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Language Learning Autobiographies, Identity Texts, and Critical Teacher Education

Hyunjung Shin and In Chull Jang *

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This paper explores possibilities of using language learning autobiographies as a form of identity texts in order to produce suggestions for critical teacher education. Specifically, we examined what insights we might gain by reframing Korean pre-service teachers' autobiographies as a form of identity texts to develop reflective teachers, who affirm their identities and language learning histories. We thematically analyzed autobiographical reflection papers on English learning experiences of 73 undergraduate students enrolled in a compulsory elementary English education course at a public university in South Korea. The analysis revealed the predominance of referral to English private education experiences and a sense of linguistic insecurity felt by these pre-service teachers, who would later teach in public schools. Based on these findings, we provide suggestions for critical teacher education to foster critical language awareness and identity investment for the students. We conclude that language learning autobiographies, while incorporating characteristics of identity texts, might be a useful tool for critical pedagogies.

Key words: language learning autobiography, identity text, teacher education, critical pedagogy, transformative pedagogy

*First Author: Hyunjung Shin, Assistant Professor, Department of Curriculum Studies, University of Saskatchewan; 28 Campus Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0X1, Canada; Email: hyunjung.shin@usask.ca

Corresponding Author: In Chull Jang, Assistant Professor, Department of English Education, Daegu National University of Education; 219 Jungang-daero, Nam-gu, Daegu 42411, Korea; Email: icjang@dnue.ac.kr

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1. INTRODUCTION

Drawing on the notion of identity texts, this paper examined language learning autobiographies of Korean English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher candidates to produce suggestions for critical teacher education. We considered theories of critical pedagogical orientation (e.g., Cummins, 2000, 2001; Cummins & Early, 2011; Freire, 2000) that argue for transformative teaching, which validates linguistic and cultural diversity of the students while simultaneously resisting monolingual and Eurocentric ideologies for social equity. Despite the "social turn" in applied linguistics as proposed by Block (2003), there is still a lack of scholarly attention on how the broader sociopolitical relations between language, culture, and identity unfold within the classroom in "mainstream" second language (L2) teacher education.

Language learning autobiographies have been considered a genre of language learners' lived experiences, beliefs, and identity formations, as well as sociopolitical contexts influencing these elements (Pavlenko, 2001). In this sense, writing one's language learning autobiography is an act of critical engagement with and powerful reflection on her learning experiences and identities. Building on previous autobiographical studies (e.g., Ahn, 2013; Kim, 2021; Pavlenko, 2003; Tse, 2000), this project aimed to identify shared experience, emotion, and feeling among pre-service teachers and to produce pedagogical suggestions and implications for critical reflections and engagement with dominant discourses of their autobiographies. Especially, when it comes to pedagogical suggestions, we sought to reframe the autobiographical data as a form of identity texts to recognize its potential as a critical pedagogical tool to develop teachers who are reflective in their teaching by affirming their identities and language learning histories. Although this study was not initially intended to implement critical pedagogy, it connects the findings from the data to suggestions and implications for critical teacher education in order to foster critical language awareness and identity investment of the students for future research and practices (Cummins, 2001; Cummins & Early, 2011; Norton, 2013).

In what follows, we first offered a brief review of the literature on identity texts as a tool for critical pedagogies in relation to language learning autobiographies. This is followed by descriptions of research contexts and participants, and a summary of key findings. We provided a detailed discussion of the study's implications for English teaching in the EFL context along with suggestions for more nuanced pedagogies using autobiographies as identity texts for critical teacher education.

2. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IDENTITY TEXTS AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGIES

2.1. Language Learning Autobiographies and Identity Texts

Language learning autobiographies are increasingly gaining popularity, both as a data collection tool and classroom assignments in applied linguistics, including the EFL teacher education context in South Korea. Broadly speaking, with the "narrative turn" in humanities and social sciences, narratives became "the central means by which people give their lives meaning across time" (Pavlenko, 2007, p. 164). This rendered narratives both an object and a legitimate means of research. In the field of applied linguistics, researchers have studied L2 learners' diaries and journals (e.g., Bailey, 1980, 1983; Norton, 2013; Schmidt & Frota, 1986; Schumann, 1980), linguistic biographies and autobiographies (e.g., Kanno, 2003; Pavlenko, 2003; Tse, 2000), and published linguistic autobiographies or language memoirs (e.g., Kinginger, 2004; Pavlenko, 2001; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). These studies have contributed to advancing our understanding of L2 learning processes and L2 learners by portraying L2 learners as complex human beings who possess multilayered affective and social dimensions as well as agency in their L2 learning. For instance, Kim (2021) examined the importance of L2-related experiences with personal and subjective meaning in his analysis of Korean pre-service teachers' L2 learning experiences, as well as changes in their motivation over the years of schooling from a sociocultural theory perspective.

An increasing number of studies have employed autobiographies or autoethnographies as a way to examine the identities of language teachers and teacher educators mostly working in English as a Second Language (ESL) or Western TESOL contexts (e.g., Ahmed, Morgan, & Maciel, 2022; Jain, 2022; Keles, 2022; Yazan, Canagarajah, & Jain, 2022; Yazan, Pentón Herrera, & Rashed, 2023). While the emerging body of research reports on using autobiographies of pre-service English teachers in the Korean context (e.g., Ahn, 2013; Kim, 2021; Kim & Won, 2018), these studies focus on the analysis of the narrative itself rather than providing specific pedagogical suggestions. This research fills this gap by re-examining the findings from the language learning autobiographies of the students in a pre-service teacher education program in South Korea. More importantly, this study tries to gain insights to better support their development as reflective teachers by drawing on the notion of identity texts (Cummins & Early, 2011).

The term "identity texts", in its original sense as used in L2 literacy education in multilingual settings, was coined by Jim Cummins to refer to literacy projects that engaged linguistically and culturally diverse students in producing multilingual texts that reflected their lived experiences and exhibited their bi/multilingual repertoires (Hamman-Ortiz, 2021). The notion of identity texts is based on the idea that literacy engagement and identity

affirmation of the students lead to literacy achievement (Cummins & Early, 2011). In Cummins' definition, identity texts refer to the products of students' creative work or performances conducted within the pedagogical space orchestrated by the classroom teacher (Cummins & Early, 2011). These texts can be written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal forms drawing on students' multiple linguistic and semiotic resources. One of the most well-known uses of identity texts in this setting is the creation of dual language (picture) books. In this activity, students choose book themes and the language of the book, and work collaboratively in composing, editing, and visually representing their words through illustrated pictures and/or digital art. Through these creative projects, L2 learners can construct themselves as young authors, designers, artists, actors, or performers in dramas.

In the adult ESL and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) teacher education context in North America, Corcoran (2016) presents examples of using autobiographical identity texts, or multimodal and digital texts produced by students, in order to promote critical literacy awareness both for TESL teachers and ESL students while incorporating students' digital literacies in teaching online and multimodal courses. He argues that autobiographical identity texts provide students with the opportunity for authentic language use, oral presentation skills, and critical reflection on their language learning. This helps them to positively reflect on their evolving identities as language learners by developing awareness of language as a dynamic mediating tool for cultural expression. Another well-known identity text project in the pre-service and in-service teacher education context is the use of the Language Portrait (LP) (Busch, 2021; Prasad, 2014). In the LP project, participants visualize their semiotic resources by mapping their language and cultural composition on a body template as a way to investigate how people evaluate their linguistic resources and position themselves regarding language ideologies in the larger society (Busch, 2021; Prasad, 2014). In the pre-service teacher education context in Canada, Lau (2016), for example, examines how the LP can help improve teacher candidates' understandings of language and identities and can foster a critical reflection on their attitudes towards linguistic diversity. Lau (2016) highlights how emotional engagements in autobiographical portraits and narratives of language experiences can open up possibilities for a critical understanding of sociopolitical dimensions of L2 teaching and learning among student teachers (see also Valencia, Herath, & Gagne, 2020).

2.2. Critical Pedagogies and Identity Texts

Critical pedagogy aims "to develop critical thinking by presenting the people's situation to them as a problem so that they can perceive, reflect, and act on it" (Crawford-Lange, 1981, p. 259; see also Auerbach, 1995, 2011). Contrary to traditional banking education, which

refers to the transmission of knowledge from teachers to students, critical pedagogy involves the collaborative construction of knowledge (Auerbach, 1995; Freire, 2000). Fairclough (2010) argues that there is an intimate relationship between the development of critical awareness of language and the development of confident and socially responsible language use in students. In this sense, reflective writing on the class projects, such as language learning autobiographies, can be a powerful tool to help students understand the meanings of the activities, negotiate their identities, and acquire positive attitudes toward the class and ownership of learning. Critical language awareness, as an element of critical pedagogy, is thus eventually concerned with empowerment (Cummins, 2001):

> …empowerment can be defined as the collaborative creation of power. Students whose schooling experiences reflect collaborative relations of power develop the ability, confidence and motivation to succeed academically. They participate competently in instruction as a result of having developed a secure sense of identity and the knowledge that their voices will be heard and respected within the classroom. In other words, empowerment derives from the process of negotiating identities in the classroom. Identities are not static or fixed but rather are constantly being shaped through experiences and interactions (p. 16).

The concept of identity texts is inherently combined with the notion of critical/transformative pedagogies (Cummins, 2000; Freire, 2000). This implies that schools and classrooms are power-laden spaces, where inequitable power relations from the wider society are often reproduced by valuing certain forms of language and culture more than others. Identity texts thus seek to challenge oppressive power relations by cultivating alternative spaces for minoritized students in multilingual settings through the use of their first or home language (L1) (or their multilingual repertoires) in classrooms and affirming their linguistic and cultural identities. Cummins and Early (2011) argue that identity texts contribute to promoting equity for students from marginalized social backgrounds by encouraging them to build on their background knowledge in L2 learning. This can be done by affirming their identities as intelligent and linguistically talented beings who can produce more accomplished L2 literacy work, and by increasing their awareness of the relationships between their L1 and the L2.

The body of research on identity texts has depicted that with proper guidance from the teachers, creating identity texts can serve as a way to create an alternative space in the language classroom, where students can expand their sense of who they are and who they can become, as well as enhance a sense of academic power of the students (Cummins, 2001). Cummins and Early (2011) offer rich case studies of identity text creation projects while illustrating the ways in which identity texts are used for critical/transformative pedagogies.

In a sense, identity work in language classrooms is fundamentally transformative as language practices are always implicated in "how people define who they are and how they subsequently act upon the possibilities such meanings convey" (Morgan, 1997, p. 432).

3. THE LANGUAGE LEARNING AUTOBIOGRAPHY PROJECT

This study consists of two parts. The first part is to identify dominant discourses of language learning and identities to locate points for critical engagements for pre-service teachers. For this purpose, the data of the language learning autobiographies of Korean pre-service teachers were collected and analyzed, and three main themes emerged: the importance of private English language education, ideologies of self-deprecation and their identity as "bad" L2 speakers, and learner agency and positive English language learning experiences (see Section 4). Following this part, we propose to reassess the autobiographies using the notion of identity texts in our analysis to examine what insights we might gain from this perspective to develop critical teacher education in future classrooms (see Section 5). While the first part of this study—the language learning autobiography project—was not designed as a critical pedagogy project, we provide a lengthy discussion on suggestions for critical teacher education, or teacher education from critical/transformative pedagogical perspectives. This section describes research methods and participants briefly for the first part.

3.1. The Context and Design of Language Learning Autobiographies for Pre-service Elementary School Teachers

The participants of this study were pre-service elementary school teachers who enrolled in a mandatory English education course at a public university. The university specializes in training pre-service elementary school teachers who are expected to teach all subjects in the South Korean primary education system, including English. Throughout their coursework, in addition to taking English language classes to increase their English proficiency, they are required to take three mandatory English teaching methods courses. The teaching methods course the participants enrolled in at the time of the study was designed to help pre-service teachers understand pedagogical principles of learner-centeredness, learn about key activities for young learners of English such as chant, song, storytelling, phonics and role-play, and practice classroom English to implement these classroom activities effectively.

One of the goals of this course was to inspire the students to become "reflective teachers" (Farrell, 2022). To improve teachers' ability to reflect on their teaching, it is crucial that they reflect on their past learning experiences, as the effective learning skills and strategies they

employed as students may contribute to the development of their knowledge of teaching methods and influence their classroom teaching practice (Farrell, 2007). Considering the importance of reflective practice in professional development, the instructor in the course designed two pre-assignment sessions for pre-service teachers to successfully reflect on their English learning experience and pen down an English learning autobiography. The objective of the first session was to have them read and discuss a prominent author's text on the language learning experience. During the semesters when this study was being conducted, the participants read three selected chapters (1, 3, and 5) from Fouser (2021). This public book was selected as the author describes the experiences of learning multiple languages in his life while highlighting that learning a new language can be considered as meeting a new world, and that reflecting on past learning experiences is a starting point of language learning. The students were required to post key sentences from the chapters on Padlet and then discuss why they chose the sentences and how the embedded meanings of the sentences related to their own experience and idea of English learning. Following the first session, students composed the first draft of their English learning autobiographies. In the second session, participants discussed their English learning experiences in small groups and as a class in order to identify similarities and variations in their reflections and to progress their discussions regarding the implications for their future English teaching. Following this session, they submitted the final draft of their autobiographies. These procedures are summarized in Table 1. This study analyzed the autobiographies of students to identify key common experiences among the students, with additional references to their pre-assignment discussions.

TABLE 1

Language Learning Autobiography Project

Session		Activity	
Session 1 (Week 3)	Out-of-class	• Reading a published language learning autobiography	Individual
		• Posting sentences and thoughts on the autobiography on Padlet	Individual
	In-class	• Discussing Padlet postings and relating discussions to one's own experience	Group
		• Discovering similar and different experiences and reflecting on them	Class
Session 2 (Week 4)	Out-of-class	• Writing a first draft of a language learning autobiography	Individual
	In-class	• Sharing one's own language learning autobiographies	Group
		• Discovering similar and different experiences and reflecting on them	Class
		• Relating discussions to their future teaching	Class
	Out-of-class	• Writing a final draft of language learning autobiography	Individual

3.2. Participants

The language learning autobiography project was not initially designed and implemented for research purposes. Thus, to use their autobiographies for this study, we obtained permission after the semester ended. When the consent was informed, the participants' confidentiality and voluntary participation were clearly ensured. Of 132 students enrolled in the English education course, 73 pre-service teachers (55.3%) agreed to have their autobiographies used in this study. All of the pre-service teachers were enrolled in their second year of the undergraduate program. Table 2 offers an overview of the participant profiles.

TABLE 2

Participant Profiles

	n	%
Gender		
Male	44	60.3
Female	29	39.7
Major		
Korean Education	17	23.3
Social Science Education	17	23.3
Physical Education	16	21.9
Arts Education	12	16.4
English Education	11	15.1

Since public English education in South Korea begins in the third grade, it may be presumed that students have at least ten years of English instruction in the public education system. However, 43 participants (58.9 %) stated that they began English learning at home or in the private sector before Grade 3, and 58 participants (79.5%) stated that they had the experience of private English education in any forms in their lifetime. Given that the participants' average English subject grade on the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) fell between grades 1 and 2 and that they participated in English education for an extended period of time, one could argue that their general English ability was higher than that of other university students of their age. Furthermore, before taking this basic English education course, they completed an English communication skill course that was taught by "native English-speaking" instructors.

3.3. The Collection and Analysis of Language Learning Autobiographies

The autobiography assignment required students to compose a three-page essay on their previous English learning experience in Korean. The format and topic were open, as they were allowed to describe their English learning trajectories chronologically or focus on one

or more English learning events. By employing the multimodal aspect of identity texts (Cummins, Hu, Markus, & Kristiina Montero, 2015), students were also requested to contribute pictures or memes (or *jjal*, in the language of the youth), which captured their experience and sentiments around English learning. The corpus of autobiographical reflection papers consisted of 67,729 Korean words (927.8 words per document) and 159 images (2.5 images per document).

The objective of this paper was to reframe pre-service teachers' autobiographies as identity texts for professional development in transformative and critical pedagogy, which differs from understanding the narrative structures of the autobiographies (i.e., narrative study) or their constructed experiences of English learning (i.e., narrative inquiry). This participatory nature of the project prompted us to determine the aspects of their language learning experiences that were deemed significant and distinctive by pre-service teachers in relation to their future profession. In fact, the initial entry point for the analysis was the pre-assignment sessions wherein students shared and examined their narratives and discussed implications for their future English teaching. Their discussion led us to the identification of two topics worthy of critical investigation: 1) the prevalence of private English education, and 2) a negative self-identity as English speakers. These two themes provided "rich points" (Agar, 1996) for students' construction of their professional identity as pre-service teachers, provided that they would later teach English in public elementary schools and that their CSAT scores and investment in English education indicated "good" English proficiency. By utilizing thematic content analytic techniques (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007), we undertook an in-depth investigation of the corpus of student autobiographies in order to identify possibilities of transforming autobiographies into identity texts and engage critically in teacher education. The following questions informed the thematic analysis:

1) What type of English private education did they receive and how did they evaluate it?
2) How did they evaluate their English competence?
3) What English learning experience did they appreciate?

While identifying and interpreting key themes, visual data was not separately analyzed, as students described their English learning experience in text and simply inserted images to prove their experiences or visually represent what they narrated. Despite such supplementary roles of visual data, some of the memes poignantly caught their ideas and emotions of English and English learning.

The subsequent sections present the findings of the analysis and discuss how autobiographies as identity texts can be mobilized as a tool for critical teacher education. Specifically, the findings demonstrate that the participants' participation in English private

education was closely associated with their negative self-concept as English speakers, and that the English learning experiences they valued in their autobiographies can provide a starting point for critical and transformative pedagogies. The excerpts and visuals included in this paper were selected from the corpus since we deemed them to be representative of these themes. The excerpts were then translated into English for this paper while preserving as much of their original Korean meaning as possible.

4. EXPERIENCES AND IDENTITIES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

4.1. Investing in English Private Education

This section depicts how the pre-service teachers' participation in private English education during their school years was portrayed in their autobiographies and how the experience affected their identities as English learners. In spite of their ten years of English education at public schools, the majority of the participants' autobiographical accounts of their English learning experiences were dedicated to descriptions, emotions, and evaluations of their participation in English private education. Some students made specific comments on public English education in case they began to learn English for the first time at a public school, or if public schools offered unique learning environments (See Section 4.3). This predominance of their English learning experiences in the private sector is a reflection of the fact that English is a subject wherein private education is heavily and enthusiastically pursued (Lee & Jang, in press). However, when it comes to pre-service teacher identity, their experience with private English education merits investigation as they teach English in public school settings. For a critical engagement in the professional development of pre-service teachers, it is essential to understand how they evaluated their experience in English private education and linked it to their future teaching practice.

According to their autobiographies, 58 pre-service teachers (79.5%) invested in various types of English private education from preschool to high school, including English kindergarten, home-visit tutoring, and an English institute called *hagwon*. Although their individual experiences and evaluations of participating in private English education varied, the common trajectory of learning English can be described as a shift from informal, experiential learning to formal, rote learning as their school years progressed (Kim, 2016). Specifically, they reported that the first time they encountered English was through their parents, siblings, relatives, or close friends and that the context of English learning was informal (Kim, 2021). They had heard English in songs and animations, their parents read to them, or they saw English letters, words, and sentences in picture books, graded readers,

and other materials primarily introduced by their parents.

> When I was a child, my parents let me listen to a lot of English stories [#34, F, Social Science Education].

> I began learning English for the first time when I was seven years old. My mom taught me the English alphabet. She wanted me to memorize the alphabet before entering elementary school, and she taught me the names while writing the alphabet [#68, F, English Education].

When their parents decided to enroll them in private English institutes or English private tutoring to provide more systematic learning environments and curricula, the informal setting for English learning began to be replaced by the formal setting. Although the sizes and types of private English education attended by the students varied, their experiences there were described as "fun" and "enjoyable" due to the teachers' use of activities such as games, chants, and songs to increase young learners' interest in the new language. However, they often viewed such activities as merely contributing to lowering affective barriers to English but not helping them improve their English competence.

> I began learning English seriously in the second grade of elementary school. My parents enrolled me in an English institute to prepare for the English subject, which begins in the third grade. Twice a week, I participated in enjoyable games and activities with foreign teachers at the institute [#61, F, Arts Education].

> Rather than focusing on grammar or reading, the English classes of the time emphasized play. After the class, I felt like I "played well with English" instead of learning something [#73, M, English Education].

In their accounts, the turning point in terms of interest and motivation in English learning occurred when they attended an intensive English institute, whose curriculum emphasized language forms, such as grammar and vocabulary, and comprehension skills, such as reading and listening. They felt that learning English in an intensive English institute was not fully experiential and interactive, but rather teacher-centered and coercive.

> When I was in the upper grades of elementary school, I attended an institute renowned for its excellent English instruction in the neighborhood. It felt more like a place to impart specific information than to teach English through games

> or activities. It emphasized solving test items and listening [#69, M, English Education].

> The English institute was more boring than I had expected. The class was not interactive. Students were expected to read and comprehend English texts. The students then went to their respective computers, listened to the native speaker audio files, and copied the scripts. Finally, I went to the teacher, read the sentence aloud, and explained its meaning. Then, I could go home [#45, F, Physical Education].

The descriptions of the high school years focused on what has been often criticized as a lingering issue in South Korea's English education: English learning for grades and exams, and memorization (43 participants, 58.9%). To achieve a higher score on school English exams or the CSAT, students should continue to take practice tests and memorize passages from textbooks and workbooks. As a result, they reported beginning to "hate" English, losing interest in learning the language, and feeling pressured to achieve high scores on high-stakes tests.

> Studying English in high school was simply for exams. At that time, I read passages meticulously and solved questions repeatedly [#3, F, Korean Education].

> I hated English so much after entering high school. To be exact, I hated the English test. I hated memorizing passages to solve question items for school exams. Memorizing English words was not fun. English was the toughest subject for me on the days of the mock tests and CSAT [#47, F, Physical Education].

The pre-service teachers' accounts of their participation in English private education after elementary school typically concluded with a negative assessment of English learning for exams, which exemplifies rote learning involving memorization and repetition. In their English learning trajectories, the initial interest in English and enjoyment of classroom activities during elementary school years were replaced by negative emotions, including anxiety and aversion, following the period. As depicted in Figure 1, one of the students compared English learning situations to squeezing an oversized package into a smaller mailbox. She said in her autobiography:

In preparation for the GPA and CSAT exams, the special lectures on the CSAT, which were provided online or by institutes, were just 'cramming' English into my brain who was not even ready [#46, F, Physical Education].

FIGURE 1

Cramming English into Brain

[#46, F, Physical Education]

4.2. Self-deprecating English Competence

The self-image of "bad" English speakers was another significant theme found in the autobiographies of pre-service English teachers. According to Park (2009), "self-deprecation" is one of the ideologies of English shared by South Koreans—"viewing Koreans as lacking sufficient competence to use English meaningfully" (p. 26). Park (2009) specifies that this language ideology serves as the underlying rationale for excessive investment in English education. Although this distinctive ideology is the result of the negotiation of two contradictory ideologies, namely the necessity of English as a global language and English as an Other language in opposition to Korean as the national language (Park, 2009), Park (2021) argues that it is embodied as part of subjectivity—"dimensions of affect, morality, and desire that shape our experiences as human subjects" (p. 2). The stereotypical South Korean English speaker who deprecates his or her English proficiency is one who becomes "dumb" in front of "native" or "near-native" English speakers (Park & Wee, 2012).

For instance, as seen in Figure 2, one participant described herself to be crying due to her incompetence in English speaking. In her English learning autobiography, she stated:

I've been studying English for over a decade, but I still find it extremely difficult to speak a single sentence. I once worked part-time at a burger store, but I was unable to speak a simple sentence to every foreign customer, so I had to rely on words and body language to communicate. When a foreigner spoke to me on the street, I would have said sorry and run away, but I was unable to

run away and I wanted to cry. It was the moment in my life that I regret the most [#1, F, Korean Education].

FIGURE 2

Incompetence in English Made Me Cry

[#1, F, Korean Education]

In this episode, the pre-service teacher emphasizes that despite having studied English since Grade 3, she was unable to communicate effectively in English at a fast food restaurant where she worked part-time. This event lowered her self-esteem as an English speaker. This is a typical affective response to self-deprecation of one's English competence called *junuk* (Park, 2021).

19 students (26%) noted in their autobiographies that their incompetence in oral communication skills in English was a result of their English learning focusing on exam preparation. Specifically, they discovered that solving test questions, memorizing vocabulary, and analyzing sentence structures did not improve "real" English competence. Figuratively, as depicted in Figure 3, they found that their English competence was now "empty".

FIGURE 3

"Empty" English

[#4, F, Korean Education]

[#61, F, Arts Education]

Using these images foregrounding an empty wallet, the pre-service teachers indicated that as they do not "possess" English competence, they are unable to effectively handle communications in English in everyday situations and are not "good" English learners and speakers. As evidenced by the man's facial expression in the image on the right, it is embarrassing since they had invested in English for more than a decade.

They frequently stated that due to their "empty" English competence, they murmured English when speaking with foreigners, making them lose confidence in English. The following excerpts demonstrate how such English learning experiences can lead to reinforcing the ideological mechanism of self-deprecation as related to the episodes regarding the difficulty and failure of oral English communication.

> I believed I was good at English, but in reality, what I was good at was taking English exams. I took an English communication course with a native English-speaking professor in the second semester of my first year as a university student. I was overwhelmed by fear of speaking English. When the professor spoke to me, my hands began to sweat, and I frequently struggled when speaking English with my classmates. I was a coward who lacked the courage to speak for fear of being ridiculed [#42, M. Physical Education].

> I believed I was good at English. When I became an adult, however, I rarely used the English I had learned for at least 11 years. When there was a disconnect between the English I had learned and the English used in everyday life, I became confused and my confidence in the language began to decline. When I met a foreigner in the past, I was a little confident in English, but now I am busy hiding and feel embarrassed [#71, F, English Education].

While taking an English communication course taught by a "native English-speaking" instructor at the university or using English in a daily context, these two students felt, contrary to their initial belief, that their English was not "good"; rather, they were good at "solving English test items" or "CSAT English". Their emotional and physical responses to the realization of English incompetence were excessively dramatic: "overwhelmed by fear", "began to sweat", "fear of being ridiculed", "be a coward", "busy hiding", and "feeling embarrassed". They realized that they lost confidence and motivation to use English since English for everyday communication varied from English for exams (Jang, 2015).

The pre-service teachers' reflections on their English competence frequently led them to consider how to improve their oral communication skills in English, overcome their English insecurity, and increase their English confidence. In their autobiographies, they discussed not only what to study and how to study English, but also what principles were significant

in terms of English learning and teaching. In addition, they connected the principles of teaching and learning English to their future careers. As seen in the following excerpts, the "interest" in English is the principle emphasized by pre-service teachers for successful English learning.

> I wish to develop an interest in English and study it with pleasure. If I become a teacher and teach English to students, I want them to have a positive attitude toward the language and enjoy participating in class. I believe that there will be a variety of teaching methods that may assist students in learning English in a natural, unforced manner [#24, F, Social Science Education].

> In fact, "interest" in English is the most crucial factor. If I become an elementary school English teacher in the future, I hope to help students view English as something fun like a game rather than a subject. Complex concepts are never too late to learn later. I believe it is the initial step to have the necessity and enjoyment of English [#69, M, English Education].

These pre-service teachers believe that if students are interested in English, they will enjoy learning the language and have positive attitudes toward English and English learning. The way to increase interest in English is to view it not as a subject to be studied, but as a means of play, and to acquire it not through memorization, but "naturally". They demonstrated a willingness to incorporate these principles into their future English teaching.

4.3. Valuing Agency in English Learning

This section illustrates the significance of learner agency by examining the positive English learning experience represented by participants in their autobiographies. The participants' English learning autobiographies did not exclusively contain negative assessments of their English learning experiences. Some of them described instances where they particularly enjoyed learning and using English, feeling a sense of accomplishment. The analysis of such positive experiences can reveal not only the type of English learning activity they enjoyed but also the factor that contributed to their empowerment for English learning (Dewaele, Chen, Padilla, & Lake, 2019). It would be a vantage point from which to encourage and foster the critical awareness of English learning and the development of transformative pedagogies for pre-service English teachers.

First of all, the English learning context that 24 participants (32.9%) described as "impressive" or "memorable" experiences was English class taught by "native English-speaking" teachers.

> Initially, I was terrified of interacting with a native English teacher and presenting in English. Every situation was unfamiliar. However, as time passed, I realized that conversing with the foreign teacher was a positive experience [#24, F, Social Science Education].

> When I was in elementary school, there was a native English teacher, and lunchtime was spent conversing with the teacher. It was so fun talking with the native English teacher. After a year of talking with the teacher, I naturally picked up a great number of words, pronunciations, and gestures of native speakers [#50, F, Physical Education].

> I was not fluent enough to communicate with a native English teacher, but we frequently enjoyed a delicious meal together and continued our conversation. Amazingly, I was able to communicate in such simple English. This experience allowed me to overcome my fear of communicating with foreigners [#55, F, Arts Education].

In the above excerpts, the participants state that conversing with a "native English-speaking" teacher was a "positive experience", "fun", and "amazing". The experiences helped them overcome their fear of communicating with an English speaker as they realized that successful communication was possible despite their limited English competence. These instances of learning English with "native English-speaking" teachers may suggest that the pre-service teachers shared an underlying assumption with respect to English learning and teaching, namely that English conversations with "native English speakers" are the only way to improve English, particularly oral communication skills. It should be noted, however, that the participants valued the experience of communicating with "native English speakers" not only because it was successful, but also because they initiated and actively participated in the conversations. In other words, they felt empowered due to "native English-speaking" teachers as well as their ability to take initiative while learning English with "native speakers".

The significance of learner agency was also evident in the episodes in which pre-service teachers passionately studied English using materials tailored to their individual interests. For instance, one student enjoyed her high school English class in which the film Zootopia, which was her favorite, was used as a primary source. Consequently, she was "never bored" and the class was "enjoyable," and the final grade was satisfactory:

> I enjoyed English so much because I studied with my favorite film. I enjoyed studying English so much that I was never bored. I worked harder not because

> I wanted to earn a good grade, but because I enjoyed the subject. I realized how much more enjoyable it is to study when doing something one enjoys. This was a result of studying English through a movie [#36, F, Physical Education].

In a similar vein, another participant described how he could enjoy and improve his English by reading the Harry Potter series in English:

> I got to read my favorite book, Harry Potter. My parents bought me the original English version of Harry Potter books when I pretended to be Harry Potter using wooden chopsticks to play the wizard with a magic wand. If I had been my usual self, I would have given up reading English books, but my love for Harry Potter was extraordinary. I was unfamiliar with the majority of the words and grammar, but I began to read very carefully. My English was on the verge of exploding [#1, M, Korean Education].

Finally, in their autobiographical narratives, pre-service teachers described events where they were required to use and practice English intensively to complete a task or project, such as an English camp, an English speech contest, or a performance of an English play. These events included a variety of activities that helped them appreciate and develop an interest in English.

> In a place similar to an English village, I was able to study with many native English teachers from various countries. In these classes, I filmed a video and composed an English newspaper while receiving immediate feedback. I was exposed to foreign culture and had a lot of enjoyable English classes. Through the experience, I realized that English was fascinating [#43, F, Physical Education].

> During my sixth-grade winter break in elementary school, I attended an English camp. My class performed “Les Misérables” on the final day of the camp, for which we had prepared for several days. Because the project was so enjoyable, I even memorized the lines for other roles. I don’t know if it improved my English skills, but it certainly sparked my interest in the language [#47, F, Physical Education].

Contrary to experiences of learning English for exams during middle and high school and subsequent feelings of insecurity in their English competence, these English learning experiences using materials tailored to their own interest inspired pre-service teachers to

develop a positive attitude toward the language and a positive sense of self as English learners. This enjoyment and affirmation of identity are due to the fact that the learning materials and contents were tailored to the interests of the students and that the classroom activities and interactions provided new opportunities to use English. Through this process, their agency was validated and supported, as they chose and negotiated the contents and methods of English learning—self-centeredness (Nunan, 2015)—and managed learning processes—learner autonomy—based on their reflexivity (Gao, 2013). These findings provide a starting point for locating the way to transform learners' English learning autobiographies, which are dominated by negative experiences and evaluation of English learning into identity texts that serve as a space for language learners to affirm their identities as language learners and users.

5. IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR CRITICAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Based on the findings illustrated above, this section presents our discussion of the study's implications and suggestions for critical teacher education. Our initial reaction to the findings of this study encompassed the following question: What might happen when these pre-service teachers, whose autobiographical accounts of their English language learning appear to value private English language education over English learning in schools, are to teach in public schools? Furthermore, we attended to the feeling of linguistic insecurity reportedly shared by many participants in this study through the linguistic ideology of self-deprecation (Park, 2009). We also considered their accounts of positive English learning experiences associated with "native English-speaking" teachers, which has been seen as resulting from perpetuating the ideology of native speaker (NS) as an ideal language teacher in Korea (Shin, 2007).

While on the surface, the participants' responses seem to favor English private education and "native speakers" of the language as "good" English teachers, we argue that these comments point to the participant's appreciation of a sense of agency and ownership in their language learning using authentic materials and experiential experiences of interest to them (e.g., English camp, English play, movies and novels of their interest). The desired characteristics of the kind of English classes resonate well with the principles of transformative/critical pedagogies mentioned earlier. Therefore, we offer two main suggestions to address the findings of this study.

We would like to clarify that the autobiographies in our study were not implemented as a clearly designed critical pedagogy per se, nor did they include students' reflections on writing autobiographies. We are unable to predict whether the autobiography activity helped

the teacher candidates to affirm their identities and enhance their agency. Therefore, we do not intend to claim that we have achieved "critical teacher education" in this study. Rather, we offer the following suggestions as a guide to help interested L2 educators and teacher educators to design critical pedagogical interventions using autobiographical identity texts in EFL teacher education programs for future studies.

5.1. Using Autobiographical Identity Texts to Validate L2 User's Bi/multilingual Identities and to Enhance Agency and Engagement in Language Learning

Literature on identity texts supports that when designed carefully, identity texts can be a powerful pedagogical tool to affirm student identities and to enhance learner agency (Cummins & Early, 2011; Cummins et al., 2015; Lau, 2016; Prasad, 2014; Valencia et al., 2020). For this reason, we suggest that the language learning autobiography assignment should be carefully designed as an identity text project and should be done at the beginning of the term (or earlier in the semester) to encourage discussions on how to help "nonnative-speaking" (NNS) pre-service teachers in EFL contexts reclaim their English language learning history.

Pedagogical benefits of identity texts, evidenced by research, include, among others, developing a strong classroom community and academic oral presentation skills through authentic target language use, and providing students with opportunities for positive reflections on their identities by validating their prior knowledge and skills (Cummins & Early, 2011). Delpit (2011) states that language minority students in multilingual settings are often already fluent in English (or the target language) and just require the skills to reach the next step of the appropriation of the linguistic forms demanded by mainstream society. Therefore, it is imperative for L2 teachers and teacher educators to be able to recognize the fluency their students already possess and to validate their bi/multilingual identities.

Given that the language learning autobiography activity implemented in this study was not fully multimodal and that pre-service teachers employed images only to complement their narratives, a possible pedagogical activity that can be implemented in the (Korean) EFL teacher education context in this regard is to create bi/multilingual or multimodal identity texts that incorporate the multiliteracies of the students, including digital literacy. For example, Cummins and Early (2011) illustrate creating picture books and performances as identity texts in a core French classroom in Canada, wherein, unlike French immersion programs, the French language is taught as a school subject. This is similar to how the English language is taught in Korean schools. For this project, the students wrote original children's stories in French and produced picture books for young readers by illustrating their stories. Later, in the form of groups, they adapted a student's story into a play script

and performed it for an audience of children from the local French immersion school. The survey at the end of the project demonstrated that most of the students felt enhanced confidence in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in French, and all students reported that they were motivated to continue to learn French.

For students in (Korean) EFL teacher education programs in the pandemic/post-pandemic era, this project may be adapted to take advantage of students' digital literacies. For example, teacher candidates may produce autobiographical identity texts in the form of digital storybooks or short videos. They can choose the topic of their interest, and use language(s) and forms of literacies of their choice in the production of these texts (including songs, photos, and pictures) while feeling ownership of their learning. By doing so, teachers/teacher educators may affirm students' identities by building on their background knowledge.

5.2. Using Autobiographical Identity Texts to Foster Critical Language Awareness to Counter Feelings of Linguistic Insecurity

With respect to the feelings of linguistics insecurity about the English competence of the pre-service teachers, we suggest that autobiographical identity texts be used to help create a community of sharing in class and enhance the hybrid and evolving identities of NNS teacher candidates as L2 users and educators.

The autobiographical accounts of the participants' English learning history indicate that most teacher candidates are not aware of the ideological nature of the construction of NS as an ideal teacher and their sense of illegitimacy as NNS teacher candidates. The issue of linguistic insecurity felt by the participants is not solely a linguistic issue, but also a matter of discourse and power, given the ideological construction of NS as an ideal language speaker and the subsequent devaluing of NNS teaching professionals' history and culture in applied linguistics (Pennycook, 1998; Shin & Sterzuk, 2019). Yet, the participants mostly indicated that the change needed to be implemented in the English classrooms and themselves, rather than critically analyzing or challenging the status quo.

By creating autobiographical identity texts from a critical pedagogy perspective to actively resist the devaluation of their linguistic identity and subsequent feelings of linguistic insecurity by the NNS teachers, EFL teachers and teacher candidates, as well as their students, can reclaim their language learning history and reconstruct their identities as competent bi/multilingual individuals with unique and special language history.

To this end, fostering critical literacy or critical language awareness among the students is crucial. As Wallace (1992) argues, critical literacy involves a consideration of "who reads what and why in what situations" (p. 61). Accordingly, the development of critical language awareness encompasses exploration of the relationship between language and power as a way of reinforcing students' sense of identity, and empowering the NNS teachers/teacher

candidates to recognize that dominant ideologies and discourses are socially constructed and thus can be challenged and negotiated (Fairclough, 2014).

For example, NNS teacher educators can model a version of their own autobiographical identity text as a template for students and use it for class discussion (see Corcoran, 2016, for an example in an ESL context). In this modelling, they may provide detailed descriptions to create the text and critical reflection on their language learning history. Furthermore, they may use journal prompts on related topics as part of constructing autobiographical identity texts to foster a critical dialogue between students and teachers. This may also be used to encourage dialogue between students to create counter-hegemonic spaces where alternative identities can be envisioned and implemented. The students can also choose course readings from L2 learning memoirs or published linguistic autobiographies to initiate a conversation.

Transformative/critical pedagogies seek to assist learners who would act upon the world in order to change it in a dialogical manner. Collaboratively producing autobiographical identity texts can be a means to create an alternative space for this critical dialogue in class while simultaneously providing opportunities for students to develop English language abilities. In this process of sharing their own identity texts, the life experiences of EFL teachers and teacher candidates may be emphasized, and they can recognize each other as sources of knowledge.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, based on findings from language learning autobiographies of pre-service teachers in an elementary teacher education program in Korea, we sought possible ways to reframe their stories as identity texts to promote critical teacher education. We argue that writing linguistic autobiographies can serve as a useful tool to enhance pre-service teachers' critical language awareness and identity investment when carefully orchestrated with critical pedagogical practice using identity texts.

We hope that this study would encourage future studies to provide such accounts. We are convinced that this is significant since we do not simply want to add another sociolinguistic analysis of autobiographical data on how and why Korean students begin to "hate" English learning through schooling. While it is important to respect the participants' languages and perspectives in our research, we also believe that as teacher educators who believe in promoting equity through education, it is our ethical responsibility to change at least what happens within our classrooms by nurturing students' understanding of who they are and who they wish to become in order to shape the possibilities outside the classroom. We believe that if teachers and teacher educators are concerned about "education for change", the first step to promote change outside the classroom is to transform education inside the

classroom (Auerbach, 1995, 2011).

We recognize that being a critical teacher/teacher educator is a difficult task as it ultimately involves changing the fundamental structure of society (Cummins, 2001). Most teachers, both in and outside of Korea, work within educational contexts where assessment tends to determine what is taught and learned (Cummins, 2000). In Auerbach and Wallerstein's (2004) problem-posing curriculum in an adult ESL setting, a teacher identifies a "problem" in dialogues with the students regarding issues of importance, followed by designing a critical pedagogical activity to address the problem to help students take action on their own. We identified a "problem" in the students' autobiographical narratives that requires further discussion regarding their development as reflective teachers, along with their identities as L2 users and teachers. Therefore, we invite the readers to further explore the problem together to foster critical L2 teacher education.

Applicable levels: Early childhood, elementary, secondary, tertiary

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