Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning” grouped the different critical pedagogies that had been reinvented from Freire by different applied linguists during the second wave of critical pedagogies. Furthermore, during this wave, critical pedagogues such as Crookes (2013) brought their critical pedagogy closer to teachers by discussing how it comes to life in classrooms in all decisions teachers make regarding curriculum, materials, and learning goals, among other factors.

Kirylo (2013) argues that when “dehumanizing forces perpetuated slavery, racism, patriarchy, bigotry or any number of oppressive, exploitive and unjust

practices, groups of people responded and courageous leaders emerged with bold voices ... denouncing injustice”. Crookes (2013) brought his critical pedagogy closer to teachers by discussing how it comes to life in classrooms in all decisions teachers make regarding curriculum, materials, and learning goals, among other factors.

About this, López-Gopar (2019) argues that critical pedagogy allows students to discuss issues relating to discriminatory practices, social inequality, identity negotiation, and power. Although it appears the language classroom is solely for teaching language, Kubota (2016) thinks that talking and teaching about controversial issues is unavoidable in English language teaching.

Based on the scholarly definitions of critical pedagogy, I would consider critical pedagogy as an approach to education that seeks to do away with the “fear factor” between teachers and students in the classroom. CP ensures that freedom of expression, equality, justice, “we feeling” as well as “a can-do” spirit among learners are held in high esteem in the classroom.

Although these definitions seem to project critical pedagogy as the best approach to modern language teaching and learning, however, it is not without its critics. As Hall (2020) points out, for some, a focus on social justice in education is little more than ‘partisan indoctrination’ and a cover for progressive politics being forced upon students. To illustrate, he gives the example of the Texas Republican Party’s election platform in 2012, which attacked educational programs teaching critical thinking skills as a form of “behavior modification... to challenge the student’s fixed beliefs and undermine parental authority.”

In the field of global ELT, it could be argued that critical pedagogy could act as a tool to impose Western concepts on students whose cultures and societies do not

share current Western ways of thinking regarding issues such as gender equality and questions of sexuality.

Amparo (2018) also sees critical pedagogies as strategies that emphasize the importance of teachers' view of their students not as passive agents in the teaching and learning process but as active participants who can negotiate their learning content. This idea of critical pedagogy sees the language classroom as a microcosm of society, and so whatever learners are expected to become must first be practiced and perfected in the classroom before it is sent outside, and if learners are agents of change, then it must start from the language classroom. With this view, learners are not seen as *tabula rasa*, ready to be filled in school by their teachers, but as those with rich experiences, who need to extend learning. Teachers incorporating CP in their lesson plans would allow learners to take total control of their learning in the English language lesson.

2.4.1 English Language Learning as a Tool of Empowerment

The English language has played a significant role in empowering students over the years. It has been a global lingua franca that serves as a means of communication and a tool for getting access to education, economic opportunities, and social mobility. It is necessary to explore how English language learning (ELL) empowers students, emphasizing key areas such as academic achievement, economic opportunities, and social inclusion. When learners become proficient in English, it enables them to get access to global knowledge, science, and technology (Graddol, 2008). This connection is critical, as it enables learners to participate in global discourses and engage with international academia.

According to Coleman (2011), English enables students to access quality education, study abroad opportunities, and academic resources that are often

unavailable in their native language. Furthermore, many academic journals, textbooks, and online resources are primarily published in English, making proficiency a gateway to advanced knowledge.

When learners learn a second language, especially English, it helps to foster cognitive development and critical thinking skills of the learners (Bialystok, 2011). These skills are essential in empowering students to analyze, interpret, and solve problems more effectively. This contributes to their academic growth and self-confidence.

English-speaking employees are also in high demand in the global job market. According to Pandey & Pandey (2014), English proficiency is often a criterion for employment in multinational corporations, tourism, and other sectors. A report by Rixon (2013) states that English skills can increase earning potential by up to 30% in developing countries. For students, this means that mastering English can directly translate into better career prospects and financial independence.

English as a tool of empowerment also enables students to become entrepreneurs and innovators by giving them access to global markets, resources, and networks. Studies by Seidlhofer (2013) suggest that English fluency enables individuals to collaborate internationally, exchange ideas, and participate in the digital economy, where English dominates. English functions as a unifying language in multicultural societies, fostering communication and understanding among people of different linguistic backgrounds. For students, this ability to communicate beyond their native language builds confidence and helps them navigate diverse social settings (Pennycook, 2017).

Proficiency in English also equips students with the tools to advocate for themselves and represent their communities on broader platforms. Studies by

Canagarajah (1999) opine that English can be a means of resisting marginalization and asserting one's identity in global forums. For female students, English language learning can be a transformative tool. Studies by Norton & Pavlenko (2019) show that English education empowers women by providing them with a voice, independence, and opportunities that might otherwise be inaccessible due to traditional gender roles.

Even though the empowering potential of English is widely acknowledged, some scholars have raised concerns about the dominance of English perpetuating inequalities. Phillipson's (1992) concept of "linguistic imperialism" argues that the global spread of English can marginalize local languages and cultures. Additionally, access to quality English education is often limited to privileged students, exacerbating social inequalities (Pennycook, 2021). These critiques highlight the need for inclusive and context-sensitive approaches to English language education.

English language learning is a powerful tool for empowering students, offering them access to education, economic opportunities, and social inclusion. However, this potential must be harnessed with an awareness of the challenges and inequalities associated with the global spread of English. By adopting inclusive and context-sensitive educational practices, educators can ensure that English serves as a means of empowerment for all students, regardless of their background. Teachers of the English language should therefore make it a point to adopt strategies that will enable learners to gain the necessary skills that will make them function effectively on the global stage.

2.4.2 The Role of English Language in Fostering Critical Thinking and Creativity among ESL Learners

The English language, as both a medium of communication and an academic discipline, plays a crucial role in fostering critical thinking and creativity. Over the years, a significant body of research has explored how English language instruction, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening, develops these essential cognitive skills. This work seeks to synthesize findings from various studies, highlighting the mechanisms, methodologies, and outcomes of using English to enhance critical thinking and creativity.

The way English fosters critical thinking is through the analysis of literary and other texts. According to Paul and Elder (2013), engaging learners with complex texts in English encourages them to question assumptions, identify biases, and evaluate evidence. Critical reading strategies, such as inference, comparison, and contextual analysis, help learners approach texts with a questioning mindset. For instance, literary works often present ambiguous themes and multifaceted characters, requiring readers to critically analyze motives, societal implications, and ethical dilemmas. This process not only sharpens analytical skills but also nurtures empathy and ethical reasoning.

When students engage in writing activities in English, it enhances their critical thinking by making them logically structure their ideas, provide evidence, and present coherent arguments. According to Hogsette (2019), the process of drafting, revising, and editing compels students to critically examine their thoughts, identify gaps in reasoning, and refine their perspectives.

Debates and discussions should be incorporated into the English Language classroom, which serve as powerful tools for fostering critical thinking. Studies by

Brookfield (2013) demonstrate that engaging in debates helps students critically evaluate different perspectives, articulate their thoughts, and respond to opposing viewpoints. The interactive nature of such activities encourages collaborative thinking and problem-solving.

Creative writing, such as poetry, short stories, and plays, is a cornerstone of fostering creativity in English instruction. Maley (2012) argues that creative writing allows learners to explore their imaginations, experiment with language, and develop unique voices. Writing prompts and exercises encourage students to think divergently and explore multiple possibilities. For example, tasks like writing alternative endings to stories or imagining dialogues between historical figures promote lateral thinking and innovation.

When learners engage with diverse genres of literature, including fantasy, science fiction, and drama, it exposed to unconventional ideas and narrative techniques. According to Rosenblatt (1994), the interpretive act of reading literature is inherently creative, as readers construct personal meanings and emotional responses to texts.

The English language, with its vast vocabulary and flexibility, lends itself to creative expression. Activities like wordplay, storytelling, and improvisation stimulate students' imaginations and encourage experimentation. Cook (2000) highlights the role of language play in developing both linguistic competence and creative thinking.

While critical thinking and creativity are often perceived as distinct skills, they are deeply interconnected in English language learning. For instance, engaging with complex literary texts requires both analytical rigor and imaginative interpretation. Similarly, crafting a compelling argument involves not only logical reasoning but also creative strategies to persuade audiences. Lipman (2003) argues that fostering critical

thinking and creativity simultaneously is essential for preparing students for real-world challenges. English language instruction, with its focus on communication, interpretation, and expression, provides an ideal platform for this dual development.

English language learning serves as a powerful tool for fostering both critical thinking and creativity. Through activities such as reading, writing, discussion, and creative expression, learners develop the cognitive and imaginative skills needed to navigate complex challenges. While there are obstacles to implementing these practices universally, continued research and innovation in pedagogy hold promise for maximizing the role of English in cultivating well-rounded, critical, and creative thinkers.

2.4.3 Learning English as A Way of Expanding Learners' Access to Knowledge and Information

English language learning has provided learners with broader access to knowledge and information. As the global lingua franca, English serves as the dominant medium for academic, technological, and professional discourse. It has become the international language for disseminating knowledge, particularly in fields such as science, technology, and business. According to Crystal (2003), English is mostly used for research publications, with an estimated 80% of scientific articles written in English. This dominance means that learning English is often a prerequisite for accessing the latest global developments and information.

Also, the English Language plays a crucial role in academia worldwide since most universities increasingly use English as the medium of instruction, especially in disciplines like engineering, medicine, and economics (Dearden, 2014). Studies by Coleman (2011) posit that English proficiency enables students to engage with cutting-edge research, attend international conferences, and collaborate with global

scholars. For instance, many textbooks, journals, and online courses are mostly offered in English. This gives English learners access to high-quality educational resources that may not be available in their native languages.

The internet, a primary source of knowledge and information, is largely dominated by English. According to Graddol (2008), approximately 60% of all online content is in English, making it the most widely used language on the web. Learning English, therefore, equips learners with the ability to navigate digital resources, including websites, research databases, and online learning platforms. The spread of English is closely tied to globalization, enabling individuals to access not only knowledge but also cultural, economic, and social opportunities. Graddol (2008) considers English as the "language of global communication," facilitating the exchange of ideas across borders.

Learning English allows individuals to engage with a vast array of media, including books, films, and news outlets. English proficiency provides learners with access to global perspectives and diverse narratives, enriching their understanding of the world. Moreover, English-language literature, from classics to contemporary works, introduces learners to cultural and philosophical ideas that expand their intellectual horizons. Rosenblatt (1994) argues that reading in a second language promotes cognitive flexibility and a deeper appreciation for different worldviews.

While English provides access to knowledge, it can also exacerbate inequalities among learners who lack proficiency in the language. The concept of the "digital divide" highlights the disparities in access to digital resources due to language barriers. Works by Pennycook (2010) and Canagarajah (1999) emphasize that the dominance of English in knowledge production marginalizes non-English speakers, creating a linguistic hierarchy. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds may face

challenges in accessing English-language resources, limiting their participation in the global knowledge economy. Efforts to bridge this gap often involve making the learning of the English language a practice of freedom in the language classroom.

Learning English has become a critical means of expanding learners' access to knowledge and information in an increasingly interconnected world. From academic research to digital resources, English proficiency opens doors to a wealth of opportunities. However, the dominance of English also poses challenges related to inclusivity and equity. To maximize the benefits of English language learning, educators and policymakers must adopt strategies that promote creativity, freedom, and autonomy among learners in the classroom. Efforts should be made by all stakeholders in the education value chain to ensure that learners have free access to knowledge and information.

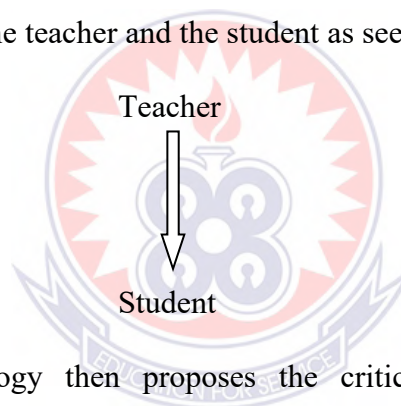
2.4.4 Literary and Educational Praxis (The Banking Model of Education)

As Freire (2009) describes, the banking method of education, as a contested concept, is “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (p. 52).

In this model, students are seen as passive empty receptacles to be filled by the teacher. The majority of higher education institutions in Ghana practice the traditional method of instruction (Awidi, 2008; Fiagbe et al, 2023), which Freire (2009) referred to as the banking concept. The banking concept is the method of instruction that treats students as receptors into which teachers deposit knowledge and, as such, does not encourage critical consciousness and the ownership of knowledge in students (Freire, 2009).

In Ghana, most schools and colleges use curricula that rely heavily on textbook usage and traditional face-to-face lecture forms of teaching (Awidi, 2008; Badu-Nyarko & Torto, 2014; Fiagbe et al, 2023). Thus, some of these schools and colleges adopt the teacher-centered approach to education, where teaching has become the emphasis instead of learning. The teacher in this model is considered active, intelligent, and knowledgeable. In this model, Freire went further to compare the teacher to the colonizer, where the colonizer always thinks his ways are the best.

The teacher in this case sees his students as hollow vessels forgetting the fact that the ultimate goal is to increase the knowledge base of students and not to decrease the human knowledge base. This concept stresses the traditional hierarchical relationship between the teacher and the student as seen below.



Critical pedagogy then proposes the critical pedagogy model whereby effective education is built upon freedom and a democratic relationship between teacher and students where they are open to learning from one another. I am of the view that teachers should give their students the freedom to bring to the classroom their individual experiences for class discussion. In doing so the teacher tends to learn a lot from the students. This will help improve his or her pedagogical knowledge.

2.4.5 The Concept of Conscientização

The word conscientização originates from Brazilian Portuguese to mean joint knowledge, consciousness, feeling, or sense. It was defined by Freire (1970) to mean “the process in which men not as recipients, but as knowing subjects achieving a

deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality”. (p.519)

It can also be considered as the active process through which a critical understanding of the socio-political-economic circumstances is gained that enables one to actively change oppressive circumstances. According to Freire “to consider the concept of conscientização as a process merely to increase awareness is inaccurate. It will always include the next step, to actively transform the circumstances that cause oppression”. (McLaren, 2016).

Freire (1970) further opines that conscientização implies, then that, when I realize that I am oppressed, I also know I can liberate myself if I transform the concrete situation where I find myself oppressed. I can transform it in my head: that would be to fall into the philosophical error of thinking that awareness “creates” reality. I would be decreed that I am free, by my mind. And yet, the structures would continue to be the same as ever I wouldn’t be free. No conscientization implies a critical insertion into a process, it implies a historical commitment to make change. (p.5).

Conscientização is the most critical approach conceivable to reality, stripping it down to get to know it and know the myths that deceive and perpetuate the dominating structure. (p.6)

Conscientization involves two concepts of praxis. One is the continuing dialectic relationship of action and reflection whereas the other is the concept of dialogue. (McLaren, 1999).

Bogle (2021) argues that, closer to Freire’s view, the boundaries between the different levels of consciousness are not as rigid that there can be a certain amount of overlap.

Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization is important and relevant today as he puts it.

"I still insist, without falling into the trap of "idealism" on the absolute necessity of conscientization. In truth, conscientization is a requirement of our human condition. It is one of the roads we have to follow if we are to deepen our awareness of our world, of facts, of events, of the demands of human consciousness to develop our capacity for epistemological curiosity". Freire (2009, p.55).

The relevance of Freire's concept is clear; making one gain a deeper awareness of the socio-political-economic reality that dominates one's life and of the ways to change this reality.

This concept stresses the relationship between the teacher and the students. It refers to the critical awareness that precedes action over time. It begins with students becoming aware of social, political, economic, gender, race, and class conditions and then taking action to resolve them in the classroom. Critical Consciousness is a concept that is central to Critical Pedagogy. Freire, (2009) is of the view that 'Conscientization' is the process of an individual or community acquiring critical consciousness, of becoming aware of one's context and identity. After the individual begins to perceive their world's social and political contradictions, it becomes possible to take action and seek a positive change. This goes beneath surface meanings, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, and received wisdom, to understand the deep meanings, root causes, social contexts, ideologies, and personal consequences of any topic. As teachers, the views and opinions of students should always be taken into consideration when they try to resolve issues such as gender, race, cultural, political, and economic issues in the classroom. This will help promote freedom and democracy in the classroom.

2.4.6 Problem -Posing Education

Kubota (2016) explains that “one form of critical pedagogy envisions transforming society for social justice through posing problems about everyday life and becoming aware of and challenging existing asymmetrical relations of power that construct our knowledge and social structures” (p. 230).

Through problem-posing education, language teachers can, for instance, promote counter-discourses among learners to subvert the mainstream pedagogy (Pennycook, 2021), encourage learners to ask critical questions about and evaluate the texts they read, and localize their pedagogical practices to suit their particular social and education settings (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Problem-posing education advocates cognition and transformative learning (Freire, 1970). Freire (1970,) emphasized problem-posing education as developing students’ critical consciousness. Freire further established that students develop knowledge by questioning the status quo and other problematic issues in their lives. Problem-posing education encourages students to ask questions as it is based on their realities and living conditions. Thus, problem-posing education unravels reality, incites critical thinking, and develops critical consciousness, leading students to take actions that improve life conditions (Freire, 1970).

With this concept, teachers problematize and students pose solutions. Students are usually allowed to pose solutions to problems in the classroom. The teacher only serves as a guide to the students in finding solutions to the problems posed by the teacher in the classroom. With this, teachers and students work together to implement change both in and out of the classroom.

This concept stresses on Dialogue

Solidarity	Equal footing	Mutual respect
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Teaching and learning should be built around a dialogue between the teacher and the learners. This will enhance solidarity, and equal footing where no one is seen as all-knowing. When teachers and their students are on equal footing in the classroom, it will enhance mutual respect between them.

2.4.7 The Neutrality of Knowledge, Power, and Social Change

The curriculum reflects officially and ideologically selected knowledge (Apple, 2012), but is also a vehicle for changing what society wants to be in the future. Thus, curriculum change often goes hand in hand with and reflects social change (Paechter, 2000, p.5). By deciding to educate children differently, social transformation might be realized. However, such a process is likely to be contested and resisted, especially if the changes are perceived to undermine the values, relative power, and privileges of the dominant group involved.

The curriculum thus may be contested between groups who want to preserve and those who wish to change certain features of their society (Aldrich, 1996). Many curricula often exclude women, national/ethnic/religious minorities, or people with disabilities, or represent them in specific and limited ways. At the secondary level, for the majority of students in sub-Saharan Africa, the language of instruction and examination is not their native language, and therefore proficiency in the medium of instruction is an important requirement for successful evidence of learning (Civan & Coskun, 2016). This has equity implications, as students who are proficient in the language in which their learning is assessed are at an advantage compared to those who are not. Since language is both a source of identity and a key means by which people can either gain access to power or be excluded from it, the issue of the medium of instruction has equity implications (Rassool, 2007).

Negotiating power relations implies redefining the roles of teachers and students who have been traditionally positioned as authority and subjects respective in traditional classrooms. From a critical pedagogy point of view, the teachers remain responsible for the engagement processes that happen in the classroom but they share this responsibility with the students (Crookes, 2013).

Pedagogy is a moral and political practice because it offers particular versions and visions of civil life, and how we might construct representations of ourselves and others in our physical and social environment, (Giroux, 2020). This is the reason why Critical Pedagogy in language teaching needs to support the belief that Education is never neutral. In other words, Pedagogy always makes a choice: to either transmit knowledge and values that support or perpetuate the status quo in terms of politics and culture. And not taking a stand does not equal being neutral.

2.4.8 Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is one of the pedagogical methodologies that springs out of Critical Pedagogy and is specifically applicable to educational contexts involving students from cultural minorities. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy aims to accept students' backgrounds and connect to students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference. It aims to create a means through which their culture can be sustained, rather than eradicated. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, just like Critical Pedagogy, also supports students to critique and question the dominant power structures of their society.

2.4.9 Critical Pedagogy and Language Learning

This approach to English language teaching ensures that language learning conforms to social reform or change. It concerns itself not with the issue of raising questions about oppression but rather deals with holistic educational activities.

Riasati & Mollaei (2012) highlighted some implications of critical pedagogy for language teaching and learning which can be seen below:

- i. English Language learning cannot be isolated from the students' emotions, imaginations, and institutions.
- ii. The language teaching syllabuses, textbooks, and other materials prepared in or for one society or country are not necessarily appropriate in other societies or countries because such matters shape and are shaped by socio-political realities that may be unique to each society.
- iii. Language learning cannot be isolated from the social practices and cultural traditions of the learner's community.
- iv. Language learning is always accompanied by hidden assumptions and values in the learners' community.
- v. Language learning takes place through negotiation. Therefore, both teachers and students should be involved in the learning process.
- vi. Teachers and learners are on equal footing and are responsible for teaching/learning language.

2.5 Critical Pedagogy in the Ghanaian Curriculum

The curriculum is the key reference point for teachers in Ghana where it is encoded in the official textbook and teacher guides, often the sole resource used by teachers. Teachers' pedagogic approaches, strategies, and practices thus serve to enact the curriculum. The curriculum links the macro (officially selected educational goals

and content) with the micro (the act of teaching and assessment in the classroom/school), and is best seen as a series of translations, transpositions, and transformations (Alexander, 2001, p.16).

The current curriculum reforms of Ghana have moved away from teacher-centered pedagogic approaches to more student, learner, or child-centered, or active learning approaches. This change to the pedagogic approaches is also informed by theories of learning, such as behaviorism and social constructivism. The official curriculum is transacted and, in the process, gets transformed, as teachers and students interpret, modify, and add to the meaning embodied in the national educational policy. Thus, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are interrelated and mutually influence one another in day-to-day classroom interaction (Alexander, 2001). In addition, the understandings and learning that students acquire are mediated by student-related factors such as student agency, motivation, home language, needs, age, gender, and socio-economic status.

Recent reforms in Ghanaian education have explicitly shifted away from traditional teacher-centred pedagogical approaches toward more learner-centred, child-centred, and active-learning models. The rollout of the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) in 2019 exemplifies this shift. It reflects a paradigm that positions learners as active participants who construct meaning through engagement, collaboration, and problem-solving, rather than as passive recipients of knowledge (Sakata, 2023). This transformation resonates with the broader theoretical shift from behaviourism where learning is teacher-driven and reinforcement-based to social constructivism, which emphasises interaction, contextual understanding, and learner autonomy.

In the context of English Language Learning (ELL), this pedagogical transition holds particular relevance. English, as both a medium of instruction and a global language, functions as a tool for self-expression, creativity, and access to information. Learner-centred ELL classrooms have the potential to empower students to articulate their thoughts, opinions, and identities with greater confidence. By providing communicative spaces where students can negotiate meaning and express personal viewpoints, ELL can become a platform for students to exercise voice and agency which are key dimensions of empowerment (Freire, 1970; Alexander, 2001).

People are always grouped into socialized cultural communities with common beliefs and practices in every society. These cultural communities are the driving force of human life of which the educational environment is part. Regardless of the diverse worldviews that exist, educational systems in Ghana and the world as a whole often represent the middle to upper-class cultural model; likewise, school curriculums are designed to preserve that dominant model through biased mediums, such as textbooks and lectures that present information from a majority perspective. With this understanding of knowledge construction and majority education in mind, critical pedagogy asks that educators reject knowledge as neutral or objective, and instead, present knowledge as subjective and support students in challenging the power structures that have been established to maintain the status quo.

However, as the curriculum is enacted in classrooms, it inevitably undergoes transformation through teacher and student mediation. Teachers interpret policy guidelines, adapt pedagogical strategies, and manage contextual constraints, while students actively interpret and respond to learning tasks. This dynamic aligns with the idea that curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are interdependent and continually reshaped through classroom interaction (Alexander, 2001). In this process, students'

beliefs about English as a tool for empowerment, creativity, and access to knowledge become central in understanding how pedagogical intentions translate into lived classroom experiences.

Empirical research in Ghana supports this complex reality. For instance, studies of senior high school teachers reveal that although their pedagogical reasoning aligns with constructivist and learner-centred principles, classroom practice often diverges due to contextual pressures such as large class sizes, limited resources, and rigid traditions (Buabeng & Amo-Darko, 2025). Similarly, while many basic school teachers have been trained in learner-centred pedagogy, the implementation is constrained by systemic challenges and entrenched norms. These findings suggest that students' opportunities to develop autonomy, creativity, and critical thinking through English learning are shaped not only by curricular intent but also by classroom realities and teacher beliefs.

In language education specifically, critical pedagogy offers an important theoretical lens. A recent study in Ghanaian French-language classrooms found that teachers valued critical pedagogy's emphasis on active participation, critical thinking, and problem-solving, yet structural barriers such as limited resources, insufficient training, and curriculum pressures hindered full enactment (Yegblemenawo & Yegblemenawo, 2025). Translating these findings to English Language Learning, it becomes clear that while ELL can potentially empower students to think independently, question assumptions, and express their perspectives, such empowerment depends on pedagogical conditions that genuinely value student voice and critical engagement.

Moreover, English Language Learning plays a pivotal role in expanding students' access to global knowledge and information. In a knowledge-driven world,

proficiency in English enhances students' ability to engage with diverse texts, digital resources, and academic discourses beyond local contexts. Thus, ELL not only serves as a linguistic skill but also as a gateway to intellectual empowerment and broader participation in academic and sociocultural communities.

In the Ghanaian curriculum context, then, understanding students' beliefs about how English learning empowers them, fosters critical capacities, and broadens access to knowledge is essential. These beliefs mediate how educational reforms are experienced and how pedagogical transformations manifest in practice. Acknowledging the agency of students their perceptions, motivations, and interpretations is therefore vital to realising the learner-centred vision embedded in Ghana's current educational reforms.

2.5.1 Expectations of Students in Critical Pedagogy

Learning occurs when students participate in activities that are ideally in authentic situations or those that approximate as closely as possible to the contexts in which the knowledge will later be required. Authentic tasks and simulations that approximate real situations with teachers modeling expert practice are central pedagogic approaches in this theory of learning. Such collaborative teacher professional development is seen as key to improving education systems globally. Influential theories of learning for teacher educators from the US include structured classroom lesson observations, taking inquiry as a professional stance, and modeling practices through ecological thinking aloud.

"Students arrive in the critical classroom with their expectations, hopes, dreams, diverse backgrounds, and life experiences, including a long history of previous schooling and educational hegemony (Freire, 1970)."The students have been taught from early on that to be a "good student" means one have to be silent, passive,

and with the sense acceptance. A good student's primary purpose is to learn the knowledge the educator imparts unquestioningly. The primary lesson was to learn obedience to authority. One common result of this process of naming is that students may awake from their passivity and begin to question some of their own previously held assumptions about teaching and learning. It also allows them to see that each individual within the classroom has had different experiences and holds different assumptions about teaching and learning.

Students should consider their upbringing, parents, siblings, education, religion, and the values that inform their beliefs and draw concentric circles that represent, in essence, the lens they employ to view the world. Students are then able to use this lens in describing how they see and interpret information and sources of knowledge. The expectations of the students in the English language classroom deduced from (Freire 1970, Giroux 2013), are as follows:

- i. **Experiential Learner:** Critical pedagogy, as a theoretical and pedagogical framework, seeks to uncover the relationship between language learning and social transformation. Rooted in the works of Freire (1970) and Giroux (1988), it emphasizes education as a means of developing critical consciousness and empowering learners to challenge structures of social oppression. Within this framework, students become *experiential learners* actively engaging with issues of inequality, power, and identity through their own lived experiences. Language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Second Language (ESL), is not viewed merely as an academic pursuit but as a process that should address learners' experiences, ideologies, and social values within their unique sociocultural settings (Pennycook, 1990; Crookes, 2013). Thus, the teaching and

learning of English should connect linguistic competence with social awareness and transformative action.

- ii. Reflective Practitioner. Critical pedagogy also encourages learners to become *reflective practitioners* who critically examine their own thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs in relation to others. Reflection in learning fosters respect for diverse viewpoints, sensitivity to cultural and personal differences, and an openness to reinterpret experiences from multiple perspectives (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983). Through reflective inquiry, learners engage in self-corrective analysis—questioning assumptions, evaluating reasoning, and making informed judgments about their actions and those of others (Brookfield, 1995). Such reflective engagement is central to developing autonomy and critical thinking, enabling students to approach learning as a dynamic, dialogic, and transformative process.
- iii. Change Agents: Aligned with the principles of critical pedagogy, students are also positioned as *agents of social change*. Rather than being passive recipients of knowledge, they are recognized as individuals with lived experiences and sociocultural identities shaped by class, race, history, and culture (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Critical and experiential educators argue that learners should interrogate the *hidden curriculum* the implicit values and power relations conveyed through school structures, textbooks, and teaching practices (Apple, 2004). In critical classrooms, educators create spaces that empower students to question social norms, express their voices, and engage in collective inquiry aimed at social transformation. However, as Gunn and Bennett (2022) note, this role requires deliberate preparation, as students must develop the critical awareness and agency

necessary to participate meaningfully in transformative learning contexts. By engaging critically and reflectively, students fulfill their potential as active participants in reshaping both their educational experiences and the broader social order.

- iv. Autonomous learner: - The students should direct their own goals and develop a pace of learning. Learning is the interest of the students and seeks to address the curiosity of the learner that is not gained in teacher-directed classrooms. It locates the roles of students and the teacher roles in teaching-learning empowering the student's aims and interests in language learning (Moore, 1972).
- v. Co-operator: - School should be the best place for knowledge construction and a place for dialogic representation of own experience. Students should seek to develop personal intellectual, life skills, and socialization. They should value the other student's perspective rather than perceiving the teacher as a source of knowledge. Interactive, collaborative, introspective learning should foster localized material for language learning through the mutual exchange of opinion and thought between teacher and students.
- vi. Ideological critique: - The student-directed classroom almost always results in students disagreeing with either fellow students or the teacher over not only what texts should be read but how they should be read, and this process of questioning expands to curricular material in its entirety, as well as course assessment methods, methodology, required assignments, and all other aspects of any given course (Breunig, 2017).
- vii. Problem solver: - The students should set the task and interact for the construction of linguistic knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are essential

in daily life activities. Language learning should develop the knowledge for solving problems through creative thinking, reflection, and a decision-making process.

- viii. Communicator. Within the framework of critical pedagogy, students are viewed not only as learners of linguistic forms but as active *communicators* who use language to construct and negotiate meaning within social contexts. Collaborative strategies such as *think-pair-share* activities allow learners to engage in dialogic exchanges that foster both linguistic competence and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Through peer discussions, students develop confidence in articulating their ideas, while also learning to appreciate diverse perspectives. Such communicative practices nurture essential language skills—listening, speaking, and interaction—while incorporating learners’ ideologies, social values, and cultural roles into classroom discourse (Canagarajah, 2005). As students share personal experiences and reflections, they become more adept at using language as a tool for both self-expression and social connection, reinforcing the notion that communication in the classroom is an act of identity formation and social participation.
- ix. Critical Thinker: Critical pedagogy positions students as *critical thinkers* who actively interrogate the social, cultural, and ideological dimensions of learning. This involves locating themselves within the classroom context, much like the teacher, by exploring their own epistemologies, biases, and prior educational experiences (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992). One practical approach to fostering such awareness is through the writing of *educational autobiographies*, which encourage learners to reflect on how schooling

and learning have shaped their beliefs and identities (Brookfield, 1995). Sharing and discussing these narratives allows students to recognize the diversity of subjectivities within the classroom and to better understand the influence of background and culture on learning (hooks, 1994).

In this context, language learning becomes a means of engaging with broader issues of *social justice, equity, and representation*. Students are encouraged to examine the curriculum, textbooks, and instructional materials critically questioning whether these reflect their lived experiences and social values (Elder & Paul, 1994; Pennycook, 2001). Learning, therefore, should be dialogic, participatory, and situated, enabling multiple voices and perspectives to emerge in classroom discourse. Through critical reflection and open dialogue, learners develop intellectual autonomy and a deeper understanding of the role of language as a vehicle for both personal and societal transformation.

2.5.2 Expectations of Teachers in Critical Pedagogy

1. The number one goal of any pedagogy is to improve student learning; however, the 2005 Global Monitoring Report on Quality (Madani, 2019) includes creative, emotional, and social development as indicators of quality learning. This review aims at conceptualizing effective pedagogy as those teaching and learning activities that make some observable change in students, leading to greater engagement and understanding and/or a measurable impact on student learning. Implicit in this is a starting point or baseline with which to contrast the observable change in behavior or learning taking place as a result of a teacher's pedagogy.

Effective teachers' pedagogical practices result in quality. Quality refers not merely to school, national, or international student examinations or assessments but also to the quality of the human interaction in the classroom through appropriate pedagogy, including freedom from corporal punishment (Alexander, 2001). Within this latter understanding, equity of learning is seen as an essential indicator of quality. Quality, however, can be seen as looking at the relationship between school inputs, such as quantitative surveys of textbooks and other physical school resources, and student achievement, but studies focusing on these range from showing significant positive associations to others which state that there are no clear and systematic relationships between key inputs and student performance. Alternatively, other studies see quality as encompassing the more complex pedagogical issue of the way resources are used in teaching and learning that affects students' achievement (Alexander, 2001).

Effective teachers' pedagogical practices are broadly interpreted and are seen in the outcomes they engender. Some of the successful outcomes of effective pedagogical practices include:

- i. Enhancement of student cognition, as well as improvement in other indicators such as changes in student confidence, participation, or values.
- ii. Improvement in social relations such as teacher-student interaction and inclusion.
- iii. Ensuring a successful learning outcome as a result of effective teacher pedagogic practice which will promote higher student attendance, use of resources, use of specific practices, and stakeholder satisfaction, such as parents and community members.

Shulman (1987) posits that the knowledge base for teachers continues to be an influential framework, and consists of the domains of content, pedagogical and curriculum knowledge, and knowledge of learners, educational contexts, and ends. His concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is central to effective pedagogies, that is, how teachers represent content knowledge in ways that students can grasp, anticipating difficulties and building in support such as using images, verbal explanations, relevant examples, metaphors, and actions. Teacher learning has recently shifted from an emphasis on the individual towards the concept of teacher-learning communities based on theories of situated cognition that recognize the importance of social engagement arising from the particular contexts and institutions in which teachers practice (Cobb & Bowers, 1999).). Situated cognition builds on social constructivism but holds that knowledge is situated, being in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed.

The teacher should encourage a safe space for teaching and learning, but that also establishes ground rules that discourage further oppression and silencing. Lockhart (2018, p.36). argue, "Teaching is a very personal ability, and it is not surprising that individual teacher brings to teaching very different beliefs and assumptions about what constitutes effective teaching". Helping students establish their level of comfort with sharing and discussing some of these issues by asking them to engage in a comfort zone activity on the first day of class is one place to start.

When students disagree, employing the reflective activity will allow students to get the opportunity to listen to one another when trying to work through some of these differences. A further consideration is how they can act as agents of social change in developing a different vision of schools and society, one that can reflect. Critical pedagogy mainly depicts the reproduction of social struggles, inequities, and

power differences, reflecting some of the main aspects of critical pedagogy classrooms. Critical theory in a classroom setting. Giroux (2013) and McLaren (2016) acknowledge the importance of teachers and students understanding classroom pedagogical practices as a form of ideological production, where the classroom reflects discursive formations and power-knowledge relations, both in schools and in society. Giroux (2020), Critical theorist, mentions the following roles of critical pedagogue:

- i. Teachers should construct curricula that draw upon the cultural resources that students bring with them to the school. This suggests not only taking the languages, histories, experiences, and voices of the students seriously but also integrating what is taught in schools into the dynamics of everyday life.
- ii. They must be able to critically analyze the ideologies, values, and interests that inform their role as teachers and the cultural politics they promote in the classroom. All of their actions presuppose some notions of what it means to be a citizen and a future society and to the degree that schools are actively engaged in the production of discourses that provide others with a sense of identity, community, and possibility, they must be responsible and reflective about their actions.
- iii. They must be able to analyze their relationship with the larger society to critically apprehend themselves as social agents capable of recognizing how they might be complicit with forms of oppression and human suffering. But they must also have a language of possibility, one that allows them to think in terms of the not yet, to speak the representable, and to imagine social relations outside of the existing configuration of power.

- iv. They must be able to understand how power works productively through the poetics of imagination, that is, they must be able to distinguish between reality as a fact and existence as a possibility. But such dreams must be forged not in isolation but in solidarity with others.
- v. We must get away from training teachers to be simply efficient technicians and practitioners. We need a new vision of what constitutes educational leadership so that we can educate teachers to think critically, locate themselves in their histories, and exercise moral and public responsibility in their roles as engaged critics and transformative intellectuals. Theoretically, critical pedagogy in classroom discourse embodies the practice of engaging students in the social construction of knowledge, which grounds its pillars on power relations. In utilizing critical pedagogy in the classroom, teachers must question their practices in the process of constructing knowledge and why the main knowledge is legitimized by the dominant culture. "Participants in critical pedagogy classrooms are encouraged to engage in collective action, founded on the principles of social justice, equality, and empowerment (McLaren, 2016)." It aims to develop collective action to locate the roles of teachers and students.

2.6 Review of Related Empirical Literature

Numerous research studies have been carried out on critical pedagogy in the English language and other subjects. Critical pedagogy emerged in colonized countries to overcome the oppression of colonization and their linguistic and cultural colonization. In language teaching pedagogy, it has been carried out to enhance the learning conditions by putting the learner at the center of instruction. The research is

relevant to my study, “English Language Learning as a Practice of Freedom in Ghana: An Analysis of Students' Views and Opinions”.

Several researchers in Ghana focused their studies on Critical Pedagogy and English education. Some of these researchers include Nkansah (2021), whose studies shed light on the instructional delivery methods Jynn University has adopted and implemented and how it has benefitted its students' learning outcomes and career success. He identified four concepts of Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy as problem-posing, students' roles, teachers' roles, praxis, and dialogue as elements that promote critical education that is appropriate for Ghana's socio-economic development (Nkansah, 2021, p. 67). He posits that tertiary education institutions in Ghana should focus on training students to develop a sense of open-mindedness, logic, and critical consciousness, which is a requirement for building citizens who meet societal needs. The classroom helps in the overall development of the individual. Teachers should therefore employ effective instructional approaches to ensure students receive the best in these tertiary institutions (Badu-Nyarko & Torto, 2014).

Higher educational institutions in Ghana still practice traditional methods of instruction (Awidi, 2008; Fiagbe et al, 2023), which Freire (2009) considers as the banking concept. These methods do not encourage critical consciousness and the ownership of knowledge in students (Freire, 2009). These Universities have adopted a teacher-centered approach to education where teaching has become the emphasis instead of learning (Nkansah, 2021). He further stresses the significance of critical pedagogy, which he thinks should be applied to Ghana's educational system. This will help Ghana to empower its citizens to become critical thinkers, problem solvers, and change agents who can address complex problems and champion the cause of socio-economic development (p.73).

The study's findings are valuable to higher education institutions that seek to address issues relative to designing curricula and instructional methods. The study findings may also assist college administrators in implementing curriculum and instructional designs meaningful to student learning outcomes. Additionally, the research findings may inform future studies about instructional delivery methods in higher education institutions in Ghana. Nkansah (2021) concluded after findings that a problem-posing curriculum informs instructional methods which promote critical thinking.

In a similar view, Akrong, et al, (2021) seek to evaluate textbooks used by JHS in the Ho West District of Ghana. The qualitative content analysis strategy was used with the aid of the latent content analysis and manifest content analysis was used to help the researcher understand the contextual use of words and features of the content of these textbooks. Specific content items in the textbooks selected were identified. In the analysis, knowledge and understanding were seen as the most highly rated cognitive skills. Knowledge was considered higher than the other four skills per the Cummins CALP and Bloom's Taxonomy. Skills such as thinking skills, integration of various school subjects, and critical language awareness were examined using EFA texts books 1, 2 and 3. It did so by employing a critical literacy approach to evaluate EAL textbooks in five Junior High Schools in Ghana. It had the following goals: (a) to investigate the extent to which EAL textbooks cater to a modified version of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive learning dimensions; (b) to examine the extent to which the academic content of these textbooks has elements of other school subjects; and (c) to evaluate the degree to which these textbooks help develop critical language awareness as a feature of critical literacy in Cummins' CALP.

The findings from their studies revealed that there was an element of integration that encourages critical additional language practices (CALP) which goes with culturally sustaining pedagogy, but it failed to create room for critical language awareness (CLA) (Akrong et al, 2021).

Also, the textbooks place so much priority on knowledge, which is a foundational skill than critical thinking, a higher-order skill. Almost all textbooks evaluated have little to do with exposing students to multiple perspectives and skills. They do not seem to offer students the opportunity to produce their own knowledge or counter texts to challenge common sense embedded in the language and to also apply critical reading to the texts.

These textbooks fail to ensure CLA or teacher language awareness, in teachers who serve as mediators of learning for students. These stand in contrast to critical pedagogy which puts the student at the center of the language learning process. And also promotes the acquisition of critical skills development necessary for their personal growth and progress.

Also, Lomotey (2021) examined the views and opinions of Senior High School (SHS) English language teachers on critical pedagogy as well as its applicability in their classrooms. The convergent parallel mixed method design was used by the researcher. This was carefully done to help the researcher fully understand issues regarding the practice and challenges of critical pedagogy as an approach to language teaching and learning.

The study sampled 550 language teachers across the country to respond to questionnaires and interviews which helped the researcher to fully appreciate the issues at hand. Having analyzed the data, it pointed out that teachers generally have a positive view of critical pedagogy. Teachers' views were seen to be in tandem with

the principles of critical pedagogy. Teachers consider the language classroom as an environment for discussing new ideologies and engaging in social interaction with learners.

Teachers see the classroom as a place where issues and challenges regarding language teaching and learning are discussed with their students. Some teachers are fully aware of the challenges facing language learners and are willing to freely engage students to discuss possible ways the students can overcome such challenges. Teachers in this study admonished textbook producers to take into account, the values, beliefs, and interests of learners for them to value and appreciate their culture.

In the area of curriculum implementation, Lomotey (2021), opines that things such as what ideas would foster patriotism and nationalism in the learner should be considered paramount in the design and implementation of the national curriculum. In so doing, it would help produce citizens who are willing and ready to contribute their quota to national development. It would also enable students to become transformers in society.

The study further affirms that “when curriculum planning and development do not include the teacher and the student, their rights are violated since it leads to some amount of oppression”. This is directly linked to Paulo Freire’s idea of oppression as re-echoed in (Lomotey, 2021) that the same people who have the power to make decisions in society are also those who can design and implement educational systems. To this end, the marginalized voices are drowned leading to powerlessness and oppression. This view simply suggests that critical pedagogy, as an approach to teaching (including language teaching), enables individuals, teachers and students alike, to question existing structures and work towards transforming lives and society as a whole. Lomotey, (2021) raised issues such as providing relevant education that

must relate to one's experience and empowering enough, and also creating students' awareness of social injustice by helping students to question the status quo. By raising these issues, she investigated the perceptions of language teachers in Ghana and the conclusions were; that teachers perceive critical pedagogy as a good practice and fit for the language classroom (Lomotey, 2021). And teachers one way or the other practice critical language pedagogy in classes with a democratic and problem-solving environment.

The study was conducted using questionnaires and interviews to gather data which I think the researcher could have added observation which could have given her a direct view of the situation under consideration. It also recommended further research on challenges teachers face in an attempt to implement critical pedagogy in the language classroom and how teachers can overcome such challenges. My study draws inspiration from this study to analyze the views and opinions of not only teachers but also students on possible best ways of implementing critical pedagogy in the English language classroom without any hindrance.

Owu-Ewie (2006) looks briefly at the historical development of educational language policy in Ghana, examines what necessitated the policy change, and responds to issues raised. The paper then argues for the reversal of the new policy and proposes the implementation of a late-exit transitional bilingual education model.

He also raised issues on language legitimacy in educational policy and said that there is a need for first language inclusion and education "to ensure freedom and human dignity for all Ghanaians and ensure that the democratic rights of all citizens are extended to the language of education"

The findings have shown that teachers perceive critical pedagogy as a good practice and fit for the language classroom. They showed this by agreeing with most

of the positive statements and disagreeing with some of the negative ones. More so, the findings have shown that several teachers make serious attempts at applying critical pedagogy in their lessons by essentially considering the individual learner differences of their students. From the results, it is suggested that teachers have to create an exciting classroom atmosphere in which the classroom is treated as a community where every student is recognized and valued as an important member of this community. Teachers must also practice democracy by offering problem-posing education, one in which students get to know and understand school policies and decisions so that they will not find their way of getting such information. Lastly, teachers must recognize the interplay of politics and education in their profession and, together with their students, identify and shape their beliefs, cultures, and assumptions to get the best out of what critical education offers them.

My study titled “English Language Learning as a Practice of Freedom: Analysis of Students views and opinions”, seeks to explore students’ roles in the application of critical pedagogy as an alternative modern approach to the teaching and learning of English Language among senior high students who have experienced various forms of approaches right from primary, junior to the senior high school levels of education. It is to help find out better and most appropriate ways of implementing CP in the English Language classroom.

2.7 Summary of Literature Review

This chapter reviews existing literature relevant to the study. It identifies the constructivist paradigm as a key theory, findings from theoretical literature and empirical literature, which highlight gaps in the current knowledge and position the study within the body of current knowledge. The chapter also reviews the conceptual framework by highlighting the various variables linked to the study. The chapter concludes by establishing the foundation of the study by demonstrating its relevance and originality. The chapter serves as an opening to the methodology deployed in the study, which is captured in the next chapter.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter seeks to look at the methodological procedures employed in this study. These include the research approach, research design, and population, sampling and sampling techniques, data collection techniques, and data analysis procedure. These steps are taken to arrive at unbiased and reliable data that would enable me to answer my research questions and make acceptable and reliable conclusions and generalizations about the applicability of critical pedagogy as an approach to Language teaching and learning that promotes freedom and democracy in the English language classroom.

3.1 The Interpretive or the Constructivist Paradigm

This paradigm serves as the philosophical worldview guiding this research work. The paradigm critically examines how people construct and reconstruct meaning through daily interactions. The way and manner in which people interact and interpret the meaning assigned to events, systems, and situations constitute the constructivist paradigm.

One school of thought under this paradigm is symbolic interactionism (Rock, 2016). This school of thought under the constructivist Paradigm examines how small groups and individuals use symbols such as gestures and language during interaction to communicate meaning (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p.17). The symbolic interactionists are of the view that the meaning we associate with objects, people, and their interactions is not inherent but rather developed out of “ongoing social interactions” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p.17). They opine that “shared meaning

helps people to understand how to act appropriately” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p.18).

This paradigm, unlike the positivist also believes in objectivity and predictability, and is interested in understanding the participant from within. Creswell & Creswell (2017) posit that the goal of this study is to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (p. 8). As an approach to qualitative research, interpretivism “holds the assumptions that individuals seek the understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell & Zhang, 2009, p. 8). From there, it establishes the foundation for understanding individuals’ interpretation of the world around them (Kogler, 2007). Researchers recognize that their background contributes to shaping their interpretation. They position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their personal, cultural, and historical experiences influence their interpretation (Creswell & Zhang, 2009).

The students we teach act differently and in different situations because of the meanings they assign to certain objects or situations. Students tend to behave differently toward approaches or methods teachers use in the classroom that they consider unfamiliar. The knowledge of this paradigm will guide the researcher in understanding how students react to every approach or strategy used in teaching and learning the English language. Hence, this paradigm will put me in a better situation to understand the participants and their responses accurately. This will aid me in the analysis of the research data to be able to effectively answer the research questions posed.

3.2. Research Approach

The research approach for this study is qualitative. Employing qualitative methodology in my research can strengthen the quality of the study because one can support, complement, or expand the study through a descriptive process. Research is qualitative when it involves deriving information from observation, interviews, or verbal interactions and concentrating on the meaning and interpreting the participants' attitudes and behaviors (Owu-Ewie, 2017). Also, Berg (2004) explains that qualitative research relies on the meanings, concepts, contexts, descriptions, and settings. This type of research often presents data in descriptive terms rather than numerical, which is quantitative. That is to say that qualitative research is both subjective and descriptive and assesses the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and opinions of people depending on the topic of the research.

The study is qualitative because it relies on the objective use of human senses to analyze, describe, and interpret data gathered through observations, focus group discussions, and experiences of the natural environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, the qualities and features of the issues raised are observed and analyzed based on the experiences from the interactions with the data and the characters involved in arriving at objective conclusions. Qualitative research gives a detailed description and appropriate interpretation of a phenomenon or a subject through the objective analysis of the experience of happenings and observations. The researcher adopted qualitative research because the problem under investigation is descriptive and inquiry-based. It also involves an analysis of human behavior and activities to draw a conclusion. The researcher found the qualitative method appropriate because the research data collected is non-numerical. That is, it was collected through observations, focus group discussions, and interpretations of students' opinions on

learning the English Language as a practice of freedom in the classroom setting. In the analysis, the researcher's opinion is formed based on responses derived from the discussions and the observation of participants' actions and behaviors.

3.3 Research Design

The research design used in conducting this work is a case study. The case study as a design to research aids in the exploration of a phenomenon within a context using a variety of data sources to ensure that the issue or problem is not tackled through one lens but through multiple lenses to allow for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed or understood (Stake, 1995).

According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when: The focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions. You cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study. You want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.

- i. The boundaries are not clear between the context and the phenomenon.

This design has been chosen for various reasons:

The case study design would enable me to unravel the forms of freedom and democracy that exist in the English language classroom. This includes power relations in the teaching and learning context. This strategy will also enable me to gain tremendous insight into the case and obtain sufficient qualitative data in analyzing the research problem. Also, due to time constraints, this design will enable me to collect my data roughly at the same time and then integrate the information into the interpretation of the results or findings.

Also, this design was chosen because there was a necessity to collect the data concurrently using both the questionnaires and the observation protocol in order not to miss any participating members and to also save time since this study is time-bound.

This design was also adopted because it provided a better understanding of issues regarding the practice and challenges of critical pedagogy as an approach to teaching and learning the English language at the Senior High School Level in Ghana, of which Sunyani Senior High School is not an exception.

3.4 Population

The target population for this study consisted of all Senior High School (SHS) Three (3) students of Sunyani Senior High School in the Sunyani Municipality, totaling 1,146 students. These students were selected as the population of interest because they are in their final year of SHS and have attained sufficient exposure to English language learning to provide meaningful insights into the study's focus on critical pedagogy and the English language as a practice of freedom.

This population was targeted because SHS 3 students have a deeper engagement with the English language curriculum and are better positioned to reflect critically on how pedagogical approaches influence their creativity, critical thinking, and perception of learning as a liberatory process. Additionally, Sunyani Senior High School was selected because a significant number of English language teachers there are familiar with or practice principles of critical pedagogy, making the school a suitable context for examining the concept in action.

3.5 Sampling and Sampling Technique

From the total population of 1,146 students, a sample of 90 students was selected for the study. These students were drawn from three SHS 3 classes, each comprising 30 students. This number was considered adequate and representative for the qualitative nature of the study, particularly for focus group interviews and classroom observations.

A purposeful sampling technique was employed to select the participants. This method was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to select participants based on their relevance, convenience, and availability for the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The three classes were purposefully chosen to ensure diversity in student backgrounds and experiences, thus enriching the data collected on how different learners perceive and engage with critical pedagogy in English language learning. The selection ensured inclusion of students who are active participants in English language lessons and who could meaningfully discuss how learning the language as a practice of freedom contributes to their creative and critical thinking development.

3.6 Data Collection Techniques

Data for this study were collected through two main qualitative methods: classroom observations and focus group interviews. These methods were chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of how students in Sunyani Senior High School experience the learning of the English language as a practice of freedom. Observation protocols, structured in the form of an opinion survey, were used to guide the data collection process. A set of pre-determined response categories was designed to help learners express opinions consistent with their experiences. Observations were conducted in three Form Three (SHS 3) English language classes, with each class observed for a maximum of three lessons. The purpose of observing multiple classes was to obtain a balanced and representative view of how students engage in English language lessons within different classroom contexts.

During the observations, particular attention was paid to several aspects of classroom interaction, including students' responses to questions, democratic participation, critical thinking, gender sensitivity, language use, and peer dialogue. The researcher recorded and later transcribed the classroom conversations, noting key

features of language patterns and communicative behaviour among students and between students and teachers. To complement and strengthen the observational data, follow-up focus group interviews were conducted with selected participants from the observed classes. This step was taken to address the limitations of classroom observation, which can be time-intensive, potentially influence participants' behaviour, or lead to missing subtle interactions due to distractions (Creswell & Zhang, 2009). The focus group interviews provided a platform for students to share their views and reflections in a more open and interactive environment. Since students at the same academic level often share similar learning experiences, group discussions enabled the researcher to gather in-depth and collective insights into the learning process (Cohen et al., 2002). The interviews followed a semi-structured format guided by an interview protocol to ensure consistency across groups while allowing for flexibility and natural discussion flow. Participants for the interviews were selected based on their willingness to participate during the completion of the observation guide. The interviews were audio-recorded using an Android phone equipped with an application that supported orthographic transcription, allowing accurate documentation for subsequent analysis.

The choice of observation and focus group interviews was influenced by the researcher's prior experience in English language classrooms, where some students displayed timidity and fear of making mistakes when asked direct questions. These challenges often limited open participation and expression. Therefore, combining observation with focus group interviews provided multiple perspectives on students' experiences and reduced the risk of missing important aspects of interaction. This multi-method approach is consistent with recommendations in the literature, which emphasize using complementary data collection tools to achieve a deeper

understanding of pedagogical practices and challenges (Cohen et al., 2002; Creswell & Zhang, 2009; Lomotey, 2021). As Lomotey (2021) observed, employing observation alongside other qualitative tools allows researchers to gain richer insights into the implementation of critical pedagogy (CP) in the language classroom. In this study, observation served as a crucial instrument for uncovering how English language learning can function as a practice of freedom for Ghanaian students.

Table 3.6.1: Data Collection Schedule

Data source	Time administered	Frequency of administration	Remarks
Observation	March, 2023	Once in each class	Successful
Observation	April, 2023	Once in each class	Successful
Observation	May, 2023	Once in each class	Successful
Observation	June, 2023	Once in each class	Successful
Interviews	June, 2023	Once in each class	Successful

I developed a consent letter, participants' information statement, and participants' consent form, providing clear direction and being consistent with the objectives. Time and direction were provided in the interview protocols and the observation guide. This was carefully done to ensure a smooth collection of the data from the respondents.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedure

The data gathered were subjected to thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research approach used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) within a dataset (Terry, et al, 2017). It is a flexible yet rigorous method that enables researchers to systematically examine participants' perspectives and experiences. In this study, thematic analysis was employed to interpret how students perceive the learning of the English language as a practice of freedom, based on data collected through classroom observations and focus group interviews. The

method allowed the researcher to move beyond surface-level responses to uncover deeper meanings and relationships within the data.

After transcribing the classroom observations and focus group discussions, the researcher repeatedly read through the transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the content. Meaningful statements and phrases were then identified and assigned codes thus concise labels that captured the essence of the participants' views or actions (Dawadi, 2020). For instance, codes such as "*group work*," "*peer collaboration*," and "*class discussions*" were identified as representing students' experiences of cooperative learning. These codes were then organized into categories that revealed recurring patterns within the data. Grouping related codes together helped illuminate key ideas such as participation, collaboration, and communication in the English language classroom.

The identified patterns were reviewed, refined, and merged to create broader themes that represented the central meanings emerging from the participants' narratives (Terry, et al, 2017). Related codes were synthesized to form themes that reflected the students' collective experiences and understandings of critical pedagogy in language learning.

For example, codes related to *group work*, *peer interaction*, and *dialogue* were combined into the theme "Teamwork and Communication," which highlights the importance of collaborative learning and peer engagement in developing critical and creative thinking skills. Similarly, patterns linked to *questioning*, *freedom of expression*, and *gender sensitivity* were developed into themes such as "Democracy in the Classroom" and "Inclusivity and Voice." These themes captured the broader idea of English language learning as a liberatory and participatory practice. As indicated in Appendix A.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the themes were validated through triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Triangulation involved comparing insights from multiple data sources such as classroom observations, opinion surveys, and focus group interviews to confirm the consistency of the identified patterns. Peer debriefing was conducted by inviting two colleagues experienced in qualitative research to review the coding framework and the emergent themes, helping to minimize researcher bias and enhance analytical rigor. Furthermore, member checking was carried out by sharing summaries of the key themes with a subset of participants to confirm that the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences and viewpoints. These strategies collectively ensured that the analysis process was transparent, dependable, and reflective of the participants' authentic voices.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were an essential component of this study to ensure that the rights, privacy, and dignity of all participants were respected throughout the research process. The study followed the ethical guidelines recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2017) for conducting qualitative research in educational settings. Before data collection began, ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate institutional authorities. Subsequently, an introductory letter was submitted to the head of Sunyani Senior High School to seek permission to conduct the study. Upon receiving approval, the researcher met with the selected participants to explain the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the research.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Since the participants were senior high school students, additional consent was sought from school authorities and class teachers who acted *in loco parentis* for the students. Participants

were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and that participation was entirely voluntary.

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and no identifying information such as names or class codes appeared in the final report. Audio recordings, observation notes, and transcripts were stored securely on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher. All data will be retained for five years after completion of the study and then permanently deleted.

The researcher also ensured non-maleficence, meaning that no harm thus psychological, emotional, or academic would come to participants as a result of their involvement in the research. Every effort was made to create a respectful and open environment where students could express their opinions freely during interviews and observations. Finally, the researcher maintained researcher reflexivity throughout the study (Berg, 2004). This involved continual self-reflection to recognize and minimize potential biases that could influence data interpretation, particularly given the researcher's prior exposure to the concept of critical pedagogy. By adhering to these ethical standards, the study ensured integrity, transparency, and respect for all participants.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the research approach, design, population, sampling, sampling technique, data collection technique, data collection schedule, data analysis procedure, and ethical considerations of the study. The methodology explains how the research questions are addressed through the approach and design stated. The next chapter addresses the analysis of results and discussions.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study, which explored students' views and opinions on English language learning as a practice of freedom in a Ghanaian Senior High School context. Data were gathered through classroom observations and focus group interviews with SHS 3 students.

The findings are organized around themes that emerged from the data analysis, each corresponding to the research questions that guided the study. Using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the transcribed classroom interactions and interview responses were read repeatedly to identify significant words, phrases, and expressions that reflected students' experiences with English language learning. Similar ideas such as *self-expression*, *confidence*, *participation*, and *collaboration* were grouped into codes and refined into broader categories.

Through an iterative process of coding and categorization, these patterns were developed into key themes that capture how students perceive English language learning as empowering, participatory, and liberatory. The analysis combined inductive insights emerging directly from the data with deductive interpretation guided by the conceptual framework of critical pedagogy.

To ensure credibility, data from classroom observations and focus group interviews were compared through triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how English language learning fosters student voice, dialogue, and critical engagement in the classroom.

4.1 Research Question One

What are ESL learners' beliefs about how English Language learning empowers them to express their thoughts and opinions freely?

This section seeks to answer research question 1 to ascertain the extent to which students believe English Language Learning empowers them to express their thoughts and opinions freely. The responses from the students who participated in the study revealed that students learn the English language for diverse or various reasons. These responses were therefore built into the following themes.

4.1.1 English language as a tool for self-expression

The responses from the respondents highlighted the significance of learning English for enhancing communication skills, both in personal and professional settings. It is common knowledge that in a human society, man does not live in isolation and hence, therefore interacts with others using language. This means that one interacts with others through communication which could either be oral or written.

In either case, there is a need for language skills to enable one to communicate effectively or meaningfully, irrespective of the language one uses, especially English, which serves as a medium of instruction in the Ghanaian education system. This implies that one does not need to only learn to acquire the necessary skills and grammatical rules to express oneself very well in one's daily dealings, but also to progress academically, especially beyond the SHS. For instance, **Respondent1 and Respondent2 of 3C9 and 3H3**, respectively, indicated that they learn the English Language because "*It improves my comm. Skills*" and "*It helps me to communicate*". English is considered a universal language that enables individuals to express themselves fluently, understand others, and connect with people from diverse

backgrounds. It helps improve fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and writing skills, essential for effective communication in various aspects of life, such as education, career, and travel. The findings of this study are similar to Rose (1989), who found that improving communication skills involves building rapport, listening actively, and expressing oneself clearly and persuasively.

Others also indicated that they learn the language to help them speak English in their daily activities. A respondent had this to say: **Respondent 7 of the 3H3 group.** *I like to learn English because English helps us communicate with many people.* This theme also emphasized the crucial role of learning English in today's globalized world, as it enables individuals to communicate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds. Skills such as empathy, active listening, and clarity of expression are developed in learners through timely feedback and continuous practice. This confirms the proposition that active listening and verbal clarity are key ingredients to successful communication. Another respondent from the 3v1 group stated that;

Respondent1 of 3V1. *The learning of language helps us to communicate with strangers who may not understand our local language.*

The responses again indicated that English language learning helps improve fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and writing skills. Learning English empowers individuals to express themselves confidently and understand others better, leading to more successful personal and professional interactions (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 921).

As a universal language, English has become an essential tool for effective communication in various aspects of life, including education, career, travel, and social interactions, making it a valuable skill to possess in the modern world (Crystal, 2003; Kachru, 2005).

The results from the analysis of the responses reveal that students learn English to enable them to communicate effectively, hence, the recurrence of effective communication from the responses gathered from the students. The theme further highlights the significance of learning English in today's globalized world, where effective communication is crucial for personal and professional success.

The responses emphasize how learning English improves fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and writing skills, which are essential for expressing oneself confidently and understanding others better. This assertion also falls in line with that of Kumaravadivelu (2006) who argues that language teaching involves a critical practice that connects the word with the world and recognizes that language is an ideology and not just a system.

This theme equally underscores the essence of English as a universal language that enables individuals to connect with people from diverse backgrounds. In conclusion, the results of the analysis demonstrate that the students recognize the value of learning English for effective communication in various aspects of their lives, such as education, career, travel, and social interactions.

4.1.2 Shared learning environment and teamwork

From the results, it was found that students love to learn the English language because it enables them to engage in learning the language through teamwork or a shared learning environment that promotes their equal participation. The responses suggest that when respondents engage in collaborative activities such as group work/discussions through projects, assignments, and exercises in the classroom, it empowers them to express their thoughts freely. The results indicated that the respondents had the opportunity to engage in shared learning and teamwork, which suggests a focus on equal participation and a collective effort to achieve learning

objectives and task completion. These responses from the respondents attest to this fact.

Respondent1 of 3C9. *We learn the English language by doing assignments, group work, and exercises.*

Responses from members of focus group 3H3 highlight the merits of group discussion as a means of shared learning experience and teamwork, buttressing the findings of Slavin (2010). The use of “we” indicates that there is a “we” feeling among members and that they feel part of a group or team that always engages in group activities. This implies that there is a collaborative learning environment where participants get the opportunity to share their knowledge, ideas, and perspectives, fostering a sense of equal participation and collective learning as asserted by (Lave, 1991). The use of pair or group work balanced with whole-class or individual work appeared to support students’ (Arkorful, 2013). For instance, some respondents stated that:

Respondent 3 of 3H3. *Group works are usually given to all students in the class to ensure we all participate.*

Respondent4 of 3V1. *Yes, during group work, we are usually asked by our teacher to discuss the questions given.*

This further affirms the assertion on problem-posing education which encourages students to ask questions as it is based on their realities and living conditions (McLaren, 2016). Thus, problem-posing education uncovers reality, incites critical thinking, and develops critical consciousness, leading students to take actions that improve life conditions (Freire, 1970).

4.1.3 Development of students' critical thinking skills

The results suggest that learners believe that studying the English language will enhance their critical thinking skills. The theme “critical thinking” identified through the responses goes beyond observation to the development of thoughts that are substantial, meaningful, and impactful to the learners, confirming the findings of Brookfield (2013). The students were of the view that learning the English language is one of the surest ways of developing critical thinking which covers a wide range of cognitive skills and intellectual dispositions needed to effectively identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments and truth claims; to discover and overcome personal preconceptions and biases; to formulate and present convincing reasons in support of conclusions; and to make reasonable, intelligent decisions about what to believe and what to do (Wallace 2003). Their assertion on the role critical thinking plays was affirmed by the learners’ response that developing critical thinking provides them the capacity to analyze information systematically by connecting diverse ideas to form a unified whole. They believe that language learning compels them to engage in purposeful reflection rather than passively accepting any information that comes their way. For instance,

Respondent 6 of 3V1 said. *“It helps us to make meaningful thoughts”.*

The respondents consider learning the English Language as a way of getting them to engage in “meaningful thoughts” which help to inform their decision-making, where their choices are based on well-thought-through reasoning and evidence. This affirms Wallace (2003) assertion that critical thinking is an adventure. Becoming mentally fit is hard work, and thinking independently can be a little scary at times, but in the end, you’ll be a smarter, stronger, and more confident thinker Wallace 2003). The responses from the participants buttress the fact that language education, such as

learning of English Language in class, encourages them to ask intriguing and thought-provoking questions based on their realities and living conditions (Halpern, 2014). Thus, learning English helps them uncover reality, incites critical thinking, and develops critical consciousness, leading students to take actions that improve life conditions (Freire, 1970).

4.1.4 Perception and Learning of Language

Responses from the participants indicate that students like to study the English Language because it is a subject that does not involve calculations. Hence, indicated their unwillingness and dislike to learning certain subjects such as Mathematics in school. For instance, a respondent said that *“I like English lessons because it is a reading subject and does not involve calculations”*. The respondents again assert that they allocate more time to the learning of the English language and other non-mathematical subjects because they dislike subjects that involve calculations and mathematical formulas. The implication of the learners’ views here suggests that the English teacher should maintain an open and equal classroom environment by making learning student-centred (Haggis, 2003).

Further probes reveal that the participants have different learning styles that suit their interests (Griggs, 1991, P. 133). Some of them prefer the ‘deep’ approach while others prefer the ‘surface’ approach to learning which depends essentially on the intention of the student to learn a particular subject (Ramsden, 2012).

The participants also see the learning of the English language as a way of enhancing their understanding of reality hence making them develop a 'deep' approach to learning to understand the meaning of the text (Haggis, 2003). The respondent's view about language learning suggests that what motivates them to learn English over other subjects may stem from their motivation to learn the subject irrespective of the

teacher's style of teaching the various subjects. This notion by the learners confirms the idea that the teacher's role is to create a classroom where learners are free to express their views based on their personal experiences. This will encourage the learner to become an active agent in his or her education (Freire, 1994).

4.1.5 Patience and dedication

Responses from a participant in the 3C9 group posit that, they enjoy English lessons because of the teacher's patience and dedication. Some students believe that they understand English lessons better in class because the teacher takes his time to teach them well to understand the topics taught. They consider the teacher's dedication to duty as a hallmark for them to understand the subject. The learners consider the teacher's dedication as a way of providing more appropriate instruction that makes the lesson more enjoyable to them. The responses also suggest that teachers take time to digest every topic in class which is a sign of commitment and dedication which makes the learners develop a positive attitude towards the subject in class. For instance, a respondent said "*Teacher takes time to teach very well, making it understandable*". This statement by the respondent suggests that the teacher adapts to the pace and interest of the learner. Some respondents see the teacher as someone who is not only interested in completing the syllabus but is more concerned about the academic progress of the learners. The respondents consider the teacher of English as someone who has their interest at heart. The learners see the teacher as someone ready to invest his time in them which creates a conducive atmosphere for the progress in language learning (Weimer, 2013). Some participants' remarks highlight how the teacher's dedication and patience contribute to learners' overall learning outcomes. These views from the learners concerning language teaching support the proposition

that language teachers should systematically collect data about their teaching and use that information to make responsible decisions about their teaching.

4.1.6 Restrictive Learning Environment

This theme emerged during the researcher's discussion and observation with the participant groups to ascertain the extent to which the English language empowers them to communicate their views freely in the language classroom. Analysis of some respondents' responses indicate that, despite the majority of the respondents affirming the fact that, they like language lessons because of the diverse reasons stated, some of them responded contrary to their colleagues. For instance, respondent 4 of 3C9 indicates that *"most of the time when a teacher sees you interacting during lessons, he says it is a distraction to others"*. This response is not different from that of respondent 5 of the same group who also said, *"Sometimes Our teacher thinks it would distract the class"*. Respondent 1 of the 3H3 group insists that he does not like English lessons and does not talk in class because *"the teacher always thinks that when we discuss among ourselves in class, it would lead to noisemaking"*. These statements from the teacher do not encourage us to always want to communicate with our peers freely in class.

Respondent 1 of 3C9 feels that anytime they interact or engage in discussion during lessons, the teacher sees it as a form of distraction, this suggests that the teacher does not encourage discussion or interaction in the classroom even if it is productive to the learners. It was observed that, sometimes when a teacher enters the class some of the students seize to talk in the class. Some of the learners made it clear to the researcher that this is because they fear the teacher will label them as "distractors" to others. Respondent 1 of 3H3 shares a similar experience, she assumes that any form of student. These findings affirmed Weimer (2013) observation that

“the way teachers talk about their experiences is fundamental to understanding how a teacher’s knowledge influences what happens in the context of their work”.

Contrary to the observations made by some of the respondents, López-Gopar (2019) argues that critical pedagogy allows students to discuss issues relating to discriminatory practices, social inequality, identity negotiation, and power. Although it appears the language classroom is solely for teaching language, Kubota (2016) believes that talking and teaching about controversial issues is unavoidable in English language teaching. It is therefore important that teachers create a democratic environment for the learners to express themselves freely without fear of being labelled “noisemakers”.

4.2 Research Question Two

What is the role of English Language learning in fostering creativity, critical thinking and autonomy among students?

This section seeks to answer Research Question 2 that sought to find out the role of English Language Learning in fostering creativity and autonomy among students. The results indicate a variety of ways English language learning as a practice of freedom can foster creativity and autonomy among learners in the language classroom. The findings highlight students' belief in their learning as a way of helping them to be creative and take control of their learning by posing their questions. This gives credence to (Hooks, 1994), notion that, when students pose their questions, it helps them to fill their knowledge gap. And that the process of asking questions allows students to articulate their current understanding of a topic, make connections with other ideas, and become aware of what they do or do not know. This is considered an integral part of learner’s self and peer assessment in the language classroom.

4.2.1 Personalized Learning and Students' Autonomy

The findings reveal that the language teacher creates an open and inclusive learning atmosphere where they are being motivated to connect their out-of-class experience, knowledge, and perspectives with the classroom learning situation (Hooks, 1994). To the participants, this approach they said helps to promote their active engagement, relevance, and real-world connection. They consider the teacher's flexibility as something that will help them appreciate the value of their learning. It makes learning more self-centred and meaningful. This goes in line with the constructivism Theory which emphasizes the need for learners to construct his or her knowledge taking into cognizance the role of the social context or the environment in language learning (Vygotsky, 1978). It further stresses that teachers who base their methods on constructivist learning theories try to give individuals a considerable amount of freedom to learn on their way and at their speed (Hooks, 1994)

Respondent 1 of 3H3. *The teacher allows me to bring what I know outside class to class.*

Respondent 6 of 3C9. *The teacher always led students to practice on their own.*

The above statements from 3H3 suggest that the participants are made to use online resources to find accurate answers to current problems in the language classroom. This kind of approach helps learners to find out things for themselves with minimum guidance. This will help to foster, autonomy, digital literacy, and information-gathering skills in learners. This finding portrays the learners as individuals who are ready to blend the open-book style of learning and the use of online resources to generate answers to questions asked in the classroom. This makes the learners replace the rote learning style with learning concepts and skills through individual or group project work. This aids them in their ability to access,

comprehend, and utilize information to help them in their learning. Allows learners to use the internet to find solutions to real-world problems (Levy, 2007). The findings reveal that the respondents usually rely on online tools to search for solutions. The findings indicate that learners try to shift towards modern technological educational practices, where the focus is making use of online resources to generate answers to problems they encounter in their learning journey effectively.

Respondent 6 of 3V1. Sometimes questions are given for us to use the internet to search for the answers.

This confirms Harmer's (2014) comment that the moment we realize that a class is composed of individuals (rather than some kind of unified whole), we have to start thinking about how to respond to these students individually so that while we may frequently teach the group as a whole, we will also, in different ways, pay attention to the different identities we are faced with. This comment by Harmer buttresses the point that learners should sometimes be allowed to explore the internet in search of new knowledge. This will promote autonomous learning and enhance creativity. The findings also suggest that learners are sometimes given difficult classroom work to inculcate in their critical thinking skills. A respondent from the 3V1 group stated that:

Respondent 7. We are also giving very difficult exercises to work on during English lessons". Teachers usually do this to encourage learners to practice "discovery" learning which will change their thinking and help find solutions to problems on their own.

4.2.2 Fostering a Sense of Relevance in Learners

The findings from the respondents highlight the use of group work and class exercises during English lessons as a strategy to promote a sense of relevance in

learners. The participants believe that when they partake in group work and class exercises, they can relate what they learn in class to real-life situations. They can understand the topics taught and this makes them feel that what they learn applies to real life. This confirms the assertion that learners need to have strong literacy skills so that they can understand content standards, communicate effectively, and negotiate learning. For learners to construct meaning and derive usefulness from what they learn, they must be able to retain important information, understand topics and concepts deeply, and actively apply knowledge (Perkins, 2006). They also believe that group work and other projects enable them to actively share and learn ideas from each other.

This will foster their sense of community and engagement that contributes to making the learning experience more relevant and meaningful. The findings further indicate that learners believe when they discuss language topics in groups, they can relate the lessons to their own experiences, opinions, and knowledge. This will make the learners see the values of what they are learning because there is a linkage to their lives and future goals. The participants also feel that the group work and assignments they do in class enable them to do peer teaching and whenever their teacher is absent from class, they can hold the class together through peer teaching. They stated that their peers can explain concepts in simpler terms to their understanding. It indicates that learners are not only active recipients of information but also deeply involved in the knowledge acquisition process. This supports Shintani's (2014) assertion that learners' language aptitude or learning style, for example, can shape the beliefs about how to learn and the specific actions (strategies) that they can employ to try to achieve their goals. This makes them feel that they are becoming owners of their knowledge hence promoting a sense of relevance among learners.

Respondent 1 of 3H3. *Yes, we are allowed to express our thoughts in language classes.*

Respondent 7 of 3H3. *We are usually giving group work to discuss among ourselves during language lessons.*

The group work in the learning English language helps to promote a learning atmosphere where the learners find personal and real-world relevance in the material they learn in class.

4.2.3 Building on Students' Strengths

The findings indicate that when students learn language as a practice of freedom in the classroom, it will help build their knowledge and understanding of concepts and ideas through a variety of texts. Teachers should create opportunities and use strategies that will enable learners to apply reading strategies such as skimming a text to identify main ideas and scanning for keywords and ideas to leverage learners' strengths, especially their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The participants indicate that when the teacher poses challenging questions to them, it encourages them to deeply engage with the material as well as synthesize ideas and apply their learning in unfamiliar contexts with minimum guidance from the teacher. Doing this in the language classroom will further help to develop their strengths, and foster a sense of confidence and competence as they navigate through complex problems to arrive at an answer on their own (Bandura, 1997, Dweck, 2006).

The results further buttress the fact that learners can think critically and solve complex problems as they are empowered to cultivate the capacity to tackle difficult tasks which in the long run enables them to recognize and build their intellectual strengths. Building on the strengths of learners involves recognizing and nurturing their inherent abilities and potential. The results go further to support the

constructivist framework of learning which emphasizes that learners take in new ideas and reorganize previous understanding which encourages reflection and rethinking. This will enable them to construct their understanding and knowledge of the world through experience and reflection on those experiences. When teachers pose challenging questions, they are not merely testing students' knowledge but are encouraging them to actively engage in the learning process, thereby building on their cognitive strengths. When learners get involved in challenging questions, they are required to analyze information, make connections, and apply their knowledge in new ways. These challenging questions encourage learners to think independently and develop their problem-solving skills are considered crucial in language learning.

4.2.4 Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression was also one of the themes built from the responses gathered. The responses reflect a learning environment that strongly supports freedom of expression which promotes student-centred learning (Freire, 1970, Brookfield, 2015, Weimer, 2013). The respondents affirmed that they are encouraged to actively partake in the learning process. The freedom of expression enables learners to voice out their thoughts and opinions freely in class which makes them feel that their contributions in class are valued and that they are empowered to possess their learning (Freire, 1970).

The results further indicate that learners are usually given time to express their opinions which helps to promote an inclusive and supportive learning atmosphere. The students believe that when they can express themselves freely in the language class, it creates an atmosphere and a culture of respect and safety. Allowing learners to express their opinions and ask questions anytime implies that the teacher recognizes the diversity of thoughts in the classroom. It encourages learners from

diverse backgrounds and perspectives to actively engage in discussion which will help enrich the learning experience of all students. The results also highlight a learning environment that supports continuous learning since learners can ask questions even after the lesson on their own time.

Respondent 6 of 3H3. Yes, we ask questions anytime we want during the lessons and after the lessons.

Respondent 5 of 3V1. We are given time to express ourselves during English lessons.

The opportunity to ask questions anytime helps learners to consider learning as an ongoing process and that learning can take place at any time and any place. This will help link the learner's experience to a broader concept of democratic education where freedom of expression is a core principle. Democratic values such as freedom to ask questions, shared learning, and freely expressing one's opinion contribute to learners' collective knowledge and decision-making. The participants view a learning environment to be a place that promotes freedom of expression and mutual respect between teachers and students.

This assertion is in tandem with Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget's theory of learning which posits that learners learn best when they actively construct their understanding through interaction and dialogue where freedom of expression is key (Vygotsky, 1978). Paulo Freire's concept of critical pedagogy comes to the fore in this case. It advocates for an education that empowers students to question and challenge dominant narratives and to express their ideas (Freire, 1970).

Freire further stresses that education should be a dialogical process where students and teachers engage in mutual exchange. The concept of conscientization or critical consciousness allows the learners to develop an awareness of the social, political, and economic contradictions and take action against oppressive elements of

reality. Students are encouraged to express their opinions which will help them to foster a critical mindset where they can think independently, analyze information critically, and challenge assumptions. This will help empower the learners to become critically aware individuals who can contribute meaningfully to the progress of society.

4.2.5 Empowerment through Knowledge

The theme reflected the responses collected from the participants. This implies that when learners understand the topic, it helps them in their comprehension. Learners can engage in discussion, answer questions, and contribute meaningfully in diverse contexts. The students believe that, when they understand a topic, they are well equipped with details to be able to express their thoughts confidently.

Respondent 2 of 3C9. When you understand the lesson, you can express yourself when a question is asked.

Respondent 1 of 3H3. Yes, our tr usually give us time in the class to express our views on the topic treated.

The knowledge they gain serves as a tool for empowerment which enables them to make informed decisions. The results portray the fact that, when learners understand a topic, it moves them away from surface-level thinking into a space where they can examine the learning situation critically. This enables them to become critical thinkers and problem solvers.

This assertion is evident in Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed which emphasizes the essence of critical consciousness (conscientization) (Freire, 1970).

“If students are not able to transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing” (Freire, 2020).

The theme supports his notion that education should not be about repository information into passive students but about fostering critical thinking, enabling them to question and reshape their reality. When learner truly understands a topic, they get the ability to analyze, question, and articulate their perspectives which is integral to empowerment. Bandura's notion of self-efficacy which talks about the ability to succeed in specific situations plays a crucial role in this context. Students' self-efficacy increases when they truly understand the lesson hence their ability to express their thoughts freely when a question is asked in the class. The respondents also believe that when they understand a lesson in class, they are well-equipped to express their views, engage in democratic processes, and contribute to society's progress.

This empowerment through knowledge has a great impact on the career growth, leadership, and creativity of learners. It buttresses the notion that knowledge when truly understood, becomes a powerful tool for self-expression and influence.

4.2.6 Motivation and Mentorship

The results portray the teacher as a mentor who fosters resilience and perseverance in learners. The students indicated that despite the mistakes they make in class during lessons, the teacher encourages them to see failure as a step toward learning. They see the teacher as someone who instills in them the value of continued effort. Re-echoing the fact that success is not achieved on a silver platter. The teacher's positive reinforcement builds in learners' confidence and encourages them to always take calculated risks in their language learning and life endeavors.

Respondent 3 of 3C9. *We are appreciated when we give the wrong response and given another opportunity to try again.*

Respondent 3 of 3V1. *When my response to a question is wrong, the tr always ask me to try my best.*

The results align with Dweck's concept of the growth mindset which emphasizes that individuals who believe their abilities can develop through dedication and hard work. When the teacher asks students to try again after a mistake, they are nurturing this growth mindset, reinforcing the idea that intelligence and skill can be developed through effort (Dweck, 2006).

Zarei, Ahour & Seifoori (2020) supports the idea that motivation and feedback from teachers can significantly impact learners' attitudes towards learning. When students are encouraged to view mistakes as learning opportunities, they are more likely to engage in metacognitive strategies that promote problem-solving abilities. Teachers who encourage learners to keep trying until they succeed are helping to foster a sense of autonomy and competence, and by encouraging persistent effort, the teacher's help students develop this orientation, which has been linked to higher levels of academic achievement and well-being. The findings also highlight the importance of Skinner's Theory on constructive feedback where desirable learning behaviour is followed by a rewarding stimulus which can increase the possibility of that behaviour being repeated. When learners' efforts are appreciated even when they make mistakes, it reinforces participation and effort (Skinner, 1984).

Teachers can try to enhance learners' motivation or reduce the debilitating effect of language anxiety. Hall (2011) concluded that the teacher is not wholly responsible but can play an important role by, for example, selecting 'motivating classroom activities.

4.2.7 Unprofessional Teacher Behaviour, Language Anxiety and Emotional Distress

Learners are in a classroom to learn a language and believe that having their errors corrected will help them to achieve this. However, teachers do need to monitor

the extent to which their corrective feedback causes individual learners' anxiety and adjust their feedback accordingly. Research has shown that teachers are often inconsistent in their practice of correcting learners – for example, correcting some learners but not others. As Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld (2008) pointed out, such inconsistency may reflect teachers' natural inclination to take account of individual differences in learners and to try to balance their cognitive and affective needs. This is evident in the learners' responses as:

Respondent 4 of 3C9. I remember my class teacher asked a question, a male answered, and the tr response was “Are you okay”. Looking at this even if you are given another chance, you will not want to go for a second trial.

Motivation is a crucial factor in determining receptivity; in contrast, language anxiety is likely to lead to defensiveness. Three major sources of anxiety have been identified – apprehensiveness about communicating in the L2 in front of the whole class, competitiveness (i.e. the negative self-evaluation that arises when learners consider themselves less successful learners than their classmates), and language tests.

4.3 Research Question Three

How does English language learning expand ESL learners' access to knowledge and information?

The results from the observation and the focus group discussion reveal that students learn the English language to enable them to get access to knowledge and information to be able to function effectively in school and outside of the school environment. The knowledge acquired will enable learners to recognize the views of others and can evaluate others' views against their own and come out with new ideas. The results reveal several ways learners can have access to knowledge and information concerning the ways they learn the English language.

4.3.1 Knowledge and Information on Gender Inclusivity

Information on gender inclusivity is integral to the learning of language. Learners learn to use language while being mindful of gender-sensitive issues. Through observation and the focus group discussions, the participants demonstrated that their teachers intentionally avoid gender-based biases when organizing students into groups. By focusing on mixed ability rather than gender, the language teacher promotes an environment where students are valued for their skills and potential rather than their gender (Norton & Pavlenko, 2019). This approach aligns with gender-inclusive education by making learners acquire information on gender roles and ensuring that all students, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to participate, collaborate, and learn from one another. It also suggests that when learners get access to information on gender roles in the classroom, it helps in fostering a classroom culture where gender does not define a student's identity or abilities, which can help in breaking down stereotypes and promoting equality (Nelson, 2009). For instance, *Respondent 6 of 3C9 had this to say “Sometimes the teacher put us in mixed ability groupings without any gender considerations”*.

The results further suggest that the Language teacher forms groups based on ability rather than gender, it reflects a move toward equity, where the focus is on providing students with what they need to succeed, rather than treating all students the same regardless of their differences. According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, equity in education involves recognizing and addressing different needs, including those based on gender, to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed (Akther, 2020). The shared view of participants is indicated as follows:

Respondent 4 of 3V1 “English language is not meant for a particular gender. We are all treated equally”.

By this view, the participants agreed that grouping students without considering gender, is a way of actively countering the notion that certain tasks or roles are more appropriate for one gender over another. Their views support the view that gender-neutral practices in classrooms can help dismantle stereotypes and encourage students to engage in a wider range of activities, irrespective of their gender (Francis, 2010). The learners believe the knowledge on gender inclusivity allows students of different genders to work together, share perspectives, and learn from each other’s strengths and experiences.

This approach aligns with the principles of inclusive education, which emphasizes the importance of creating a learning environment where diversity is respected and valued. By not grouping students based on gender, the teacher avoids reinforcing gender segregation in the classroom, which can limit social and academic development (Trawick-Smith, 2022). Instead, students are exposed to a variety of viewpoints and ways of thinking, which can enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills. As societies increasingly recognize the importance of gender equality, educational practices that avoid gender-based distinctions are seen as essential in preparing students to participate in a more inclusive and equitable world.

The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) underscores the importance of eliminating gender disparities in education as a key step toward achieving broader gender equality (Akther, 2020). Gender bias can influence teachers’ expectations of students, often unconsciously, which can affect students’ academic outcomes. By not considering gender in group formation, the

teacher minimizes the risk of perpetuating such biases and ensures that students are assessed and grouped based on their abilities rather than their gender.

4.3.2 Confidence and Self-Expression

During the observation and discussion, it was noted that learners who have a variety of information on the topic taught were able to express their thoughts with confidence. During the discussion, all the participants believe that when they learn the language in freedom, they can explore new areas of knowledge, which helps in building confidence and self-expression in and outside the language classroom. This reflects a sense of confidence and empowerment in the student's learning experience. The learners acknowledge that when their teacher is effective in his teaching during language lessons, he or she will be conscious of the learners' freedom to practice new skills and ideas in the classroom (Bandura, 1997).

"Our teacher's teaching style helps me to understand whatever topic I read in class."

This suggests that they feel supported and capable of grasping even challenging concepts. This boosts their confidence in their abilities, making them more willing to engage with the material independently. The results also imply that the learners feel comfortable enough to articulate their understanding and learning process. The positive impact of the teacher's style encourages the students to express their thoughts, ask questions, and participate more actively in class discussions, further enhancing their learning and communication skills. The findings support Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, which emphasizes the belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations (Bandura, 1997). This plays a crucial role in how people approach goals, tasks, and challenges. The learner's recognition of the teacher's effective teaching style indicates that the teacher has created a learning environment that fosters this self-efficacy (Hoy & Spero, 2005). When students feel confident in

their ability to understand the material, they are more likely to take risks in their learning, such as tackling difficult topics or participating in discussions. This confidence is also reinforced by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes the importance of scaffolding in education. Scaffolding involves the use of a variety of teaching techniques to bridge learning gaps (Vygotsky, 1978). The participants believe that if they are given support in the language classroom, it will help them to reach higher levels of comprehension and skill acquisition. Effective teaching involves providing support that is gradually removed as the student becomes more capable. The learners feel that their teacher's teaching style enhances their understanding, which often correlates with a supportive classroom environment where self-expression is encouraged. The learner's positive experience suggests that the teacher's approach allows them to voice their thoughts and engage in active learning freely. The students believe that their ability to understand "whatever topic" they read is a testament to a teaching style that likely involves dialogue, questioning, and collaborative learning, all of which are key to fostering self-expression.

4.3.3 Self-Directed Learning

To find out how learners get access to knowledge and information, a learner had this to say.

Respondent 6 of 3C9: *"Sometimes I use the Internet, especially Google, to learn more about the topic I don't understand."*

This statement reflects an aspect of self-directed learning. It demonstrates participants' willingness to seek out information and resources independently when they find challenges in their learning. Based on the statement above, using the Internet, especially search engines like Google, the learner takes control of their learning by actively exploring and deepening their understanding of topics they find

challenging. This approach is central to self-directed learning, where the learner identifies their needs, sets learning goals, and uses available resources to achieve them.

The statement further highlights a fundamental principle of self-directed learning (SDL) where the learners had the autonomy to identify knowledge gaps and take proactive steps to address them (Knowles, 1975). The observation and discussions also reveal that when a learner encounters something they don't understand, they don't just wait for instruction. Instead, they actively search for information, often using the vast resources available online. This according to Anderson (2018, p. 70) aligns with one of the core components of Self-directed learning which consider the internet as a place that offers a wide range of resources, from academic papers and expert opinions to forums and educational videos, enabling learners to access diverse perspectives and deepen their understanding of a topic.

Moreover, this practice aligns with the concept of lifelong learning, where individuals continually update their knowledge and skills in response to changing personal and professional needs. As technology advances, the ability to effectively use the Internet for learning becomes increasingly important, empowering individuals to stay current and competitive in a rapidly evolving world. The use of Google for self-directed learning also ties into the theory of connectivism, which emphasizes the role of networks in the learning process. According to Siemens (2005), learning is not just about acquiring knowledge but about knowing how to find and connect with the right resources at the right time. Google serves as a critical tool in this networked approach to learning, allowing individuals to quickly access and evaluate information from a wide range of sources.

4.3.4 Learner-Teacher Collaboration

One major feature of a democratic and free language class is that of mutual trust and respect between the teacher and their students. Some of the respondents consider their relationship with the language teacher as a source of access to knowledge and information. A learning environment where learners are free to relate cordially with their teacher enhances learners' access to knowledge and information. For instance, a respondent stated that;

"Sometimes I contact the teacher privately for more explanation when I don't understand a topic."

This statement reflects a proactive approach to learning and highlights the importance of teacher-student collaboration. It suggests that the student values the teacher's guidance and is willing to take the initiative to seek additional help when needed. This indicates a healthy learning environment where the teacher is accessible and supportive, and the student feels comfortable reaching out for clarification. It underscores the collaborative nature of the educational process, where both parties work together to ensure the student's understanding and success.

The findings further illustrate an active learning approach that emphasizes the collaborative relationship between students and teachers. This dynamic is crucial in fostering deeper understanding and academic success. Active learners engage with the material, ask questions, and seek help when they encounter difficulties. By contacting the teacher privately for further explanation, the student is demonstrating this active engagement, a behaviour associated with higher levels of academic achievement. Research shows that students who proactively seek help when they don't understand a topic are more likely to succeed than those who passively wait for clarification during regular class sessions.

The teacher-student relationship is central to effective education. According to Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, learning occurs in a social context, and the interaction between teacher and student is crucial for cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). The participants believe that sometimes, when they need additional help, they reach out privately, which demonstrates their understanding of this collaborative process, where the teacher only acts as a facilitator of learning by providing tailored support that meets the learner's specific needs. This behaviour also reflects the importance of a supportive learning environment.

The findings further indicate that a classroom where students feel comfortable contacting the teacher privately is one where there is trust and mutual respect. From the discussions, learners think that whenever their teacher makes himself accessible, it encourages them to take ownership of their learning, and they will always seek help without fear of intimidation. This aligns with the concept of formative assessment, where ongoing feedback and support are provided to guide students' learning processes (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Students who actively seek help tend to develop better self-regulation skills, which are linked to long-term academic success (Zimmerman, 2002). By engaging in private consultations with their teacher, they learn to identify their learning gaps and take steps to address them, a practice that fosters independence and lifelong learning.

4.4 Chapter Summary

At the end of the analysis, the findings revealed that learners prefer to learn the English language in a democratic environment where they can voice their opinions freely. This is confirmed in research question two, where learners demonstrated their commitment to learning the English language as a way of ensuring autonomy, ensuring a sense of relevance, and building on their strengths. In research question

three, the analysis shows that learners learn language as a way of acquiring more knowledge and information on gender inclusion, as well as ensuring a cordial relationship between students and their teachers.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Overview

This chapter of the thesis discusses a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further studies of the work. These are the main threads that have been used to tie this work together.

5.1 Summary

Overall, the study highlights the importance of English language learning in empowering students to communicate effectively, think critically, and develop a deeper understanding of reality. It also emphasizes the need for teachers to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that encourages student participation and critical thinking.

5.2 Summary of Major Findings

The major findings are:

1. Learners view the English language as a powerful tool for communication and self-expression. They recognize that proficiency in English enables them to articulate their thoughts, ideas, and opinions more confidently, and to connect effectively with people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This reflects their belief in the empowering role of English as a universal medium for expression and interaction.
2. The study found that English language learning promotes creativity, critical thinking, and learner autonomy, particularly when teachers employ strategies that challenge students intellectually. When teachers pose thought-provoking questions and encourage independent inquiry, learners demonstrate greater

initiative, problem-solving skills, and confidence in forming their own perspectives.

3. Learners display an awareness of gender-sensitive communication in their use of English, which suggests that they view language learning as not only a cognitive process but also a social one shaped by values of respect and inclusion. Furthermore, they prefer that learning groups be organized according to ability rather than gender, reinforcing the belief that English language classrooms should promote equality and collaboration.
4. When learners' opinions are acknowledged and incorporated into classroom interactions, they feel more valued and comfortable participating in the learning process. This participatory environment fosters confidence and motivation, enabling students to express themselves more freely and take ownership of their learning journey.
5. A positive and supportive teacher–student relationship enhances learners' access to knowledge and information. When learners feel comfortable approaching teachers and seeking guidance, they become more proactive in pursuing understanding beyond classroom instruction. This collaborative dynamic extends their access to learning resources, both linguistic and intellectual, through the English language.

5.3 Conclusions

The study highlights the critical role of learning the English language as a practice of freedom within the classroom setting. Emphasizing democratic principles in teaching and learning creates an atmosphere where students can express themselves freely, without experiencing language anxiety or oppression.

The findings reveal that when learners engage with the English language in a free and open atmosphere, it significantly enhances their communication skills, critical thinking abilities, autonomy and creativity, awareness of gender and inclusivity, confidence to challenge unprofessional teacher conduct without fear of intimidation.

Collectively, these outcomes contribute to students' overall improvement in linguistic competence, academic achievement, and effective communication in English.

5.4 Recommendations for Practice

The researcher recommends that:

- **In-service Training and Professional Development:** It is recommended that regular in-service training and professional development seminars be organized for English language teachers. These programs should focus on innovative pedagogical strategies that empower learners to use English as a tool for self-expression and intercultural communication. By enhancing teachers' understanding of learner-centered methods, students will be better supported in expressing their thoughts and opinions freely.
- **Integration of 21st-Century Skills in Language Teaching:** Teachers should receive specialized training on how to effectively incorporate 21st-century skills—such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and learner autonomy—into English language lessons. These skills not only improve students' linguistic competence but also foster independent thinking and problem-solving abilities, enabling learners to become more confident and autonomous users of English.

- **Provision of Adequate Learning Infrastructure:** The provision of appropriate and up-to-date infrastructure—such as well-equipped classrooms, digital learning tools, libraries, and language laboratories—should be prioritized to expand learners’ access to knowledge and information. A resource-rich environment enhances students’ ability to explore, research, and engage meaningfully with English both inside and outside the classroom.
- **Promotion of Inclusive and Supportive Learning Environments:** Teachers should create classroom environments that promote equality, respect, and inclusivity, where learners can practice English without fear of intimidation or discrimination. When students feel safe and valued, they are more likely to participate actively, express their ideas freely, and develop confidence in using the language in real-world contexts.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the results of this research, the following were suggested for further research.

- Firstly, it is recommended that a greater number of senior high schools be used in further studies to consolidate the findings in this study.
- Secondly, research work of this nature should be carried out in other related subjects, such as social studies, history, and government, to broaden the scope of democracy in the classroom.
- Again, further research should be conducted to ascertain the challenges that may hinder teachers from implementing critical pedagogy in their classrooms.
- Finally, for students to be abreast with current trends in the learning of the English language, there should be research on critical digital pedagogy, which will help ensure learners acquire 21st-century skills in language learning.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Research Question 1:

What are ESL learners' beliefs about how English Language learning empowers them to express their thoughts and opinions freely?

Q1. What are your thoughts on English language lessons? What do you enjoy or find challenging about them?			
Themes	Similar response		
Improves communication skills	R1. It improves my comm. Skills R2. Yes. It helps me to communicate	R2. , yes: it helps me to express myself fluently in and outside the classroom. Yes, it helps me learn the rules of the language better and speak fluently. R4. Yes, the English language is simple and enables us to express ourselves. R6. Yes, it helps me to learn new vocabulary. R7. Because English helps us communicate with many people.	R1. It helps us to communicate with strangers who may not understand our local language. R2. It improves our fluency and helps us to communicate around the world. R3. It helps us to speak, and pronounce words correctly. R4. The English language helps us to communicate everywhere we go. R5. Learning the English language makes us speak good English and write good essays. R6. Because it helps us to be fluent and speak good English. R7. It helps us to communicate with people around the world.
Negative learning environment	R4. The tr. Kills the spirit of the students during lessons. R5. I wouldn't say I like the way our tr teaches the subject.	R1. Because our tr is lazy. She doesn't teach well, she doesn't like writing on the board, and also, she likes insulting.	

Lack of support	R7. Our English tr is boring since he does not use games, fun, and jokes during lessons.		
Patience and dedication	R3. Yes. Tr takes time to teach very well, making it understandable		
Different learning approaches. (perception and learning)		R5. Yes, because English is a reading subject and does not involve calculations.	
Develops critical thinking skills	R6. It helps us to make meaningful thoughts.		
How much opportunity do you have to collaborate or interact with your peers during English language lessons? Is this helpful for your learning?			
Theme	H1:	H2	H3
Team work and communication	R1. Through assignments, group work and exercises. R2. By doing group work in class R3. We usually do group discussion R7. During group discussions		
Shared learning experience		R3. Group works are usually given to all students in the class to ensure we all participate. R4. Yes, during group work we are usually asked by our tr to discuss the questions given.	R1. I consider it a way of sharing ideas and we usually do it during group work. R2. During group work and presentations. R4. During presentations and group work. R6. During group work. R7. It helps us to gain more experience in English language
Restrictive learning environment	R4. Most at times when a teacher sees you interacting during lessons, he says it's a distraction to others R5. Sometimes our tr thinks it would distract the class.	R1: Our tr always think that when we discuss in class among ourselves it will lead to noisemaking in the class.	

<p>Team work and communication</p>	<p>R6. Yes, but many of my colleagues do not bring any meaningful conversation to class.</p>	<p>R2. Yes. Whenever a question is asked, I discuss it with my friends to come out with the answer. R5. Yes, when we interact with ourselves it helps bring new ideas from our friends. R6. We are made to interact with each other when it comes to group work and class discussion. R7. When you don't understand what the tr teaches in class, you can ask a colleague.</p>	<p>R3. When it comes to literature, we interact with our colleagues during drama lessons. R5. We always interact with each other during English lessons because it involves speaking, listening, reading and writing.</p>
<p>Do you think the teaching of English language ever unintentionally perpetuates gender stereotypes or inequalities? Why or why not?</p>			
<p>themes</p>	<p>3c9</p>	<p>3h3</p>	<p>3v1</p>
<p>Gender inclusivity</p>	<p>R1. Tr makes sure both boys and girls are allowed to express themselves in class. R6. Sometimes the tr put us in mixed ability groupings without any gender considerations.</p>	<p>R2. Yes, our tr treats the entire class equally.</p>	<p>R2. It is a core subject and the tr makes sure he treats everyone equally. R4. English language is not meant for a particular gender. We are all treated equally. R5. Everybody is made to talk freely. R6. English is meant for everyone, the tr does not discriminate in class. R7. English is not meant for a particular gender. Our tr does not discriminate.</p>
<p>Equal participation</p>	<p>R3. Tr always asks questions evenly in class. R4. English language is a core subject, so teachers do not discriminate based on gender. R5. Our tr treat us equally all the time.</p>	<p>R1. Our tr treats us equally regardless of one's gender. R4. No. because we all cooperate with our tr during lessons in the class. R5. No. we are all treated the same in class during lessons.</p>	<p>R3. We are all given equal opportunity to ask and answer questions in class.</p>

	R7. English language is a core subject and everybody participate equally.	R6. The tr does not discriminate when it comes to language lessons. R7. All students take active part in English language lessons.	
segregation	R2. He let us join groups to learn some topics in class	R3. Yes, tr thinks boys are more intelligent than the girls in the class.	R1. Because we are usually made to forms groups to learn new topics in class.



APPENDIX B

Research Question 2:

What is the role of English Language learning in fostering creativity, critical thinking and autonomy among students?

Q1. What are your thoughts on English language lessons? What do you enjoy or find challenging about them?			
Themes	Similar response		
Improves communication skills	R1. It improves my comm. Skills R2. Yes. It helps me to communicate	R2. , yes: it helps me to express myself fluently in and outside the classroom. Yes, it helps me learn the rules of the language better and speak fluently. R4. Yes, the English language is simple and enables us to express ourselves. R6. Yes, it helps me to learn new vocabulary. R7. Because English helps us communicate with many people.	R1. It helps us to communicate with strangers who may not understand our local language. R2. It improves our fluency and helps us to communicate around the world. R3. It helps us to speak, and pronounce words correctly. R4. The English language helps us to communicate everywhere we go. R5. Learning the English language makes us speak good English and write good essays. R6. Because it helps us to be fluent and speak good English. R7. It helps us to communicate with people around the world.
Negative learning environment	R4. The tr. Kills the spirit of the students during lessons. R5. I wouldn't say I like the way our tr teaches the subject.	R1. Because our tr is lazy. She doesn't teach well, she doesn't like writing on the board, and also, she likes insulting.	
Lack of support	R7. Our English tr is boring since he does not use games, fun, and jokes during lessons.		

Patience and dedication	R3. Yes. Tr takes time to teach very well, making it understandable		
Different learning approaches. (perception and learning)		R5. Yes, because English is a reading subject and does not involve calculations.	
Develops critical thinking skills	R6. It helps us to make meaningful thoughts.		
How much opportunity do you have to collaborate or interact with your peers during English language lessons? Is this helpful for your learning?			
Theme	H1:	H2	H3
Team work and communication	R1. Through assignments, group work and exercises. R2. By doing group work in class R3. We usually do group discussion R7. During group discussions		
Shared learning experience		R3. Group works are usually given to all students in the class to ensure we all participate. R4. Yes, during group work we are usually asked by our tr to discuss the questions given.	R1. I consider it a way of sharing ideas and we usually do it during group work. R2. During group work and presentations. R4. During presentations and group work. R6. During group work. R7. It helps us to gain more experience in English language
Restrictive learning environment	R4. Most at times when a teacher sees you interacting during lessons, he says it's a distraction to others	R1: Our tr always think that when we discuss in class among ourselves it will lead to noisemaking in the class.	

	R5. Sometimes our tr thinks it would distract the class.		
Team work and communication	R6. Yes, but many of my colleagues do not bring any meaningful conversation to class.	R2. Yes. Whenever a question is asked, I discuss it with my friends to come out with the answer. R5. Yes, when we interact with ourselves it helps bring new ideas from our friends. R6. We are made to interact with each other when it comes to group work and class discussion. R7. When you don't understand what the tr teaches in class, you can ask a colleague.	R3. When it comes to literature, we interact with our colleagues during drama lessons. R5. We always interact with each other during English lessons because it involves speaking, listening, reading and writing.
Do you think the teaching of English language ever unintentionally perpetuates gender stereotypes or inequalities? Why or why not?			
themes	3c9	3h3	3v1
Gender inclusivity	R1. Tr makes sure both boys and girls are allowed to express themselves in class. R6. Sometimes the tr put us in mixed ability groupings without any gender considerations.	R2. Yes, our tr treats the entire class equally.	R2. It is a core subject and the tr makes sure he treats everyone equally. R4. English language is not meant for a particular gender. We are all treated equally. R5. Everybody is made to talk freely. R6. English is meant for everyone, the tr does not discriminate in class. R7. English is not meant for a particular gender. Our tr does not discriminate.
Equal participation	R3. Tr always asks questions evenly in class. R4. English language is a core subject, so teachers do not	R1. Our tr treats us equally regardless of one's gender. R4. No. because we all cooperate with our tr during lessons in the class.	R3. We are all given equal opportunity to ask and answer questions in class.

	<p>discriminate based on gender. R5. Our tr treat us equally all the time. R7. English language is a core subject and everybody participate equally.</p>	<p>R5. No. we are all treated the same in class during lessons. R6. The tr does not discriminate when it comes to language lessons. R7. All students take active part in English language lessons.</p>	
segregation	<p>R2. He let us join groups to learn some topics in class</p>	<p>R3. Yes, tr thinks boys are more intelligent than the girls in the class.</p>	<p>R1. Because we are usually made to forms groups to learn new topics in class.</p>



APPENDIX C

Research Question 3 and Themes

How does English language learning expand ESL learners' access to knowledge and information?

Do you think the teaching of English language ever unintentionally perpetuates gender stereotypes or inequalities? Why or why not?			
themes	3c9	3h3	3v1
Gender inclusivity	<p>R1. Tr makes sure both boys and girls are allowed to express themselves in class.</p> <p>R6. Sometimes the tr put us in mixed ability groupings without any gender considerations.</p>	<p>R2. Yes, our tr treats the entire class equally.</p>	<p>R2. It is a core subject and the tr makes sure he treats everyone equally.</p> <p>R4. English language is not meant for a particular gender. We are all treated equally.</p> <p>R5. Everybody is made to talk freely.</p> <p>R6. English is meant for everyone, the tr does not discriminate in class.</p> <p>R7. English is not meant for a particular gender. Our tr does not discriminate.</p>
Equal participation	<p>R3. Tr always asks questions evenly in class.</p> <p>R4. English language is a core subject, so teachers do not discriminate based on gender.</p> <p>R5. Our tr treat us equally all the time.</p> <p>R7. English language is a core subject and</p>	<p>R1. Our tr treats us equally regardless of one's gender.</p> <p>R4. No. because we all cooperate with our tr during lessons in the class.</p> <p>R5. No. we are all treated the same in class during lessons.</p> <p>R6. The tr does not discriminate when it comes to language</p>	<p>R3. We are all given equal opportunity to ask and answer questions in class.</p>

	everybody participate equally.	lessons. R7. All students take active part in English language lessons.	
segregation	R2. He let us join groups to learn some topics in class	R3. Yes, tr thinks boys are more intelligent than the girls in the class.	R1. Because we are usually made to forms groups to learn new topics in class.
Do you feel like your teachers' teaching methods cater to your individual learning style? What approaches work best for you?			
Autonomy and agency	R1. Tr allows me to express what I know	R4. No. sometimes what we read is not what is usually taught in class. The tr only guide us to be able to learn on our own.	R4. The tr always help us do our exercises and get the understanding of new topics.
Confidence and self expression		R2. Yes, the tr teaching style helps me to understand whatever I read in class.	R5. It reflects our style of learning especially when it come to the teaching of writing. R6. Yes, everybody has the chance to ask questions during language lessons.
Student-centred approach		R1. Yes. We learn and do whatever the tr ask us to do in class.	
Effective teaching methods	R7. Sometimes, the tr takes his time explain the topic well to our understanding.	R6. The tr usually use some keywords to help us understand the topic. R7. When the class gets boring tr makes jokes to get students who sleep wake up.	R1. The tr sometimes makes jokes when the class is boring. R2. He does not talk all the time but when the class is boring, he makes jokes. R2. The tr usually takes his time to

			<p>explain certain keywords to help us understand the topic.</p> <p>R3. Because he uses the learner's centered method and teaches to our level of understanding.</p> <p>R7. Some key words are always explained to enable us understand the topic well.</p>
Student frustration and disengagement	<p>R4. My English madam will shout at you so hard when you make a least mistake during lessons.</p> <p>R5. Sometimes the tr is too boring.</p> <p>R6. The teachers understanding is far ahead of us. Sometimes we don't understand his teaching style.</p>	<p>R3. We sometimes don't pass our test because the tr don't teach us to understand.</p> <p>R5. No. because the tr teaches without asking us questions and also teaches fast which makes understanding difficult.</p>	<p>R3. Sometimes the tr is too fast making it difficult for us to understand.</p>
<p>How do you think English language teachers distribute opportunities for participation and questioning in class? Do you feel like both genders have equal chance to contribute?</p>			
Equitable distribution of attention	<p>R1. Tr spreads question during English language lessons.</p> <p>R3. He allows both boys and girls to ask questions so that the girls will not feel left out.</p> <p>R4. They do the distribution of questions equally.</p> <p>R5. The tr ask questions evenly in the class.</p>	<p>R4. Yes, questions, contributions and discussions are done by all students and the tr.</p> <p>R6. Questions are general irrespective of your gender.</p>	<p>R2. The tr does not ask a particular gender before asking the question. He gives equal opportunity for us to answer questions asked.</p> <p>R3. Everybody has to chance to either ask or answer questions in class.</p> <p>R5. The tr treats everyone equally during English</p>

			<p>lessons.</p> <p>R6. Yes, questions are always evenly asked during lessons.</p> <p>R7. Everybody takes part in the lesson, so questions are distributed evenly during English lessons.</p>
Encouraging active participation	<p>R2. We are all been asked to participate equally in the lessons.</p> <p>R6. The tr sometimes makes jokes and fun to keep the class effective.</p> <p>R7. Every gender is always active during English lessons.</p>	<p>R1. Yes, questions are always evenly distributed in class by our tr.</p> <p>R3. Yes, asking and answering questions are done by both males and females in the class.</p> <p>R5. No, because whenever the tr ask questions, she expects us all to give a meaningful answer.</p> <p>R7. The tr ask more questions to make sure we get the understanding of the lesson.</p>	<p>R4. Our tr always ask the question and anybody can answer provided you know the answer.</p>
Dominance by few students		<p>R2. No, sometimes the tr only ask the boys some questions ignoring the girls.</p>	<p>R1. No, the boys are usually given more chance to answer questions than the girls.</p>
What steps do you take when you are struggling with a particular English language topic? Have you ever sought help or assistance?			
Student-teacher collaboration	<p>R1. I go out with teacher to ask for further explanation and research at library.</p> <p>R6. Sometimes I contact the teacher privately for more</p>	<p>R2. I do ask the tr to explain the concept further so I get the understanding of the topic.</p> <p>R5. As for me I tell the teacher how I feel about the topic</p>	<p>R2. I asked the tr questions to explain the topic further to my understanding.</p> <p>R3. I usually ask the tr to go over the topic for us to</p>

	explanation.	and he can do something about it to help me understand it.	get the understanding. R4. We ask questions to make sure we get understanding. R7. I sometimes contact my tr for further explanation outside the classroom.
Proactive learning	R3. If I am not satisfied with an answer, I ask to get further explanation. R7. We ask more questions on the topic.	R1. I normally ask my colleagues to explain that topic further to my understanding.	R1. I always ask my colleagues for further explanation. R5. I will visit the library to check it up in a book to understand that topic. R6. I ask more questions about that particular topic.
Self-directed learning	R2. I ask questions about the topic. R4. I will sit and do self-learning because I feel it's easier to study it alone.	R3. I have to go over the material again to get the understanding. R4. I personally tackle the topic myself to get the understanding. R6. I sometimes use the internet especially google to learn more on the topic. R7. I go to those classes that are done treating such topics for them to teach me.	
Frustration and confusion	R5. We do grumble among ourselves.		

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Discussion protocol

A. Demographic information

- a) School Name:
- b) Form of Student:
- c) Date:
- d) Sex.....

Q1. What are your thoughts on English language lessons? What do you enjoy or find challenging about them?

Q2. How much opportunity do you have to collaborate or interact with your peers during English language lessons? Is this helpful for your learning?

Q3. Do you think the teaching of English language ever unintentionally perpetuates gender stereotypes or inequalities? Why or why not?

Q4. Do you believe the teaching methods in your English Language class encourage critical thinking? Why or why not? Can you give examples?

Q5. How comfortable do you feel sharing your thoughts and opinions during class discussion? Do you feel like your voice is heard?

Q6. What does your English Language teacher do when your response to a question is wrong? Are you given another opportunity to try again?

Q7. Do you think the teaching of English language ever unintentionally perpetuates gender stereotypes or inequalities? Why or why not?

Q8. Do you feel like your teachers' teaching methods cater to your individual learning style? What approaches work best for you?

How do you think English language teachers distribute opportunities for participation and questioning in class? Do you feel like both genders have equal chance to contribute?

Q9. What steps do you take when you are struggling with a particular English language topic? Have you ever sought help or assistance?