# Becoming an empowered EFL teacher: A critical self-reflection of professional development

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## Introduction

My intellectual journey has gone through several educational stages. I learned English as a foreign language in the Junior High School in 1994-1997, and then senior high school from 1997-2000. In that time span, in Indonesia the curriculum applied was 1994 curriculum which emphasized the *communicative approach* (Darjowijoyo, 2000). It is worth noting that the government did not prioritize a particular variety of English, but UK and US English were the most popular (Darjowijoyo, 2000; Lauder, 2008). Despite the curriculum mandating the communicative approach, in my own experience the emphasis of English during junior and senior high school was on reading and grammar. The national exam was mostly multiple choice questions on reading, grammar, and a short dialogue. Therefore, there was a mismatch between what the curriculum aimed at (fluency in speaking), and what the test scores measured (Lie, 2007).

Unlike the junior and the senior high schools which should follow the government's curriculum, the university level had the autonomy to decide its own subject specific course. The only compulsory courses were those related to Indonesia specifically, such as state ideology (Pancasila), the history of Indonesian culture, and Indonesian arts and society,

The followings are my intellectual trajectories from Undergraduate degree to PhD degrees:

## Undergraduate Degree

I did my undergraduate studies in 2000-2004 at state university in East Java, Indonesia. This is where I began to see linguistics, applied linguistics, literature, and other forms of university-taught knowledge as a closed system; knowledge was produced by privileged scholars in the West, and for their purposes.

During my four years of study before writing a thesis, I took both skill-based courses (such as courses on writing and speaking), and content-based courses, such as a range of Linguistics and Literature courses. Among my lecturers, there was one UK alumnus, two US alumni, eight alumni from Australian universities, and the rest graduated from local universities. The lecturer mostly used quite old resources as the

university did not have access to legitimate and updated professional resources such as books and journals.

In that regard, using Kachru's category of World Englishes, I was merely exposed to inner circle English (Kachru, 1986). No other varieties of English were introduced in the classroom. The only recognized and accepted varieties were American and British English. So even the issue of World Englishes never came across in the classroom so that it was absent from our attention. In that context, the hegemonic power of US and British English was prevalent. The knowledge I learned was rigid and I could only follow the product of knowledge imported from Western countries such as UK, US and Australia. For example, the novels discussed in the classroom were from UK or US such as *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe, 1970) *or The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1981). There was no novel written by an Asian writer introduced in the classroom. In the academic writing class, for example, the organizational structure always followed Anglo-Saxon styles.

In that phase, my learning was a typical of 'colonial celebration' (Pennycook, 2000, p. 116) as I, for example, thought that the standard pronunciation was only British and American. We students tried to emulate British or American accents when we spoke, instead developing the 'post-colonial accent' (Clemente & Higgins 2008 cited in Sayer, 2012, p. 174). This domination of inner circle English parallels Lauder's (2008) finding that UK and US English were the major varieties taught in the English classroom in Indonesia. This finding of inner circle dominance was similar in the work of Banegas (2014), where the language teacher education program in an Argentinian province perpetuated a monolithic culture and a 'a British political agenda' (p. 232), which is of course contextually inappropriate for Argentina.

It was during my undergraduate study that I actively joined an English organization for university students. In 2002/2003 I was elected Vice President of the organization and at the same year I was appointed the coordinator of linguistic studies at English Student Association at my department. During the period I had the chance to join three national debate competitions at three different universities. These debating experiences boosted my confidence (see Wahyudi, 2016b). Furthermore, I learned more critical thinking skills during my debate rehearsals and competitions, as we had to think particular issues from both pro and con sides within a particular time frame, as well as being responding to our opponents' cases.

Completing my undergraduate study, I wrote an application of Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) to analyze a rubric on teaching tips in the KangGURU Magazine for my thesis. I analyzed field, tenor and mode of the teaching and learning tips (Wahyudi, 2004). There were several reasons for doing this work. First of all I

wanted to analyze something which was current and familiar, so the tips about teaching and learning English in the magazine were based in daily life issues. The second reason was the SFL School was really dominant in my department, so I was one of the students aligning myself with that dominance. Thirdly, I liked Linguistics more than literary works, as Linguistics at the time dealt more with local issues.

**The start of my professional development journey**
I refer to professional development in this article as the consciousness of the strengths and weaknesses including the development of knowledge and beliefs of English language teaching and learning (Robert, 1998, cited in Munoz, 2007), more specifically in the complex interplay between teaching, research and publishing required of teachers (Baber, 2012 cited in Graham, 2015), PhD study, and ELT/Applied Linguistic conferences.

**English for Academic Preparation (EAP)**
From March – August 2008 I joined a six-month English for Academic Preparation (EAP) at An English Academic Training Institute (EATI, pseudonym) as part of the scholarship program. It was during this program that I was trained to pass the IELTS test and wrote an academic essay required for doing assignments at Australian Universities (see Wahyudi, 2016b). Additionally, I was taught a Cross-Cultural Understanding course. I was taught by two native speakers. In addition to learning on how to pass the IELTS exam, I learned essay writing, to write in a straightforward and concise manner following Anglo-Saxon style (see Wahyudi, 2016b). Coming from the Javanese culture where the culture socialized me to use a circular mode of thinking (see Kaplan, 1966), it was a hard struggle to adopt the style. The fact that the native speaker teachers were from inner circle countries, the knowledge they taught me reinforced the inner circle views of knowledge.

**From a bridging course in TEFL to Masters in TESOL**
During my time at a bridging course in TEFL, I struggled in three out of four courses. Making a lesson plan, teaching practices, teaching theories, and evaluating textbooks were among the things that I struggled with. This might be because my bachelor was in English language and literature where I did not have the chance to learn English language teaching related content. Secondly, my struggle might have been triggered by the fact that academic culture in Australian higher education was dissimilar to the one I encountered in Indonesia. Having one's own voice, critical reflexivity, practice based or field based activities, high reading loads were among the things that were not

emphasized in my past schooling. Therefore, I found them as new things to learn. For a course on practical skills for English teachers on which I gained a distinction, I still remember that I gained a good grade on my individual presentation discussing language learning strategies. The reason was I had learned this topic from another course. Another factor was that as an EFL learner, I had practiced my own language learning strategies especially on English language. The familiarity on the topic and my personal experience were the notable reasons I could succeed in the course. In the group work (myself and a South Korean friend), we had a chance to interview the students at our university especially on their use of the university computers along with their reasons. In this group work, we also got distinction (75-84). This second success might also be the fact the topic was general in which we did not need a specific knowledge to do the work. By the end of this TEFL course, I gained two credits (65-74) and two distinctions. This might mean that even though I made significant struggles during the semester, I could still survive with some degree of satisfying results.

At Masters level there were some courses in which I got average results, and other courses in which I received the highest possible grade. The courses on literacy, especially when I did an assignment on bilingualism compared to monolingualism, I gained only approximately 65. I was not engaged in the literature because bilingualism and monolingualism were not the issues I was familiar with as in Indonesian contexts. I was writing about something with which I was unfamiliar.

An example of a course in which I performed at my best was a unit on Discourse Analysis. I liked this course very much because the courses have more social and cultural dimensions, which as I have noted is typical of the courses that suit me. In doing the assignments in both courses, I drew on my personal experience. I did not only join the courses but became part of the course, I was deeply engaged. My engagement was shown in my assignments. In the discourse analysis course, I analysed language and identity in match-making discourse, something I was one of the actors in. In the analysis of the recorded text of match-making, I could make insightful, personalized arguments. This ability to make a personalized connection with my course work led to my involvement in the subject (https://soundout.org/personalized-learning-and-meaningful-student-involvement/). In the end of the semester, I gained High Distinction (85-100) for this course. My match-making discourse analysis was later published as Wahyudi (2012)

An important point to highlight is that the familiarities of context and emotional engagement with the courses were among the influential factors for the successful completion of the courses I was enrolled in. Overall, during my bridging course and M. Ed TESOL study, I began to see that applied linguistic and ELT knowledge from

broader perspectives was more intuitive to me when the courses could be situated in day-to-day social contexts, such as courses on discourse analysis. Another reason was that I had access to professional resources, such as updated books and journals, and also the fact that I was taught by lecturers who had good records of international publication. Moreover, the lecturers in these courses gave me wide readings so that I had to read more.

At this stage, I was socialized into how Western academic settings – specifically Australian in my case – were conducted, and I was the able to adapt and became part of the academic system to some extent. But overall, I still saw that the 'standard' English to follow was the inner circle English (Kachru, 1986), particularly UK and US, as I was not taught other varieties of Englishes, and I did not read articles on World Englishes or join a conference on this issue which might have offered a critical perspective on inner circle English. At the time,  I did not even know that there were other legitimate varieties of English.

Accepted as a permanent lecturer at the end of 2010, after the completion of Masters study, my professionalism developed as I had more chances to join national and international conferences such as the 2012 TEFLIN (The Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia) conference, the University of Malaya Discourse and Society Conference (2012), and the Universitas Negeri Sebelas Maret (UNS) International TEFL conference (2013). At these conferences I presented papers on critical thinking, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and the teaching of journal writing (all papers are available in my [www.academia.edu](www.academia.edu) account). In the conferences, I discussed my topics of interest, expanded network, and gained insights both from the keynote talks and other parallel speakers. It was in TEFLIN 2012 that, as the keynote speaker, Professor Kumaravadivelu discussed a critical stance toward ELT Method and discussed language teacher education that promoted local sensitivity and encouraged the teachers to theorize their own practices (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). This enhanced the impression of post-method pedagogy I had garnered from his book (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

**PhD study and my intellectual project**
I started my PhD under a New Zealand ASEAN Scholarship (2013-2017) at Victoria University of Wellington in July 2013 and was officially enrolled in August. Studying at Victoria, I have been exposed to reading materials of particular relevance to my PhD research. I also joined cohort group discussion on post-structural and post-colonial scholarships. My first supervisor, whose expertise on post-structural/post-colonial domain was one of the key experts in the group, and Foucault was one of the vital

figures to be discussed. Once, my supervisor invited Professor Tony Schirato to talk about the Foucauldian ideas. His talk was amazing, and he was able to convey Foucauldian ideas in a simple way, and relating the ideas to the very daily life issue such as power relations in supervisor/supervisee relationship. It impressed me and I began to read the book that he and his colleagues wrote entitled *Understanding Foucault* (Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000). The book summarized the key ideas of Foucault. I began to be more attracted by Foucauldian thought. Through more frequent meetings with my supervisors, particularly with my first supervisor whose expertise is in Foucauldian theory (my second supervisor's expertise is in English Language and Literature Teaching), I began to think that some of the Foucauldian ideas were applicable to my PhD research.

My first supervisor provided support for this. In the process of consultation in the first semester, I considered using mixed methods in my research. Both of my supervisors then offered me to have a third supervisor if I really wanted to employ mixed methods, as both of my supervisors are from purely qualitative strands. As time passed, I was in doubt that I would use mixed methods because I am not good at quantifying things. Furthermore, if I wanted to take a mixed method approach, then I need to have more participants. I cancelled that intention and decided to use a purely qualitative approach, primarily post-structural analysis under a Foucauldian framework. This suited me because I had experiences using discourse analysis, and also had taught a Discourse Analysis course before I commenced my PhD.

However, as I also wanted to explore local contexts, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) was not enough. It was my first supervisor who introduced me to *Southern Theory* (Connell, 2007) and *Asia as Method* (Chen, 2010), and these books offered space for knowledge outside the dominant European and North American discourses, space within which my own local and institutional context could be accommodated. My first supervisor also mentioned the work of Syed Husein Al-Attas and Syed Farid Al-Attas as important works to read. As I read the works of these scholars, I was particularly drawn to an article about 'intellectual imperialism' (Al-Attas, 2000, p. 23), and to *Alternative discourses in Asian Social Science: Responses to Euro-centrism* (Al-Attas, 2006).

In addition, I was also interested to discuss post-method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a) as this pedagogy accommodates local sociocultural context, encourages teachers to teach based on their own theories, while at the same time critiquing the assumption of universal applicability of the existing ELT method imported from the West. More importantly, the author listed their inspirations, citing the work of post-structural, post-colonial, and post-modern thinkers such as Michel

Foucault, Edward Said, and Homi K. Bhabha (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a). This pedagogy aligned with my interest! I recognized this post-method pedagogy from my Masters study, and especially from my 2010-2012 teaching period.

All these diverse professional references address the complexity of research I am interested to do. These professional literatures do not only help me do my PhD research, but they also help me interrogate the dominant discourses in English Language Teaching and more importantly, they open the space for my own socio-cultural identities and voices (Wahyudi, 2016b). These professional literatures really help me see knowledge in broader perspectives, including social and political aspects. In that regard, I began to see that applied linguistic knowledge, including ELT, is a contested space. I am inspired by Foucault's notion that 'truth' as a historical category and knowledge is shaped by political factors (O'Farell, 2005), as I mentioned briefly in my former paper (Wahyudi, 2015b). Seeing applied linguistic knowledge in this regard, I see that knowledge is contested depending on from what paradigm we see that knowledge.

Furthermore, my enrolment in *Advanced Qualitative Course* during my first year of PhD study has made me clearer about the nature of the truth claims made in knowledge, especially those stemming from qualitative and quantitative paradigms. When one of the lecturers in the course (the course was handled by 5 different lecturers) discussed about the nature of ontology, epistemology of knowledge, by discussing Lather (2006) the paradigms in research, I was even better informed as to why ontology is essential to making truth claims and undertaking epistemology, and in addressing axiology (ethics).  Post-structural thinkers, my knowledge on advanced qualitative research, my engagement in cohort group discussion, my discussions with my supervisors, and also readings by and on other critical scholars have shaped and inspired the way I see knowledge, and how I position myself and my identities among the contested terrain of knowledge. All the above factors contribute to my publications, among which are to voice out my engagement with 'critical knowledge dialogue and production' (Wahyudi, 2014c, p. 183). My article on democratic online course (Wahyudi, 2014a) is one example of how I, inspired by post-structural thinkers, problematized the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on critical thinking conducted by Edinburgh University. My professional development grew through international publications discussing internet use under the New Literacy Studies proposed by Pahl & Rowsell (2012) (see Wahyudi, 2015b) and from my exposure with the provoking thoughts of critical thinkers such as Foucault and other ELT scholars (Wahyudi, 2015b, p. 36). In addition to the above critical thinkers, the following key ELT scholars' works have

motivated me a lot on 'bringing' the critical works into ELT and concurrently have successfully provoked and ignited my intellectual inquiries, voice and identities.

Here are to name few; problematization of native speakers (Canagarajah, 1999), 'globalization, method and practice in periphery classrooms' (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 134), 'reconstructing local knowledge' (Canagarajah, 2005, p. 3), 'from colonial celebration to post-colonial performativity' (Pennycook, 2000, pp. 107-116), and the need to reorient 'TESOL to Teaching English as Glocalized Communication (TEGCOM)' (Lin, Wang, Akamatsu & Riazi, 2002, p. 295).

Canagarajah (1999) discussed the common phenomena of native speaker fallacy in the ELT industry, where the native speakers of English regardless of their pedagogical skills and degree are favored over non-native speaker teachers who have the same skills. For him, this is a fallacy that needs to be resisted. Canagarajah's perspective has made me aware that native speakers and non-native speakers of English should be equally valued ,and that pedagogical skill is more important.

In a similar case, Canagarajah (2002) explained that ELT method is exported from the Centre to the periphery through British and American representatives overseas, and through networks of publication such as Oxford and Cambridge. Keynote speaker roles, which are dominantly taken by native speakers of English to Asian contexts, he argues, are representative of these political and economic benefits of the Centers. This explanation made me aware that ELT methodology should not only be seen as knowledge per se, but also as part of a material and political agenda. The advocacy to 'reconstruct local knowledge' (Canagarajah, 2005, p. 3) accordingly draws inspiration from Hall's (1997) claim that the word 'global' represents 'the dominant particular' (p. 67) and Appadurai's (1996) assertion that 'local practice' is historically constructed (p. 17). This has made me aware that all global or local knowledge is the same (Canagarajah, 2005), but is made different by the truth claim made. Knowledge made in Europe or US is basically also local (Canagarajah, 2005). However, this particular knowledge is published through reputable publishers and thus it is politically claimed as global (Canagarajah, 2005). From this, I found more supporting arguments that knowledge, as Foucault said, is historically and politically constructed (O'Farrell, 2005).

Pennycook (2000, pp. 107-116) outlines different forms of English learning in relation to ideology, which also provides meaningful insights. He explains that learning English can mean, at one end, 'colonial celebration' (p. 108) where the English learners want to emulate native speakers of English and follow the standard of inner circle English. At the other end, learning English can function as 'post-colonial performativity' (p. 116), where the learners no longer emulate inner circle English but as

a tool to express the learners' own identities, a position which, in my opinion, should be adopted.

Another very powerful voice that inspires me is the call for reorientation of 'TESOL paradigm to TEGCOM' (Lin, Wang, Akamatsu & Riazi, 2002, p. 295), where teaching English is no longer to "Other" languages as it still implies "Othering" (Shin, 2006) but teaching English should be seen more as dialogue as two way communication between the inner circle English and learners' own language, culture, identities, and needs (Lin, Wang, Akamatsu & Riazi, 2002). Reading this article made me think that teaching English means that there should be meaningful dialogues between English and my own language, culture, and identities.

**Publications during my PhD study**

During my PhD study, I also make the most of it to professionally grow, especially through publications. In the publication process I benefited from the existing references for publishing in international publishing outlets such as Casanave & Vandrick (2003) and the strategy to choose 'the right international journal in TESOL and Applied Linguistics' (Renandya, 2014, p. 1). Equally important is identifying the non-discursive requirement in publishing (Canagarajah, 2006), to be aware of the subtle and implicit political dimension operating behind the publication. In the edited book Casanave & Vandrick 2003 there are interesting chapters written by different scholars. In this book, Canagarajah (2003) discusses his strategy and experience in publishing from Sri Lanka, where he lacked material resources. Learning the publishing strategy from his senior colleague, Canagarajah (2003) suggested a strategy in which writers are advised to have less literature review and more 'data and interpretation' (p. 238). Similarly, Kubota (2003) shared her dilemmatic position when publishing particularly when she had to negotiate between her own voice and the reviewers' voices. She only suggests accommodating the reviewers' feedback as long as it did not serve as a major change to her own voice.

An article by Renandya (2014) is likewise important to a novice writer in the TESOL and Applied Linguistics areas, for example his suggestion of examining journals which emphasize theoretical and research papers (e.g., *TESOL Quarterly*) and pedagogically oriented journals (e.g., *ELT Journal*). He further suggests for novice writers to look for new legitimate journals as they have 'a higher acceptance rate' (Renandya, 2014, p. 12), something I also mentioned in my former paper (Wahyudi, 2015b). These references led me to think that publishing involves complex aspects including 'political' ones as discussed by Canagarajah (2006) and also practical strategies as proposed by Renandya (2014); see also my publication as the combination

of global and local practice (Wahyudi, 2015b). All the references above help me to decide the target appropriate journals, to accept or negotiate or rebut the reviewers' feedback.

As a novice researcher and writer myself, I am more pragmatic in the sense that I both wrote *critical papers*, for example discussing my criticism of the Massive Open Online courses (Wahyudi, 2014a), intercultural competences: multi-dynamic, interdisciplinary, inter-subjective and critical approaches (Wahyudi, 2016b), and *normative papers*, where I wrote about textbook evaluation in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course used in my university (Wahyudi, 2014b). On other occasions, I acted as the literacy broker for my students' publications where I served as the co-author (Wahyudi, 2016a). In the future, I might focus on some particular interests, such as post-structural/post-colonial studies, English in Academic Setting, Discourse Analysis and other related domains.

In addition to writing articles, I have also written book reviews for the important books I use in my PhD research. Two book reviews I have written are *Asia as Method* (Wahyudi, 2014c) and *Language Teacher Education for a global society* (Wahyudi, 2015b). I did this to store the critical concepts in my memory, wrote the summary of the book so I just need to revisit the book reviews if I need to see the main contents again. In the book reviews, I also made academic dialogues as I analyzed the reviewed books by using other academic references. I also put my opinion in the reviews so that I have voice there. My further intention to write the book reviews is to add the record of my publication.

**Participation in international conferences during PhD study**
In addition to my publications, my professional development has been enhanced by joining international conferences. In 2014 I presented my PhD proposal at an International ELT conference in Malaysia. My intention to join the conference was to meet one of the keynote speakers, whose works aligned with my research. I joined his plenary session and talked to him at the break session to consult about my PhD project. He commented that my PhD research was too broad, which helped me refine it. Recently in 2016 I presented my temporary findings at the Centre of English Language Communication (CELC) Symposium at the National University of Singapore and got very critical and constructive feedback from Professor Suresh Canagarajah, one of the keynote speakers on some aspects, such as the difference between subjective and subjectivity, the not yet fully discussed post-structural analysis in my research. The feedback from these two scholars from these different international conferences reminded me to critically navigate and write up my dissertation.

**Conclusion**

Critical works from post-structural and post-colonial thinkers, other academic resources, and my personal experiences in publishing have provided me critical insights in foregrounding our research and making truth claims. Seeing that knowledge is historically and politically constructed as Foucault contended (O'Farrell, 2005) helped me see that knowledge is fluid and is subject to 'agreement' between the scholars in particular discourse communities. Post-structural and post-colonial ELT scholars have helped me to hone my critical analysis especially on how politically, culturally, and economically the fields of ELT and Applied Linguistics are often used to perpetuate hegemony of power of the Centre (UK & US) (Canagarajah, 2002). Finally, scholarship on publication itself - Casanave & Vandrick (Eds) (2003), Renandya (2014), Canagarajah (2006) - are helpful guides in the publishing process. Learning from all of these, I can flexibly 'shuttle' between writing 'critical' and the 'normative' papers as my strategy of being a novice writer publishing internationally. In this regard, my exposure in the critical works has provided me more options on how to exert my agency.

The different educational stages in my life have each made their own contribution to my professional development, including my undergraduate degree and my engagement in student English clubs as the organizers and as the representative of debate team had boosted my confidence (see Wahyudi, 2016b). This experience resonated with my performances in the rest of my undergraduate courses. In my bridging course and Master degree, my familiarity with topics embedded in my personal encounters made me engaged and successful in the courses. While in my PhD study I made the most of professional development opportunities through the course I took, my readings on post-structural/post-colonial theory and works critical of ELT, cohort group discussions, joining Faculty of Graduate Research (FGR) workshops, discussions with my supervisors, attending faculty seminars, joining conferences, and writing for publications. All these show that my achievement is embedded in 'learning networks' (Barnacle & Mewburne, 2010, p. 433). All these serve different shapes and crystals (Ellingson, 2009) and demonstrate their own rigor in my professional development as an EFL teacher.

**Acknowledgement**:

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