

# Online Instruction as a New Learning Territory for a Filipinized Critical Language Pedagogy: From the Era of Pandemic Onward



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## Highlights

- Philippine education has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic causing the learners' unequal access and opportunity to remote learning.
- While the tenets of the country's Department of Education highlight the significance of 'criticality,' its concept faces difficulties in concretizing its practical purpose to the clientele.
- Technology and language learning support the learners' critical thinking through active online engagement guided by more authentic instructional and teaching materials that raised their social consciousness through online participatory approach.
- Through critical language pedagogy, the learners developed their voices, proving that they have read the world more than just reading the word.

## 1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the lens of Philippine education at all levels. Those changes, like the shift of instructions from the traditional face to face to virtual mode, initially gained controversies involving the attitude and competence of the teachers, and the students. As a developing country, the Philippines is primarily and generally unprepared in remote instructions. Among those directly affected are those in the government schools that do not have a strong internet connection and do not even have gadgets for an online learning modality. Aida Yuvienco mentioned in an interview by GovInsider that only 26% of the government schools

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have internet connection (Basu, 2020). While the national and local government, which are supported by the private and non-government sectors, have exerted extra efforts to make education accessible to all, such access generally remains exclusive to those who are privileged and fortunate. Hence, the gap between the rich and the poor remains even wider. I would say that most of the marginalized and oppressed students in far-flung areas experience this the way they endure problems on their electricity connection and other basic needs connected to learning engagement. In the same interview with Yuvienco, she emphasized that at least 5000 public schools do not even have access to electricity (Basu, 2020). In effect, this reality has worsened their even poorer economic condition.

On my end, I still consider myself fortunate to be with a private comprehensive university which can provide for the needs of our students in any form of emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic because of their Learning Management System (LMS) being used by both teachers and students long before the pandemic hit the country and the world. Besides, my students are also economically fortunate to have easy access to remote learning. But looking at the broader kaleidoscope of the present health crisis, it has undoubtedly broadened the gap between the rich and the poor regarding their right to education. Moreover, this pandemic has created a bigger and stronger wall that divides fortunate and less fortunate learners. As an honest assessment, the issue here is not about the rich and the poor because all of them are victims of this great oppressor, the virus. Hence, the present condition has given birth not just to the so-called new normal, but rather, the learning oppression becomes unlikely normal. While we look at the darker side of this reality, this learning oppression can also give way to an initial move to cause the learners to think radically if their right to education is equally and justly offered and received. Because of these beleaguered experiences, the cognitive revolution to understand the societal problem that affects every breath becomes a way for them to think even more critically. In the end, the condition paves a way to produce an even stronger voice to read the world, not just the word.

This chapter focuses on the condition, significance and implication of critical pedagogy in language teaching to provide learners an arena for voice production needed for them to become community builders. This pandemic allowed me to design student-centered lessons and activities that allow the learners to use the English language in building active and socially-relevant language learning in both synchronous and asynchronous sessions. In this case, critical language pedagogy (CLP) is concretized by providing student-centered classroom instructions by initially promoting negotiations and agreements to defeat the burden caused by the pandemic through online participatory approach. Similarly, dialogic engagements allow them to experience democratic and emancipated learning as they listen to everyone's story, problem and ideas; hence, they even learn how to value authentic knowledge from everyone and to provide solutions to the presented challenges. Through participatory approach, CLP helps students to become more active learning participants as they understand themselves as members of the community and their roles to play in defining democracy and equity through effective language use.

The first part of this chapter presents the condition of the Philippine education and the use and challenges of CLP as a classroom approach in the country during pandemic. It is followed by the discussion of pandemic as a form of learning oppression and at the same time, the opportunity for acknowledging the impact of CLP in making the language learning more meaningful. Finally, the practical employment of CLP using participatory approach is emphasized through the learners' critical engagements to social issues integrated with technology.

### ***1.1 'Filipinization' of the Philippine Critical Pedagogy in the Basic Education***

As a high school teacher, I always make sure that my actions and decisions are guided by the Department of Education's (DepEd) mission and vision to shape the learners' critical thinking skills. Through these, achieving the ultimate goal of critical literacy, emancipation, and social justice for the learners to serve as nation builders can be materialized. When carefully reading the DepEd's mission, vision, and significant features, I am happy to note that the critical features are highlighted, which shows its responsiveness to the learners' needs. To cite, the mission states that the Department of Education's (DepEd) primary task is *"to protect and promote the right of every Filipino to quality, equitable, culture-based, and complete basic education. Similarly, DepEd envisions that every Filipinos would "enable them to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to building the nation" (Department of Education, n.d.).*

Understanding how the country's education system remains committed to its goal of serving its clientele, I am fascinated by how the government values every member of the community's equal participation in building a stronger nation through accessible education. Despite my respect for the effusive statements of the role of the Department of Education, I constantly asked if these highly constructed statements of responsibilities and maxims are translated into what they ought to achieve in transforming lives. With the spirit of an individual's capacity, knowledge and skills, values, and aspirations, education becomes a cradle of life-long learning in empowering the learners through the support of all the stakeholders. In the end, everyone in the society will benefit from this collaborative and cooperative approach to achieve the common goal of social change. This mission and vision is every teacher's framework to concretize our oath to the learners, the country, and God.

Hence, DepEd's general goals adhere to the important principles, which center on the curriculum and the learners, as prescribed by the Republic Act No. 10533 in pursuit of the K to 12 programs. Some of these goals include learner-centered, inclusive, relevant and appropriate, research-based, culture-sensitive, contextualized and global, constructive, inquiry-based, reflective, collaborative, differentiated, and integrative instructions. Hence, the K to 12 program features the target learners to achieve the following skills to become critical thinkers: information, media and

technology skills; learning and innovation skills; communication skills; and life, and career skills (Department of Education, 2019).

Before the implementation of the K to 12 program in the basic education curriculum, the Philippine government has already made various academic and legal support to promote equality, emancipation, and social justice. Some of those are Education for All 2015 Acceleration, Alternative Learning System (ALS), Special Education (SpEd) Program, Indigenous Peoples' Education, and Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), among others. All of these aim to respect individualities, differences, and identities necessary to encourage the production of the learners' voices in building a stronger nation and in increasing learners' participation rate to formal education through local knowledge and skills in addressing their needs for literacy development (Department of Education, 2009, 2011; World Education Forum, 2015). In the end, they all shared common goal of shaping critical approach in teaching to materialize both the mission and vision of the Philippine education.

## *1.2 Challenges of Critical Pedagogy*

Despite those government efforts to produce a just, democratic and accessible education for all, there is still a severe presence of internalized oppression in Philippine education. For example, problems on discrimination, violence, racism, political pressure, and stereotyping still appear in the classroom instructions and the instructional and assessments tools. Mostly, the victims include women, LGBTQI+, poor, and indigenous people. Unfortunately, Philippine education's oppression problem is worsened by language-based oppression like the use of unfavorable and demeaning terminologies. The country also has a long history of oppression, especially on women, despite the country's reputable international standing toward women's empowerment (Asean Today, 2019) caused by colonization and dictatorship. With these, Philippine education deserves to have a serious inclusion of critical pedagogy that will construct citizens who have high regard to social equality, democracy, and transformation in the vortex of globalization and internationalization (Monroy-Adarlo, 2016). Therefore, more than the educational goal of developing skills needed to help learners be globally competitive in the marketplace, classroom instructions must develop them into critical, creative, logical and analytical thinkers. These are open and reflective to understand and value others by equally treating as they share their voices necessary to build community (Baluran & Pido, 2017). With these academic, legal, and philosophical frames, I am deeply influenced by Viola's (2009) encouragement to produce "filipinized" critical pedagogy. Accordingly, this does not settle on reflection alone, but most importantly, to concretize the call to change the course of understanding the world by employing both theories and practices that bring democracy, peace, and equality.

### ***1.3 The Language and Its Role in Critical Pedagogy***

Unfortunately, critical pedagogy, as an approach, is not widely acknowledged in language teaching in the Filipino context because of the cultural conservatism as it claimed to be true among Asians as passive and reticent (Kumaravadivelu, 2010). Indeed, language classrooms highly focus on language structures and rules than achieving the social functions of the language. As a result, this reality threatens the full implementation of shaping student-centeredness.

Influenced by the works and minds of critical thinkers from Paulo Freire and other modern-day advocates of criticality in education and instruction, I am coming from reflective teaching accounts during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic on how revolutionary [language] learning establishes power and social justice. This is by understanding if the role of education is justly served to the learners, giving them opportunities for participation and allowing them to recognize power relation (Richardson, 2001). It is essential to understand that learning activists do not learn in social isolation. Instead, they often learn from one another by networking and observing the actions and strategies to become more skilled (Ollis, 2012). Critical and anti-oppressive pedagogy must then take a decisive role in directing the learners towards identity shaping and, in the end, a social reconstruction (Baudu, 2012; Tuman, 1998). Besides, it is also worthy of considering language as a tool in strengthening their voice through awareness and participation to configure social, cultural, economic, political, and historical statuses. The reform of pedagogy in the name of a higher level of critical thinking must be a priority in the language classroom as a form of social resistance by making the program, i.e., the curriculum and instruction, more contemporary, more politically aware, and more critical. Thus, teaching English must be labeled as the best way of enfranchising, liberating, enabling, and empowering those who will make the future (Tuman, 1998) as there are reflective numbers of studies and literature. They become the source of more critical language pedagogy features as a discipline, a philosophy and a movement for whatever purpose.

Having this Freirean ideology through critical language pedagogy, the problems in the society such as injustice, oppression, discrimination, marginalization, and similar social occurrences are recognized by the ESL learners. With an emphasis on the use of language, CLP helps develop such power and political ideologies needed to address such social inconsistencies and deficiencies through revolutionary delivery of the language pedagogy with a greater purpose of going beyond the common understanding of the merely communicative discipline, but rather, an avenue of processing democracy and social reforms initiated by the empowered language learners. This shows the presence of politics and power necessary to attain the goal of social transformation successfully.

Hence, this approach solidifies the student-centeredness in the teaching-learning processes. The students are the heart of learning since they tend to be dynamic members of the learning community. In the end, the process allows them to think provocatively and reflectively by engaging themselves in any sociopolitical issues

and activities. With these opportunities, they would undoubtedly enjoy academic freedom while enjoying their rights and power in education and decision making. These rights afforded to them may not necessarily mean a way of disempowering the teachers. Rather, these enhance their role as they create every possibility, power, and equality present in their authentically designed classroom tasks. As teachers pose problems that invite students to engage positively and produce new knowledge, they become learners in their own rights. Providing clarity to this scenario, teachers and students appear to be in an equal learning arena. Hence, critical reflection and action break the gap between social and educational theory and classroom and community practices.

## **2 The Pandemic as a Form of Learning Oppression**

On top of this condition, pandemic becomes a form of learning oppression that limits our students' rights and opportunities toward education, especially in a community like the Philippines. Indeed, most learners have lost their voices in acquiring and producing the much needed authentic knowledge. With those inevitable effects of the pandemic, our government has immediately responded to protect us from a more severe impact by making policies and precautionary measures. Sad to say, significant government agencies and even private academic institutions have failed to listen to the clamours of the ordinary teachers and students' voices as substantial elements in framing responses to the shift of the learning modality. Our students, who are considered the center of the educational processes, are not even consulted to determine their needs and demands. The school administrations and their consultants drastically created policies on their own. Hence, the skeletal force of those guidelines and policies are highly influenced by their power instead of the learners'.

In these cases, equal opportunity among the schools' stakeholders becomes problematic as the powerful control the systems entirely without looking at how significant the others are in designing better guidelines, programs, and policies. As a result, the learners' needs and demands are at risk in no way that they are not justly consulted in understanding them during the pandemic. After all, they are our measurement of learning successes.

### ***2.1 The Pandemic Opportunities to Social Learning and Understanding***

True enough, most of students are helpless to get access to equal instructions. Surprisingly, it appears that their discriminated and oppressed encounters from the influential figures in the academe have become their means to concerted critical

pedagogy in their language classroom. Most of them freely discussed society's realities that silenced them during the pandemic. The imposed lockdown in Metro Manila and eventually in the nearby provinces to the rest of the country has initially boxed the learners to substantial learning exposure and engagement in the typical classroom settings. Like many Filipinos, homes and workplaces become one where students have barely seen the wall that divides their schools and their families.

Many of my students suffered from different forms of anxiety, which appeared in many stories and social media posts. Others even claimed to have depression. While I merely relied on social media, I assume that these are but the expected consequences of this world crisis. But again, the limited movement and engagement of my students in language learning have even proved their sense of social knowledge and understanding of the reality of their community. While its discussions that raise social awareness and relevance are not typically observed among them, perhaps of their age and interests, they have started to talk about specific societal issues that directly and indirectly affect them. Most of them do not only speak about class suspensions, but the justifications of this academic decision have been explored. More to that is their serious discussion on the government education system's readiness to provide their needs for them to survive in this learning challenges. The decision of the administration is now observed and becomes critical to them like the instant remote instructions, the quality of learning they would gain and the quality of engagement they have with the teachers and their fellow learners. In effect, social media platforms become their territory to dissect the related issues to this learning modality. Some of those online trending issues are the call to education freeze and the total suspension of all academic activities to prioritize every family's economic condition, health, and security. On a positive note, the Philippine educational institutions remain tough in continuing the learning in the midst of pandemic.

Similarly, my senior high school students are now critical to talk about food security and agricultural resiliency during the pandemic. They have started to care about the poor who have suffered from the scarcity of the basic needs in these difficult times. Some of them discussed the Philippines' health status and its readiness to provide care and protection to the millions of Filipinos, especially those affected by the virus. Interestingly, most of them even researched the health department's budget and how this possibly responds to the healthcare condition. On top of these is their active discussion on government officials' alleged corruption issues as a hindrance to the public services. Problematizing these anomalies and malpractices in the government, they have begun to think of the marginalized sectors, especially the poor students and their families: how they engage and survive in remote learning, how they equally receive their rights to education, how they survive the day with enough food on their table, how they fight the virus with enough protection and information, and how they continue their access to the world while living in isolation and physical distancing. True enough, their voices have started to grow bigger and louder to know and tell the truth that affects their lives.

These changes in the beliefs and attitudes of the students are greatly attributed to their language learning through their proper, careful and effective use of language as they discussed those socially-relevant issues that worsen the pandemic condition.

Evidences appear through citations and references of the issues as proofs of their academic discourse. Likewise, the degree of their participations has been strengthened by critical questioning, and by providing solutions to the issues presented. These are all evident in their written works, online discussion fora, and classroom discussions. Hence, their voices are all heard and become authentic source of information in doing and refining their classroom works.

### **3 Critical Pedagogy and Language Learning**

#### ***3.1 Academic Writing and Pandemic Issues: Learning the World More than Learning the Word***

Due to this pandemic, our institution has implemented two-hour synchronous and asynchronous sessions in a week. Before the sessions, we designed the course sites with the needed materials like the following: course information folder containing course and course site description, online house rules, and weekly expectations. We also have additional folders for a course outline, teacher's information folder, and consultation hours that further provide our learners extra time for clarifications. Learning module folders are also created to give students a guide to know their weekly learning standards and competences, learning materials, assessments and rubrics, links, and materials for synchronous and asynchronous sessions and consultation periods. In case my students cannot attend the synchronous class because of their poor internet connection and other technical problems, they are provided with teacher-prepared learning packets that serve as their guide to monitor their learning. Similarly, they are also provided with a copy of the recorded online class for their reference in their own pace. These teachers' efforts become our means to narrow or limit the possibility of inequality and injustices. Giving justice to our students, we adopted the Department of Education's Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) in response to time challenges. The government and private schools both employ virtual and modular approaches to serve their clientele justly.

Interestingly, a virtual language classroom appears to be a perfect venue for creating multiple voices that inspire subjectivities. In my academic writing class, we primarily use the Blackboard Learning System. It encourages the production of their voices through some of its useful features like Discussion Board, Active Collaboration and Integration, Group Management, Social Learning, and SafeAssign. We also have access to other relevant institutional course tools like Microsoft Team, Zoom, Cloud Campus, and Google Meet. Using these course tools, my students showed their hunger for learning due to the pandemic's learning oppression. These are manifested by their stand on different issues that oppressed them, including economic, agricultural, health resiliency, and education readiness. Discussing these issues as materials for learning, the process proves that the learners do not just learn the grammar structures, characteristics and features of



academic writing, but more importantly, they understand the real condition of the world. Technology, in this case, has fully supported the critical pedagogy and critical learning because language learners, being digital natives, are more engaged in virtual mode using different news sites and apps that are helpful in their learning acquisition. Hence, their understanding of the world appear in most classroom activities, such as classroom interactions and writing like journals and reflections.

### ***3.2 Online Participatory Approach Toward Dialogic, Democratic, and Collaborative Academic Writing***

The prewriting stage is considered crucial in establishing well-crafted academic writing. This stage is initialized and strengthened by dialogic, democratic, and collaborative online discussions in this pandemic. Several social issues are raised, brainstormed, and justified, like suspensions of classes and different social events and gatherings, readiness and flexibility of education system, food security and sustainability of agriculture, the strength of public health, the essential public services and transparency of the government amid a health crisis.

With those problems raised by my students, I thought of a participatory approach in executing the lessons in academic writing. Through this approach, my students would able to solve their problems in relation to their social world guided by the language of academic writing. With their engagement and intervention with the pandemic issues, they could think and offer authentic solutions through their outputs. In this case, they are empowered in such a way that they make their own decision and action as they intensify their language literacy through writing.

Similarly, dialogic and democratic online group discussions are showed by thoroughly penetrating the nature and impact of the social problems, understanding and questioning the government imposed precautionary measures, and providing self-formulated and authentic solutions to the identified social issues. These features of critical pedagogy are highly shown by the use of the learners' first language (L1) during the pre-writing stage. Mostly, private schools in the Philippines implement the "English-Only Policy" (EOP). Still, most of the time, those schools or even the classroom-based language policy ends up miserably because others would instead observe silently rather than participate. This silence becomes an outlet of my students who are afraid of others' possible judgment if they commit grammatical mistakes. While many classroom teachers remain skeptical on the role and impact of L1 in L2 learning, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning supports the use of L1 (Harun et al., 2014). The first language, as a cultural artefact, serves as a regulatory tool in L2 learning. Indeed, it connects their learning and the social world; hence, their active participation in the second language classroom discourse can be empowered by their L1. Through this, empowerment is also supported by their agency and identity as language learners.

In my class, I highly encourage using English as a second language as it is the heart of the subject I teach in support to the school's "English-Only Policy". However, the learners' home language still functions especially in the early stages of writing. For instance, in one of the highlights of the lessons in Academic Writing when I discussed writing a Position Paper, I asked them to reflect on the present condition of the country and the world concerning COVID-19 pandemic. To establish the academic value of the discourse, I encouraged them to read both local and international articles and watch news programs that highlight the pandemic. These were all parts of their homework prior to the discussion proper. During the discussion and the pre-writing stage of the position paper writing, the class was divided into smaller groups to prepare the topic to be discussed in their paper as their output using Blackboard Collaboration for at least 30 min. This activity gave them opportunity to share the gathered materials about COVID-19 and their reflections about it, including their personal, family and community experiences during the preliminary part of the lockdown.

During the small group discussion (breakout session), I observed that most of my students discussed and brainstormed using Filipino or Taglish (a mix of Tagalog and English). These codeswitching and code-mixing are dominantly used not just in academic institution, but the rest of the country. In this case, I felt how they were incredibly connected to their community by discussing national and local issues that directly and indirectly affect them. After the pre-writing stage, they engaged themselves into group writing using google editing for an hour. Looking into their final output, I can say that they successfully create cohesive position paper using the rubric I personally prepared (focus/clarity of the position, organization and structure, argument and support/evidence for position, and mechanics of writing). Aside from quantitative remarks, I also consider qualitative feedback guided by the provided rubric. There are indeed more inputs or authentic knowledge that they produced and shared. This is because of their connection to the language's cultural impact and how they connect themselves to the topic being discussed. In this case, I can directly say that the effective and cohesive output of my students are supported by the use of technology and students' use of their L1 in an L2 class as a source of power to understand and speak the truth about pandemic that affect both instructions and learning.

The following were excerpted from their recorded conversations:

**Excerpt 1: Financial Support of the Government to the Poorest of the Poor Filipinos**

- Student A:* *May ayuda na ba from the government? (Is there already a financial aid from the government?)*
- Student B:* *Feeling ko wala pa lahat? (I think not everyone has received that yet.)*
- Student A:* *Dami na nagrereklamo. Look at the news. (There are a lot of Filipinos who are complaining now.)*
- Student B:* *What can you expect? Normal na 'yan sa gobyerno natin, inutil. (It's the government, so inutile!)*

- Student C:* *Kawawa talaga yung mga mahihirap sa ... yung mga hinuli.* (I pity the condition of the poor ... They were arrested.) (About the mass demonstration happened during the lockdown in the north of Metro Manila initiated by the poor community sectors.)
- Student B:* *Yes, wala na nga makain, hinuli pa.* (Yes, they don't even have food, and yet they were arrested.)
- Student A:* *Kase nga wala silang social distancing...* (I think they did not observe social distancing.)
- Student B:* *Oh common, they have nothing on their tables, walang trabaho, walang kita. Natural magagalit sila sa gobyeno.* (... no jobs, no salary. They will naturally get angry at the government.)

The excerpt conversations, taken from their small group discussion using Blackboard Collaboration and Zoom, allow them to express their knowledge as a product of their social interactions in various online discussions. They cannot merely absorb pandemic stories. Still, they feel that they need to engage in relevant social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Using their home language appears in the recorded conversations, they created identities and agency as members of a bigger community affected by the pandemic. They need to speak to produce a more potent and transformative voice representing student and youth sectors in their little ways.

Additionally, their participation has become a platform for interrogation of power that deals with the officials' insensitivity to handle the increasing number of confirmed affected patients. They also joined the public clamors toward the health secretary's resignation because of his incompetence and corruption in the agencies under his office.

### **Excerpt 2: On the Public Clamor Toward the Resignation of the Health Secretary**

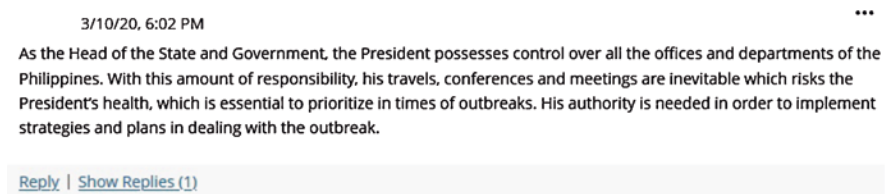
- Student 1:* *Until now, wala naman nababago. Bagot na ako sa sitwasyon natin.* (Until now, nothing has really changed. I'm getting bored with the situation.)
- Student 2:* *Lahat naman tayo. Do we have any choice?* (Everybody does.)
- Student 1:* *I dunno. Pero sa nakikita ko, walang silbi si Duque (the Health secretary).* (I think Duque is useless.)
- All:* *Tama hahahaha.* (True hahahaha.)
- Student 3:* *Oo nga. Dapat magresign na sya. Dami nang galit.* (Yes, he should resign. Many are already upset.)
- Student 4:* *Kapal lang ng mukha.* (Shameless.)
- Student 1:* *Agree.*
- Student 2:* *The president should consider a better health practitioner for the position. Dami naman d'yan.*  
(There are plenty who can really do his job.)
- Student 1:* *I think may mga suggestions naman ang ibang agencies like the Senate.* (I think there are already suggestions from other agencies like the Senate.)

In the end, the use of L1 in a dialogic and democratic discourse exemplifies a solid structure of empowering multiple voices in an ESL classroom as the development of students' voice should be about moving from a model of practice concerned with 'efficiency and hierarchical modes of accountability characterized by metaphors of wholeness, reflection and inquiry and collaboration and congeniality (Rodduck & Flutter 2004, cited in Bain, 2010).

Likewise, it is interesting to highlight that when the topic provokes and promotes social relevance, students engaged more in the discussions and activities. They can even produce unexpected insights that are not customarily observed during their typical classroom instructions. For example, when I asked them to write their stand on "the no-touch policy" with the president (this was among the initial policies that the government proposed during the first few weeks of the lockdown), most of them have rich arguments expressing both their support and opposition to it. For those who have supported the policy, the stands were supported by legal arguments being the head of state, leader of national government, and commander in chief. For instance, Fig. 1 stressed that the president needs to remain healthy to lead the country, especially in this most trying time. Additionally, Fig. 2 cited the president's age, who is now 74 years old and vulnerable to the disease. Hence, it is a must to ensure the president's safety as mandated by the Philippine constitution.

While other students support the policy, they cannot avoid suggesting that the government or the president implements other equally significant actions. This is to ensure the security of the people like improving public sanitation and strict implementation of home quarantine and social distancing. In Fig. 3, it was emphasized that protecting the president should also be extended to the people around him and generally, the public. Still emphasizing the age of the president, Fig. 4 added the public sanitation to intensify the public safety against the virus.

On the other hand, while some of my students understand the legal protocols that protect the president, most of them are critical to handle the issue. Indeed, one of my students stated that this policy is self-serving that prioritizes his family more than his country. Some believe that this "no-touch policy" with the president may be detrimental to the effectiveness of the basic services he needs to offer to the Filipino people. Indeed, most of my students expressed that the president has the oath to serve the country, the people, and the constitution like the emphasis given in Figs. 5 and 6. Therefore, protection to be given to the president must also be extended to



**Fig. 1** Student A's response to the online blackboard forum. Retrieved November 25, 2020, from [https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/\\_106945\\_1/engagement/discussion/\\_2922876\\_1?view=discussions&courseId=\\_106945\\_1](https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/_106945_1/engagement/discussion/_2922876_1?view=discussions&courseId=_106945_1). Screenshot by author (University of Santo, 2020).

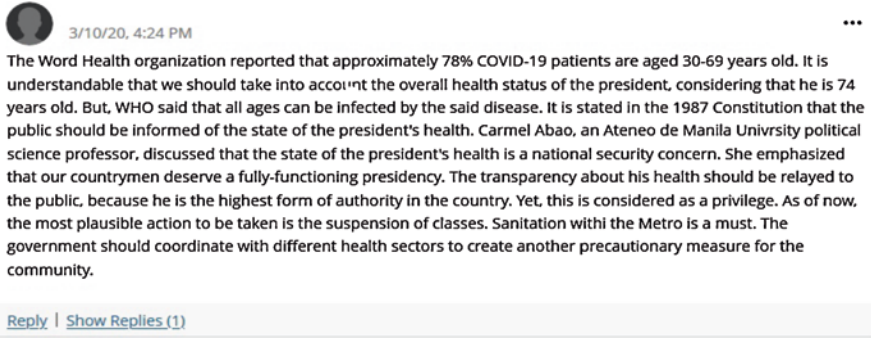


Fig. 2 Student B's response to the online blackboard forum. Retrieved November 25, 2020, from [https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/\\_106945\\_1/engagement/discussion/\\_2922876\\_1?view=discussions&courseId=\\_106945\\_1](https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/_106945_1/engagement/discussion/_2922876_1?view=discussions&courseId=_106945_1). Screenshot by author (University of Santo, 2020)

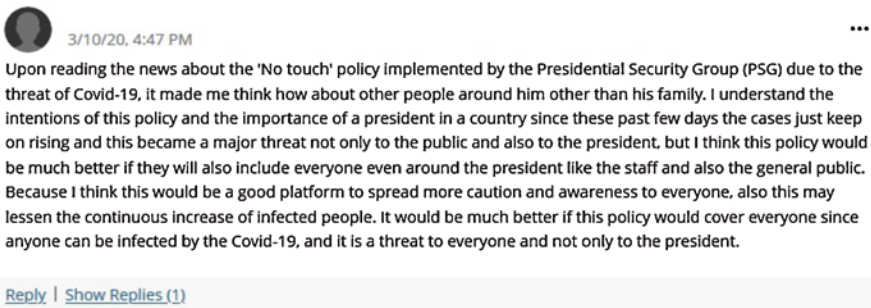


Fig. 3 Student C's response to the online blackboard forum. Retrieved November 25, 2020, from [https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/\\_106945\\_1/engagement/discussion/\\_2922876\\_1?view=discussions&courseId=\\_106945\\_1](https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/_106945_1/engagement/discussion/_2922876_1?view=discussions&courseId=_106945_1). Screenshot by author (University of Santo Tomas, 2020).

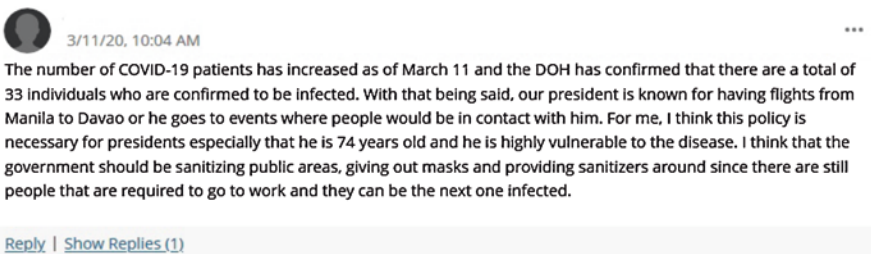
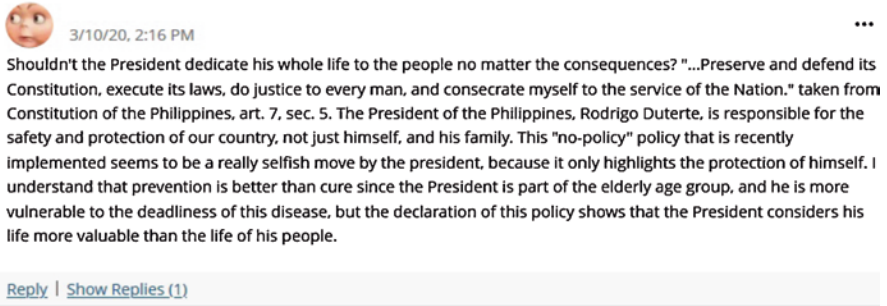
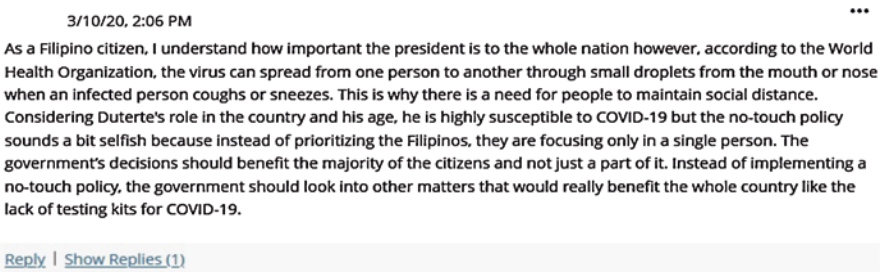


Fig. 4 Student D's response to the online blackboard forum. Retrieved November 25, 2020, from [https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/\\_106945\\_1/engagement/discussion/\\_2922876\\_1?view=discussions&courseId=\\_106945\\_1](https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/_106945_1/engagement/discussion/_2922876_1?view=discussions&courseId=_106945_1). Screenshot by author (University of Santo Tomas, 2020).



**Fig. 5** Student E's response to the online blackboard forum. Retrieved November 25, 2020, from [https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/\\_106945\\_1/engagement/discussion/2922876\\_1?view=discussions&courseId=\\_106945\\_1](https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/_106945_1/engagement/discussion/2922876_1?view=discussions&courseId=_106945_1). Screenshot by author (University of Santo Tomas, 2020).



**Fig. 6** Student F's response to the online blackboard forum. Retrieved November 25, 2020, from [https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/\\_106945\\_1/engagement/discussion/\\_2922876\\_1?view=discussions&courseId=\\_106945\\_1](https://ust.blackboard.com/ultra/courses/_106945_1/engagement/discussion/_2922876_1?view=discussions&courseId=_106945_1). Screenshot by author (University of Santo Tomas, 2020).

every Filipino through social distancing, home quarantine, and other health protocols.

The students' active engagement from their classroom interactions, breakout sessions, and discussion fora has further helped them create different social actions, projects, and programs in proposal writing. Several themes were identified showing how they penetrate social problems and issues during the pandemic that affect them as community members. Similarly, their proposals have shown that several themes empower everyone's voices as significant components of building a stronger community. Through these proposals, the students have proven that more than reading and writing the word, it is more powerful to read and write the world. After reading all their proposals, I categorized them by themes. Some of the constructs involved equal rights to education, sustainability to fitness, health and sanitation, food security and agricultural resiliency, equal access to common services, women and senior citizens, support to the transportation sectors, and LGBTQIA+ group.

Interestingly, they have discussed clearly how these proposals would be implemented. On top of their proposals is the community's role, similar to other sectors, supporting the pandemic's most affected sectors. It proves that every member of

**Table 1** Thematic summary of students’ proposals

Identified problems	Proposed Activities/Projects	Implementation
<b>1. Equal Rights to Education and Social Justice</b>	<i>“Knowledge is the Key”</i>	Virtual or modular instructions Partnership with the local government units for monitoring, administration, and supervision Empowering non-government organizations (NGO’s) Virtual or distant consultations
	<i>“THE MORE YOU KNOW, THE BETTER: A Healthcare Teaching Project”</i>	
	<i>“Kalinangan sa Barangay” (Cultivation in Villages)</i>	
	<i>“ALAM PINOY: Know Your Risk and Know Your Status” (Filipino Knowledge)</i>	
	<i>“Gadgets for All”</i>	
	<i>“Disconnecting the line is disconnecting learning.”</i>	
<b>2. Sustaining Fitness, Health, and Sanitation</b>	<i>“Health on Wheels: Caravan on a Medical Mission”</i>	Partnership with the local government units and rural health units for monitoring, administration, and supervision Empowering non-government organizations (NGO’s) Virtual or modular physical activities Virtual or distant consultations
	<i>“Plants vs. Zumba”</i>	
	<i>“Brain Maps: A Modern Take on Mental Health”</i>	
	<i>“howrYOU: an innovative application for teenagers who self-harm.”</i>	
	<i>“Breakfast is served: A Feeding Program to Fight against Malnutrition.”</i>	
	<i>“Bangon Bata: Accessible Healthcare to Street Children” (“Stand Children) (“Think Blue”</i>	
<b>3. Food Security and Agricultural Resiliency</b>	<i>“Healthy Wealthy Deli: A Culinary Community Workshop”</i>	Partnership with both government and non-government organizations Promoting urban farming Virtual or modular training (webinar)
	<i>“Public On-site Greenhouse Implementation (POGI)”</i>	
	<i>“Urban Gardening”</i>	
<b>4. Equal Access to Public Services</b>	<i>“#SanaAll: Basic Health Services Access to Low-lying Areas in The Philippines” (#IWishEverybodyCould)</i>	Partnership with both government and non-government agencies Creation of internet applications for monitoring and supervision of the basic services, especially the recipients
	<i>“Project GRAB (Generating Resources for Access to hospital Beds): A Program Solution for the Lack of Hospital Beds in Metro Manila.”</i>	
	<i>“Helping Hands Ready to Reach Out”</i>	
	<i>“Ayuda Time!: From Class A to E” (Time to Help: From Class A to E)</i>	

(continued)

**Table 1** (continued)

Identified problems	Proposed Activities/Projects	Implementation
<b>5. Youth, Women and Senior Citizens</b>	<i>“Urban YOUth : YOUth Serving Youth”</i>	Partnership with both government and non-government agencies
	<i>“LifeBoost for Kids: A Perspective for the Young Minds”</i>	Creation of more accessible hotlines for youth, women, and Senior citizens’ concerns online or modular
	<i>“Hotline: Saving Women”</i>	engagements and consultations with the experts
	<i>“ENGAGE!: Giving The Life Back to the Elderly Generation”</i>	
	<i>“Kahit Maputi na ang Buhok Ko”</i> (Despite our Old Age)	
<b>6. Transportation Sector</b>	<i>“Know the Aid for the Pain”</i>	Partnership with government and non-government organizations
<b>7. LGBTQ+ Condition</b>	<i>“Balay Kulay Center For All Colors”</i> (Rainbow House Center for All)	Partnership with government and non-government organizations Online and distant consultations

society’s voices and significance can shape a better place if everyone equally participates and whose voices are heard and acted upon. Despite this health crisis, students believe that virtual engagement and implementation can work successfully. It becomes the new mode of community understanding. The table below shows the summary of the students’ output with an emphasis on empowered voice and critical stand (Table 1).

These identified themes from the students’ output appear to be the “filipinized” critical pedagogy in teaching the language. Every proposal clearly shows what the people, especially the marginalized and the oppressed, need to do to survive the pandemic. These proposals have all started with the students’ reflection and end with their authentic action. Indeed, these proposals show that power and transformation can be achieved through community involvement and partnerships. With the authenticity of the voice from the learners, supported by their connection to their community, the presented output achieved cohesiveness and coherence.

Very importantly, the success of their work which is manifested in both synchronous and asynchronous tasks are also supported by the teacher’s assessment style that construct criticality in language learning. Primarily, there is a rubric used to assess every activity, but students’ voice should be presented already in this stage. This can be done through negotiation and agreement in such a way that I presented the elements that an academic writing should possess; on the other hand, students also contributed in constructing the rubric such as the level of argument and position. In assessing their works, I highly observed both teachers’ and peers’ feedbacking focusing on their writing mechanics to maintain the academic value of their work. In the end, I allotted space for their inquiry about my feedback. Online discussion and consultations followed in case there are groups with questions or clarifications.



## 4 Conclusion

True enough, nobody can stop one from learning even at the height of any form of disaster or crisis. Like any form of oppression, the more people experience the pains of either human or non-human tyranny, the more effort they exert to look for any possible way to crush the oppressive elements that caused their miserable life. In the beginning, when the Philippine government, through the Department of Education, has implemented different precautions to sustain learning during a pandemic, everything was rejected. Every mind has various dogmas, every mouth has other verses, and every heart has different concerns. However, while the issue of remote teaching is still under argument because of its perceived oppressive effect that divides the privileged and the underprivileged, the impact of the health crisis has also made way for the learners to become more radical in problematizing the present condition, in social engagement, and in providing more feasible programs and policies that would address this global pandemic. While I see and experience how marginalized students suffer enormously from the unjust effect of COVID-19, I still believe that everyone is a victim with different degrees. But on the brighter side, this learning oppression has created a more aggressive instructional approach. This effect directs the learners to a more meaningful and substantial language learning as critical language pedagogy is highly observed in English class.

Among those shreds of evidence is the dialogic and democratic involvement in the virtual discussions using Blackboard and Google Meet by giving their authentic insights in producing better and stronger knowledge necessary in the discipline. Similarly, this situation has encouraged the use and application of truth-based instructions by highlighting and dissecting social issues that directly and indirectly affect their lives. My engagement with CLP during pandemic is, indeed, intensified by participatory approach that allows my students understand the reality of today's world. Hence, problematizing pandemic issues also allow them to offer self-constructed solutions that empower them through language learning. This approach is supported in dialogic and collaborative online discussions that further shape democratic language learning. Allow me to emphasize the power of L1 in L2 learning because, in the Philippines, the learners' first language is not commonly considered a language resource. As a matter of fact, most Filipino teachers in English look at it as an impediment to L2 learning. Another exciting feature of CLP in my class is their first language producing different but rich ideas that contribute effectively in producing their final output. Finally, every learner proposed other social actions to continuously extend support and care to the various societal sectors, especially the marginalized, oppressed and discriminated making the instructions more ethical.

The issue of instructional materials and resources is also among those that further gives color to the criticality of language teaching. Primarily, there is an unavailability of the textbooks, manuals and other instructional materials that support critical pedagogy in language teaching. This experience shows that our school system is not yet ready to employ critical teaching and learning; nevertheless, our cultural conservatism remains powerful to find newer and fiercer formula in language

teaching and learning. Additionally, the lack of those materials has also forced us to look into locally available resources that help my students engage actively. For instance, we consider the daily news, editorials, commentaries and personal stories and experiences that provoked their thinking to be more radical in assessing issues that affect our lives during the pandemic. Since news websites are just a click away, they become the most accessible means for us to understand the society. This reality appears to be a very advantageous practice because it highlights the truth-based feature of critical pedagogy in raising consciousness.

## 5 Food for Thought

Virtual teaching and learning is definitely challenging especially for the Filipinos and perhaps in other developing countries and regions whose technology and internet service are not responsive to the demands of language education today. However, learning must continue despite all those struggles; otherwise, we will simply worsen the condition of learning oppression.

To my fellow language teachers who believe that language is more than just a structure, but a means of empowering the learners especially during the pandemic, I ask you all to join me in my journey in looking for all possible ways to provide the needs of our students. In times characterized by limitations and boundaries, online platforms become effective avenue of discovering more of our students' potentials in letting them engage with the world to know themselves fully and to concretize their role in creating dialogic, democratic and ethical territory where voices are humanely treated. In my engagement to language teaching, I have the following online platforms with specific features that allows an even louder students' voices (Table 2).

**Table 2** Suggested online platforms and their relevant features

Online platform	Relevant features that encourage students' voice
Blackboard/Cloud Campus	<p>Blackboard is compatible across devices</p> <p>Breakout Rooms allow the students to engage in small group discussion initiating brainstorming and knowledge facilitation and production</p> <p>Blackboard Forum allows students to freely give their feedback, reactions, comments and suggestions to the given topic</p> <p>Group Management supports small group collaborative and cooperative discussion</p> <p>SafeAssign supports students to produce authentic knowledge as it traces plagiarized contents from the submitted written output</p>
Google Meet	<p>Google Meet is also compatible to all devices</p> <p>Students can use chatbox to participate in case they cannot have problem with their audio</p> <p>Students can easily share screen when presenting their outputs</p>
Zoom	<p>Zoom is also compatible to all devices</p> <p>Breakout Rooms help students engage in small group discussions</p> <p>Students can freely share their screen when presenting their output</p> <p>Polls are available to let participants engage in an online polls</p> <p>Chatbox can also be used in case students cannot use their audio</p>

Hopefully, this reflective account will direct language educators and researchers to investigate critical language pedagogy during and even after the pandemic. It is good to carefully scrutinize the essential elements in language instructions to trace how language develops power among the learners as future nation-builders.

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