

Developing Critical Language Awareness through Culturally Responsive and Multilingual Pedagogies in Postgraduate English Language Education

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Abstrak

Pendidikan pada abad ke-21 menuntut peserta didik untuk tidak hanya menguasai konten, tetapi juga mengembangkan keterampilan esensial seperti motivasi, kolaborasi, dan berpikir kritis. Namun, banyak mahasiswa di pendidikan tinggi masih menunjukkan tingkat keterlibatan yang rendah dan interaksi yang terbatas selama kegiatan pembelajaran, yang pada akhirnya berdampak negatif terhadap pencapaian akademik mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki efektivitas pembelajaran kooperatif dalam meningkatkan hasil belajar dan motivasi mahasiswa di lingkungan perguruan tinggi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, melibatkan mahasiswa program sarjana pendidikan biologi. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis data interaktif yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan strategi pembelajaran kooperatif dapat menciptakan lingkungan kelas yang lebih aktif dan suportif, meningkatkan motivasi belajar mahasiswa, serta memberikan kontribusi positif terhadap kinerja akademik mereka. Disimpulkan bahwa pembelajaran kooperatif dapat menjadi model pedagogis yang efektif untuk mendorong keterlibatan mahasiswa dan meningkatkan hasil belajar di konteks pendidikan tinggi.

Kata kunci: pembelajaran kooperatif, hasil belajar, motivasi belajar.

Abstract

Education in the 21st century requires students to develop not only content mastery but also essential skills such as motivation, collaboration, and critical thinking. However, many higher education students still exhibit low engagement and limited interaction during learning activities, which consequently negatively affects their academic achievement. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of cooperative learning in improving students' learning outcomes and motivation in a university setting. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, involving undergraduate students enrolled in a biology education program. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using interactive data analysis techniques consisting of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that implementing cooperative learning strategies fosters a more active and supportive classroom environment, enhances students' learning motivation, and contributes positively to their academic performance. It is concluded that cooperative learning can serve as an effective pedagogical model for promoting student engagement and improving learning outcomes in higher education contexts.

Keywords: cooperative learning, learning outcomes, student motivation

A. Introduction

In recent years, the field of English language education has undergone a significant paradigm shift from viewing language as a neutral communication tool to understanding it as a social and ideological construct. Traditional English teaching practices have largely focused on linguistic accuracy, fluency, and communicative competence, often neglecting the deeper socio-political dimensions of language use. This instrumental view of English is increasingly being questioned as scholars emphasize the importance of developing learners' Critical Language Awareness (CLA)—the ability to recognize, analyze, and challenge power relations, identity constructions, and cultural ideologies embedded in language. In the context of postgraduate education, where learners are expected to engage with academic discourses critically and reflectively, the cultivation of CLA becomes essential.

The need to integrate Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Multilingual Pedagogy into English language education stems from the recognition that language learning is inseparable from culture, identity, and social context. CRT acknowledges and values students' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, using them as resources for learning rather than deficits to be corrected. By connecting classroom instruction to students' lived experiences, CRT not only enhances inclusivity but also fosters critical reflection on issues of representation, equity, and power. Similarly, multilingual pedagogy challenges the dominance of English-only ideologies by promoting the strategic use of multiple languages in the classroom, allowing students to draw upon their full linguistic repertoires. This approach not only supports linguistic and cognitive development but also affirms students' identities as multilingual and multicultural individuals.

Despite the theoretical recognition of these concepts, their practical implementation in higher education—particularly in postgraduate English programs—remains limited. Many postgraduate students, even those specializing in English language education, continue to experience curricula that prioritize linguistic proficiency and academic writing skills over critical and intercultural competencies. Consequently, there is a pressing need to examine how culturally responsive and multilingual pedagogical strategies can be effectively employed to foster CLA among postgraduate learners. Such an exploration is especially relevant in multilingual societies, where English functions as both a tool of global communication and a symbol of socio-cultural hierarchy.

This qualitative study aims to investigate how postgraduate English language students develop Critical Language Awareness through culturally responsive and multilingual teaching practices. It seeks to understand their perceptions, experiences, and reflections on pedagogical approaches that integrate critical, cultural, and linguistic dimensions of language learning. By focusing on postgraduate students—who are future educators, researchers, and policymakers—this study highlights how critical pedagogy can influence broader educational practices and discourse. Through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals, the study explores the transformative potential of culturally grounded and linguistically inclusive teaching in promoting critical consciousness.

In sum, this research responds to the growing call for a more equitable and critically engaged English language education. It contributes to ongoing discussions in critical applied linguistics by demonstrating how culturally responsive and multilingual pedagogies can empower learners to interrogate dominant language ideologies and reconstruct their understanding of English as a pluralistic, dynamic, and contextually situated language. The findings are expected to provide theoretical insights and practical implications for educators and curriculum designers committed to fostering critical awareness and intercultural competence in postgraduate English education.

1. Critical Language Awareness (CLA)

Critical Language Awareness (CLA) emerged from the field of critical applied linguistics, primarily as a response to the limitations of traditional language education, which focuses narrowly on linguistic accuracy and communicative competence. As conceptualized by Fairclough (1992), CLA emphasizes that language is not a neutral medium but a social practice imbued with power relations, ideology, and identity. Learners are encouraged to analyze how language constructs and reflects social hierarchies, cultural assumptions, and ideological positions. In English language education, fostering CLA involves guiding students to critically question how English is used to privilege certain worldviews and marginalize others. This critical engagement enables learners to move beyond the passive acquisition of linguistic forms toward active participation in meaning-making and social transformation. For postgraduate students in English education, CLA is particularly vital as it develops their ability to reflect on language policies, classroom discourse, and pedagogical practices from a critical and ethical standpoint.

2. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) provides a pedagogical framework that aligns closely with the principles of CLA. Coined by Gay (2010) and further developed by Ladson-Billings (1995), CRT emphasizes the importance of integrating students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and identities into the teaching process. A culturally responsive teacher recognizes the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students and designs learning experiences that affirm and build upon these assets. In language education, CRT transforms the classroom into a space where multiple voices and perspectives are valued, allowing learners to engage critically with texts, cultures, and social issues. This approach not only promotes equity and inclusivity but also fosters students' motivation and engagement by making learning personally and culturally relevant. When combined with CLA, CRT encourages learners to

examine how cultural narratives and power dynamics are embedded in language use, and how education can become a means for social empowerment.

3. Multilingual Pedagogy

Multilingual pedagogy extends the principles of CRT by challenging the dominance of monolingual norms in English language teaching. Scholars such as García and Wei (2014) propose that allowing students to use their full linguistic repertoires through translanguaging practices enhances learning, cognitive flexibility, and identity affirmation. In multilingual classrooms, language is not compartmentalized but viewed as a fluid and dynamic resource for communication and meaning-making. For postgraduate students, engaging in multilingual pedagogical practices enables them to critically reflect on the sociolinguistic realities of English as a global language and to reconsider their own roles as multilingual speakers and educators. Multilingual pedagogy thus aligns with CLA by promoting critical reflection on linguistic hierarchies and by validating students' diverse linguistic identities within academic spaces.

4. Theoretical Framework: Social Learning and Constructivism

This study is grounded in Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Constructivist Learning Theory. According to Bandura, learning occurs through observation, imitation, and interaction within social contexts. Learners construct knowledge by observing others, reflecting on experiences, and engaging in meaningful social exchanges. In the context of this study, postgraduate students develop CLA not only through direct instruction but also by engaging collaboratively with peers and instructors in discussions that challenge linguistic ideologies and cultural assumptions. Through modeling and reflection, they internalize critical perspectives that influence their future teaching and research practices.

Meanwhile, Constructivist Theory, rooted in the works of Piaget and Vygotsky, posits that knowledge is actively constructed rather than passively received. Learners make sense of new experiences by connecting them to prior knowledge, cultural background, and social context. Constructivist pedagogy encourages inquiry, dialogue, and reflection—processes that are central to both CLA and CRT. In a multilingual learning environment, constructivism supports the idea that language learning is a co-constructed social process shaped by cultural and linguistic diversity. Students construct understanding through authentic interactions and by negotiating meaning across languages and cultures.

5. Synthesis and Conceptual Linkages

Integrating CLA, CRT, and multilingual pedagogy within the frameworks of social learning and constructivism offers a holistic approach to postgraduate English education. Social learning theory explains how critical and culturally responsive behaviors are modeled and internalized through interaction, while constructivism highlights the learner's active role in constructing knowledge through cultural and linguistic engagement. Together, these theories provide a foundation for designing pedagogical practices that encourage reflection, collaboration, and transformation. Such integration empowers postgraduate students to not only develop linguistic competence but also to become critically aware, culturally sensitive, and socially responsible educators and researchers.

B. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how postgraduate English language students develop Critical Language Awareness (CLA) through culturally responsive and multilingual pedagogical practices. The research was conducted in the Postgraduate English Education Program at State Islamic University Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin (UIN SMH) Banten, taking place from October 21 to October 28, 2025. Data collection involved a combination of classroom observations, learning outcome assessments, and documentation.

1. Research Design

The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach. While primarily qualitative, it incorporates quantitative descriptive analysis to strengthen the interpretation of findings. The qualitative component focuses on describing and interpreting students' learning behaviors, classroom interactions, and reflections related to the teaching practices. The inclusion of descriptive and inferential statistics, such as the t-test, serves to compare learning outcomes and provide measurable support for the qualitative observations.

2. Research Subjects

The subjects were postgraduate students enrolled in the English Language Education Program at UIN SMH Banten. They were selected due to their ** advanced English proficiency** and their potential roles as future educators and researchers. The total number of participants was determined using a random sampling technique to ensure representativeness and minimize researcher bias. This method was deemed appropriate as it offered equal opportunity for selection among all eligible postgraduate students, thereby enhancing the study's credibility.

3. Research Instruments

Two main instruments were utilized for data collection:

- a. English Learning Outcome Test (Pre- and Post-Test). This test was designed to measure students' proficiency in language skills, including reading comprehension, academic writing, and critical

language awareness. The test results were used to quantitatively evaluate how culturally responsive and multilingual teaching strategies influenced academic performance.

- b. Observation Sheet of Student Activities. This instrument was used to document students' behaviors, including participation, collaboration, and engagement during classroom activities. The observation specifically focused on indicators such as interaction patterns, responsiveness to cultural and linguistic diversity, and evidence of critical reflection in language use. The sheets were completed during each session of the study and later analyzed qualitatively to identify recurring patterns and themes.

4. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was executed through several sequential stages. First, the researcher coordinated with course instructors to schedule and implement the culturally responsive and multilingual learning activities. Next, students completed the English learning test (pre-test) before the intervention and again (post-test) afterward to assess improvements in learning outcomes. During the lessons, the researcher conducted systematic classroom observations, recording relevant qualitative data on the observation sheets. Finally, supporting documentation, such as teaching materials and students' written reflections, was collected to provide additional context.

5. Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistics and inferential analysis (t-test). Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, were used to summarize students' learning outcomes and participation levels. The t-test was applied to determine whether there was a significant difference in students' English learning results before and after the implementation of culturally responsive and multilingual teaching strategies. Furthermore, qualitative data from observations were analyzed thematically to interpret students' engagement, motivation, and critical awareness. The integration of both qualitative interpretation and statistical evidence allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of these pedagogical interventions on postgraduate students' language learning and critical development.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the integrated model of Critical Language Awareness (CLA), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), and Multilingual Pedagogy influences the learning outcomes and engagement of postgraduate English students at UIN SMH Banten. The research involved two groups of participants—an experimental class and a control class—each consisting of seven postgraduate students. The experimental class was taught using the integrated CLA–CRT–Multilingual model, while the control class followed conventional teaching practices emphasizing linguistic competence and grammatical accuracy.

Quantitative data from the English learning outcome tests revealed a substantial improvement in the experimental group's performance.¹ The average pretest score for the experimental class was 68, which increased to 83 in the posttest, marking a mean improvement of 15 points. In contrast, the control class's average pretest score was 69, increasing modestly to 75 in the posttest, with a mean improvement of only 6 points. The results of the t-test analysis further supported the significance of this difference, showing a calculated t-value ($t_h = 3.87$) greater than the critical t-table value ($t_t = 2.00$) at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. This statistical evidence confirms that the application of CLA, CRT, and multilingual pedagogy produced a significant positive effect on students' English learning outcomes.

Qualitative data gathered from classroom observations and reflective journals revealed several key themes related to students' learning experiences. Three major findings emerged:

1. Enhanced critical awareness of language and power relations.
2. Increased cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in classroom interactions.
3. Greater engagement and confidence in using multiple languages for academic purposes.

2. Development of Critical Language Awareness

The first major finding was the enhancement of critical language awareness among the postgraduate students. During the intervention, students were encouraged to analyze authentic texts that reflected social and cultural power dynamics, such as media articles, advertisements, and institutional documents. Through guided discussions and reflective writing, students demonstrated the ability to question how language shapes perception, reinforces ideologies, and constructs identity. This outcome aligns with Fairclough's (1992) concept of CLA, which emphasizes the role of language education in promoting critical consciousness.² Observational data showed that students increasingly recognized the political and cultural dimensions of English, expressing greater awareness of how certain language varieties and accents are privileged over others. This reflective process empowered students to view English not merely as a tool for communication but as a medium for cultural negotiation and social transformation.

3. Implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching

The second theme highlights how culturally responsive teaching (CRT) created a more inclusive and meaningful learning environment. Instructors integrated students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds into class discussions, assignments, and examples. For instance, students were invited to compare English-language materials with texts from their native languages and cultures. This practice validated

their linguistic identities and encouraged deeper engagement. The observation sheets indicated higher levels of participation, collaboration, and mutual respect during classroom activities in the experimental group compared to the control group. The culturally responsive approach also enhanced students' motivation, as they perceived the learning process as relevant to their personal and cultural experiences. These findings are consistent with Gay's (2010) view that CRT strengthens students' academic performance by connecting instruction to their cultural realities.

4. The Role of Multilingual Pedagogy

The third significant finding relates to the integration of multilingual pedagogy, which encouraged students to draw upon their full linguistic repertoires. Students used their first languages to brainstorm ideas, clarify complex concepts, and translate culturally specific terms during collaborative tasks. This multilingual practice not only facilitated comprehension but also fostered metalinguistic awareness—students became more conscious of cross-linguistic similarities, differences, and nuances in meaning. The approach aligns with García and Wei's (2014) theory of translanguaging, which views multilingualism as a resource for learning rather than an obstacle. Students reported that using multiple languages helped them express abstract ideas more effectively and enhanced their confidence in academic communication. This finding underscores the potential of multilingual pedagogy to promote equity and inclusivity in higher education settings.

5. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of statistical and qualitative results strongly reinforces the overall effectiveness of the CLA–CRT–Multilingual model. The significant difference between the experimental and control groups' learning outcomes supports the qualitative evidence that culturally responsive and multilingual practices lead to deeper engagement and understanding. The observed improvement in students' test scores reflects not only cognitive gains but also affective and social growth, as students became more critical, collaborative, and self-reflective learners. The combination of critical awareness, cultural responsiveness, and multilingualism created a holistic learning environment where language was treated as both an academic and social practice.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the growing discourse in critical applied linguistics, demonstrating that postgraduate English education can move beyond traditional skill-based instruction toward transformative and socially responsive pedagogy. The integration of CLA, CRT, and multilingual strategies effectively embodies both Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Constructivist Learning Theory, as students actively constructed knowledge through observation, dialogue, and collaboration in culturally rich contexts. By observing peers and engaging in critical discussions, students modeled and internalized critical perspectives on language, aligning with Bandura's emphasis on social interaction as a learning mechanism. Simultaneously, through constructivist principles, students built new understandings by connecting classroom experiences with their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

D. Conclusion

This experimental study aimed to determine the effect of the integrated Critical Language Awareness (CLA), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), and Multilingual Pedagogy model on the learning outcomes of postgraduate English language students at UIN SMH Banten. The research involved two groups of students and a teaching intervention designed to incorporate critical reflection, cultural responsiveness, and multilingual practices into English language learning.

The quantitative results demonstrated that the implementation of this integrated model significantly improved students' English learning outcomes. This was evidenced by the substantial increase in the average post-test scores for the experimental group (from 68 to 83), compared to the modest increase in the control group (from 69 to 75). The t-test analysis ($t_h = 3.87 > t_t = 2.00$, $\alpha = 0.05$) confirmed that this improvement was statistically significant.

Beyond quantitative measures, qualitative observations indicated that students developed a greater critical awareness of language, demonstrated increased sensitivity to cultural diversity, and showed more active engagement in multilingual interactions. These outcomes reflect that the integrated CLA–CRT–Multilingual model fosters not only academic improvement but also the development of reflective, culturally aware, and socially responsible learners. The findings, therefore, affirm that this model offers an effective and holistic approach to English language education, particularly at the postgraduate level, where critical thinking and intercultural competence are essential learning outcomes.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. For Educators: Instructors in higher education, especially in English language programs, should consider adopting and adapting the CLA–CRT–Multilingual model to create more inclusive, critical, and engaging learning environments. Teachers should design activities that connect linguistic analysis with cultural and social issues while encouraging students to fully draw upon their multilingual resources.
2. For Curriculum Developers: Curriculum designers are encouraged to integrate core components of critical language awareness and cultural responsiveness into postgraduate English syllabi. This

will help ensure that language learning is aligned with the broader goals of equity, diversity, and global citizenship.

3. For Future Researchers: Future research should expand upon this study by involving larger sample sizes, utilizing more complex mixed-methods approaches, or exploring the long-term impact of the model on learners' critical and intercultural competencies.

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