
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Unsettling Words to Empowering Spaces: How Filipino Students' Narratives Shape Peaceful English Classrooms

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| ABSTRACT

This study explores how Filipino students' narratives shape supportive and peaceful English classrooms, focusing on the impact of negative classroom experiences, the perceived helpfulness of teacher feedback, and students' suggestions for creating a positive learning environment. The research aims to (1) examine how negative experiences, such as teacher feedback and peer interactions, affect students' confidence in using English; (2) understand the types of teacher feedback perceived as constructive or discouraging; and (3) identify strategies students suggest for fostering a supportive environment. Using a qualitative approach, the study collected data through written responses from eight students in the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (BAELS) program. The findings reveal that negative experiences, such as ridicule and strict teacher policies, significantly diminish students' confidence, often leading to anxiety and a reluctance to participate. Teacher feedback, especially when harsh or deficit-focused, exacerbates these issues, while positive and empathetic feedback enhances motivation and self-esteem. Students emphasized the need for encouragement over criticism, with suggestions including respectful correction methods and the importance of creating a psychologically safe classroom. Strategies for improving classroom dynamics, such as stronger anti-bullying policies, were also highlighted. These findings underscore the importance of creating inclusive, respectful learning environments where mistakes are embraced as part of the learning process. The study aligns with critical pedagogy and peace linguistics, advocating for the use of language as a tool for empowering students, promoting confidence, and cultivating a positive classroom atmosphere. By integrating these principles, teachers can support both the academic and emotional development of students, fostering an environment conducive to language learning and personal growth.

| KEYWORDS

Filipino students, Teacher feedback, Classroom environment, Language learning, Critical pedagogy, Peace linguistics

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Education is more than just the transmission of knowledge; it is a transformative process that cultivates critical consciousness and advances social justice. In English language education, frameworks like **critical pedagogy** and **peace linguistics** examine the power dynamics, language practices, and classroom interactions that shape learning experiences. Critical pedagogy empowers students through reflective learning, challenging social inequalities (Currell, 2020). Peace linguistics complements this by promoting peaceful communication, fostering mutual respect, and understanding through language education (Baisoraya Sampiano Parcon & Adriano, 2024). These approaches are particularly relevant in the Philippine context, where English functions as both a second language and a medium of instruction.

In the Philippines, Filipino students often encounter linguistic and social barriers in English classrooms. These include **language anxiety**, **socio-economic disparities**, and **culturally insensitive teaching practices**. Students' narratives frequently highlight experiences of marginalization due to limited English proficiency or receiving harsh feedback from teachers and peers (Reyes, Tongkoh, & Chavez, 2023). Such negative experiences can result in diminished confidence and hinder their ability to develop language skills. Conversely, supportive teacher-student relationships and constructive feedback enhance students' engagement and linguistic competence (Rabbani & Salwa Habib Husain, 2024). Failing to address these challenges risks perpetuating hostile learning environments that impede both academic growth and emotional well-being.

This study draws on **critical pedagogy** and **peace linguistics** as guiding frameworks to examine students' narratives in English classrooms. Critical pedagogy emphasizes creating a dialogic classroom where students' voices are valued and inequalities are challenged (Shor et al., 2017). Peace linguistics highlights the use of language to promote harmony, empathy, and peaceful communication (Baisoraya Sampiano Parcon & Adriano, 2024). Together, these frameworks emphasize the transformative power of education in reshaping classrooms into spaces that nurture confidence, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding. By exploring how negative and positive experiences shape students' learning, this study seeks to illuminate the interplay between power, language, and identity in English classrooms.

In the Philippines, English proficiency is often regarded as a marker of academic success and social mobility. However, the pressure to excel in English creates challenges for students, especially those from linguistically or socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Negative interactions—such as culturally insensitive teaching or punitive feedback—exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and exclusion. Moreover, traditional classroom practices that emphasize rote learning over dialogic engagement fail to empower students. Grounding this research in the cultural realities of Filipino classrooms allows for an exploration of how critical pedagogy and peace linguistics can be adapted to address these unique challenges.

This study aims to examine how Filipino students' narratives can shape supportive and peaceful English classrooms. Specifically, it seeks to:

- (1) explore how negative classroom experiences, including teacher feedback and peer interactions, affect students' confidence in using English in the classroom;*
- (2) understand the types of teacher feedback that students perceive as constructive or discouraging in the context of language learning; and*
- (3) identify strategies that students suggest for creating a supportive and peaceful environment conducive to learning English.*

To integrate critical pedagogy and peace linguistics, this study aspires to cultivate language education practices that prioritize empathy, respect, and social justice. The insights gained will inform the development of transformative pedagogical approaches aimed at creating empowering and inclusive English classrooms.

2. Literature review

The literature on Filipino students' narratives in English classrooms reveals a complex interplay between language use, cultural identity, and empowerment. These narratives highlight both challenges and opportunities in creating peaceful and inclusive educational environments. Research indicates that incorporating students' native languages alongside English in the classroom can foster a more inclusive and empowering atmosphere. Paez (2018) found that using Filipino in English language teaching (ELT) settings not only challenges traditional English-only policies but also creates a classroom environment that reflects familial and community values, thereby enhancing relevance and student engagement.

Despite the potential benefits, several factors hinder Filipino students from using English as a medium of conversation. Mancilla and Hisona (2019) identified issues such as lack of confidence, shyness, and anxiety, which contribute to students' reluctance to engage in English communication. Paez (2018) demonstrated that integrating Filipino in ELT empowers students by acknowledging their cultural identity and promoting shared values within the classroom. Quinto et al. (2021) explored how student engagement and academic mindsets influence L2 (second language) writing among Filipino ESL students, highlighting the role of psychological factors in language learning outcomes. Castro et al. (2023) examined Filipino students' perceptions of different English varieties, emphasizing the importance of exposure to various English forms in enhancing language competence and cultural awareness. The

Filipino concept of 'pakikisama,' which emphasizes social harmony and relational comfort, significantly influences classroom dynamics. Ocampo (2015) discussed how classroom communication can serve as a site of both empowerment and marginalization, depending on how it aligns with students' cultural expectations and experiences.

Collectively, these studies suggest that acknowledging and integrating students' cultural narratives and language preferences in English classrooms can transform unsettling experiences into empowering ones. Creating spaces that value students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds promotes peaceful and inclusive learning environments. While existing literature provides insights into the role of language and culture in Filipino English classrooms, further research is needed to explore how students' personal narratives can be systematically integrated into teaching practices to enhance empowerment and peacebuilding within educational settings. In conclusion, Filipino students' narratives play a crucial role in shaping English classrooms into spaces of empowerment. By recognizing and valuing these narratives, educators can foster environments that not only facilitate language learning but also promote peace and inclusivity.

3. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design. It aims to explore how negative classroom experiences, such as teacher feedback, affect students' confidence in using English in the classroom. It also seeks to understand which types of teacher feedback students perceive as constructive or discouraging, and identify strategies they suggest for creating a supportive learning environment. The study utilized a structured interview guide to collect data through written responses. This approach allows for in-depth exploration of students' personal experiences and perceptions, giving them the opportunity to reflect thoughtfully on their experiences in the classroom. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave consent for their written responses to be used for analysis. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured throughout the research process.

The study involved eight students from the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (BAELS) program. These participants were chosen to reflect a range of experiences in using English in the classroom, with a focus on their experiences with teacher feedback. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to explore three main research objectives:

1. **Impact of Negative Classroom Experiences:** Questions focused on how negative feedback and peer interactions affect students' confidence in using English.
2. **Types of Teacher Feedback:** Participants were asked to reflect on the types of feedback they find constructive versus discouraging, including how this feedback influences their motivation and participation in class.
3. **Strategies for a Supportive Environment:** The guide also included questions asking students to suggest strategies for fostering a more supportive, peaceful, and motivating classroom environment for learning English.

The structured interview guide allowed participants to respond in writing at their own pace, providing them with the opportunity to reflect deeply on their experiences. This method is particularly useful for capturing detailed and thoughtful responses, which is important for addressing the sensitive nature of the topics discussed (e.g., negative feedback, peer interactions). The written responses will be analyzed qualitatively, focusing on identifying recurring themes, patterns, and insights.

Given the small sample size of eight participants, the findings may not be fully generalizable to a larger population of students. However, the qualitative nature of the study provides rich, detailed insights into the experiences of the participants, which can inform further research and practical recommendations for classroom practices.

4. Results/Findings

This section presents the focus of the research, which aims to explore how negative classroom experiences, such as teacher feedback and peer interactions, influence students' confidence in using English in the classroom. Through in-depth interviews, the study gathers qualitative data to examine the personal experiences with negative comments, perceived types of feedback students perceive as constructive or discouraging and identify strategies they suggest for fostering a more supportive learning environment.

Personal Experiences with Negative Comments

The results of this study indicate that negative personal experiences, such as mockery and judgment, can significantly affect students' confidence in using English in the classroom. For instance, Informant 1 shared an experience from high school where they were ridiculed for mispronouncing the word "representative" as "rip-resentative." This incident illustrates how students can internalize mockery, leading to a diminished sense of self-worth and a fear of making mistakes. This aligns with Singh's (2015)

assertion that rigid adherence to "correct" language standards can inhibit the progress of ESL learners. The societal pressure to conform to a single, idealized version of English can overshadow the broader goal of language acquisition, which should prioritize communication and cultural expression. The emotional impact of such experiences can create a barrier to learning, as students may withdraw from participating due to the fear of judgment.

Teacher-student interactions further reinforce the effects of negative comments on students' confidence. Informant 8's narrative about their strict third-grade teacher reveals how an English-only policy in the classroom led to discouragement and fear of speaking. While the teacher's intention may have been to promote proficiency in English, the exclusion of vernacular languages created an environment where students felt silenced and anxious. This reflects a tension between linguistic diversity and monolingual ideologies in education. Critical pedagogy suggests that educational practices should empower students and recognize the value of their linguistic backgrounds (Freire, 1970). By enforcing rigid language policies, educators may unintentionally alienate students, particularly those from multilingual communities, further complicating their learning experience and undermining their confidence.

Additionally, self-consciousness about language skills, as described by Informant 3, can lead to anxiety and hinder active participation in the classroom. Early exposure to English may foster a sense of confidence initially, but as students compare themselves to peers or idealized native speakers, they may become more self-conscious. This self-awareness can lead to a reluctance to speak and participate, as seen in Informant 1's experience during a group presentation. This highlights the critical role of classroom environments in shaping students' language identities. As critical pedagogy and peace linguistics suggest, teachers should create spaces that validate diverse linguistic repertoires and foster inclusive dialogue. By reducing the focus on "correct" language use and encouraging open communication, educators can reduce students' anxiety, promote participation, and enhance their overall learning experience. These findings underscore the need for a balanced approach that addresses both the academic and emotional needs of language learners.

The Perceived Helpfulness or Harshness of Teacher Feedback

Student narratives often reveal the detrimental effects of harsh and discouraging teacher feedback on learners' confidence and motivation. Informant 1's experience of being told, "You know how to speak but you suck in writing," highlights a deficit-based approach to feedback, where emphasis is placed on students' weaknesses rather than their potential for growth. This aligns with Freire's (1970) critique of traditional education models that treat students as passive recipients of knowledge, stifling their agency and confidence. Similarly, Informant 3's account reveals a similar focus on outcomes, where the pressure to meet idealized standards of language proficiency can leave students feeling discouraged rather than empowered. Both examples underscore the need for a shift toward more constructive and empathetic feedback that fosters a supportive classroom environment, where students are encouraged to engage with the learning process rather than be solely judged on their final performance. Such feedback practices resonate with the principles of critical pedagogy, which advocate for an inclusive and collaborative learning environment where students are viewed as active participants in their educational journey (Uddin, 2019).

In contrast to harsh feedback, positive and constructive feedback plays a pivotal role in enhancing students' motivation and confidence in the classroom. Informant 7's reflection on receiving constructive feedback highlights how this type of input not only addresses areas for improvement but also encourages students to actively engage in their language development. This approach aligns with Freire's (1970) concept of dialogic education, where teachers and students engage in mutual reflection, fostering a dynamic of respect and growth. Similarly, Informant 8's experience of receiving encouraging feedback underscores the importance of creating a learning environment where students feel supported and empowered to overcome linguistic challenges. Such positive reinforcement not only helps students improve their language skills but also promotes a classroom culture rooted in mutual respect and inclusivity. From the perspective of peace linguistics, this approach promotes harmony and understanding, ensuring that students from diverse linguistic backgrounds feel valued and capable of contributing meaningfully to the learning process (Pulman et al., 2024). As these narratives illustrate, constructive feedback is integral to creating a classroom environment where students can thrive both academically and personally.

The emotional impact of feedback, particularly when delivered in a dismissive or mocking manner, can have long-lasting effects on students' confidence and willingness to participate in language learning. Informant 6's experience of receiving feedback in front of the class, coupled with mockery, highlights how such practices can lead to embarrassment and anxiety. This aligns with the tenets of critical pedagogy, which calls for educators to be mindful of power dynamics and the emotional consequences of their feedback (Freire, 1970). Furthermore, Informant 7's experience of being criticized for their "too Bisaya" accent underscores the importance of cultural and linguistic sensitivity in the classroom. Such comments reflect a bias against non-native accents,

reinforcing a hierarchy that marginalizes certain linguistic identities (Zotzmann, 2013). By adopting culturally sensitive and inclusive language practices, educators can mitigate these biases and foster a classroom environment where all students feel respected and valued. Incorporating principles from both critical pedagogy and peace linguistics ensures that feedback is not only constructive but also culturally affirming, promoting an inclusive atmosphere where students' diverse linguistic backgrounds are seen as strengths rather than barriers. Ultimately, these practices contribute to an equitable learning environment that supports both emotional well-being and academic success.

Suggestions for Improving the Classroom Environment.

In response to the need for fostering a supportive learning environment, students emphasized the importance of encouragement over criticism in the classroom. Informants 1 and 7 suggested that educators should view mistakes as an integral part of the learning process, rather than using them as a metric for judging intelligence. Informant 1 specifically pointed out the detrimental effects of stereotypes that equate fluency with intelligence, while Informant 7 advocated for embracing errors to facilitate growth without fear of judgment. These insights are rooted in critical pedagogy, which challenges traditional power dynamics in education by promoting dialogical interaction and empowering learners through mutual respect (Freire, 1970). The approach also aligns with peace linguistics, which emphasizes creating empathetic and non-judgmental spaces for communication (Crystal, 2003). By adopting an encouragement-based framework, teachers can help alleviate the anxiety that often accompanies language learning, creating a classroom environment where students feel confident enough to take risks and improve their skills.

Respectful feedback was another significant theme that emerged from the students' narratives. Informants 2, 3, 6, and 8 emphasized the need for non-humiliating correction methods. Informant 2 highlighted the importance of avoiding ridicule, such as laughing at mistakes, to ensure that students feel safe in their learning environment. Similarly, Informant 8 cautioned against prescriptivist attitudes that focus on rigid grammatical correctness, urging teachers to correct errors with empathy and understanding. These perspectives are consistent with both critical pedagogy and peace linguistics, which stress the importance of dignity, mutual respect, and nonviolent communication in educational settings. In this context, providing corrections in a respectful and constructive manner not only improves linguistic skills but also contributes to the emotional well-being of students, fostering an environment that encourages participation and engagement without fear of humiliation.

Furthermore, students underscored the need for stronger anti-bullying policies to protect their confidence and emotional security in the classroom. Informant 4 specifically pointed out that even "simple mockery" could undermine a student's willingness to learn and engage. This sentiment reflects the broader concern for creating a psychologically safe classroom, where students feel supported rather than ridiculed. Addressing bullying within the classroom environment is crucial for building an inclusive and empowering space, as emphasized by both critical pedagogy and peace linguistics. By strengthening anti-bullying measures, such as teacher training on managing peer interactions and encouraging restorative practices, educators can help ensure that every student feels valued. These actions not only contribute to a safer learning environment but also align with global educational goals of fostering inclusivity, empathy, and respect.

5. Conclusion

This study explores how Filipino students' narratives shape supportive and peaceful English classrooms by examining the impact of negative classroom experiences, the perceived helpfulness of teacher feedback, and students' suggestions for improving the learning environment. The results reveal that negative experiences, such as mockery or strict teacher policies, significantly affect students' confidence in using English. These incidents, including being ridiculed for language mistakes, often lead to emotional barriers, such as fear and anxiety, which hinder active participation. Additionally, the study highlights that harsh, deficit-focused feedback damages students' self-worth, while constructive and empathetic feedback fosters motivation and confidence, encouraging students to engage more deeply in language learning. The emotional consequences of dismissive feedback and culturally insensitive comments further emphasize the importance of creating inclusive, respectful classroom environments that affirm students' linguistic identities. The study also identifies key strategies for improving classroom dynamics, emphasizing the need for encouragement over criticism, respectful correction methods, and stronger anti-bullying policies. Students advocate for teachers to embrace mistakes as part of the learning process, fostering a non-judgmental space where students feel safe to take risks and improve. These findings align with critical pedagogy and peace linguistics, which stress the importance of mutual respect, empathy, and nonviolent communication in education. By integrating these principles, teachers can create an emotionally supportive environment that promotes both academic success and emotional well-being. Ultimately, the study concludes that language in educational dialogues plays a crucial role in empowering or disempowering students, underscoring the importance of using language as a tool for building confidence and a positive classroom atmosphere.

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