Article

Translating John Dewey's Idea of Education as a Social Function into EFL Teaching Practices

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A B S T R A C T

This article represents the writers' independent perspectives regarding the conversion of John Dewey's ideas about education as a social function. As is recognized, Dewey's philosophical vision of education has been embraced by educational authorities in numerous countries, and his ideas remain pertinent in the contemporary era, where the intricacies of societal challenges converge with the advancement of technology. The world appears to be becoming increasingly interconnected. In the context of EFL, students must be equipped with the tools to effectively process the rapid influx of information and actively engage in societal issues to address challenges. Accordingly, this article aims to translate Dewey's concept of education as a social function, given that there is still a paucity of literature on this topic, despite the prevalence of studies that indirectly utilize Deweyan ideas, such as collaborative learning. However, no explicit connection is made to Dewey's ideas in education. This article commences with an examination of Dewey's education as a social function, subsequently extending the analysis to the context of EFL instruction. In this section, the writers propose EFL teaching instructions and activities that align with the tenets of Deweyan philosophy. It is hoped that this article will contribute to the ongoing discourse on the interconnection between EFL and the social function of education and provide insights for EFL educators in the formulation of instructional strategies, given the dual objective of equipping learners with linguistic proficiency and preparing them to take responsible roles within their communities.

Keywords: *John Dewey's Ideas of Education, Education as a Social Function, EFL Teaching Practices, Commentary Articles, Perspective Article*

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INTRODUCTION

John Dewey, one of the most prominent educational theorists of the early twentieth century, argues that education should be understood as a social function rather than merely a process of acquiring knowledge or technical skills (Dewey, 2001). His educational philosophy emphasizes experiential learning, democratic participation, and the integration of schooling with real-life social contexts. Dewey contends that academic culture should reflect society itself, allowing students to actively participate in learning processes and interpersonal interactions through collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility. Consequently, Deweyan pedagogy promotes student-centered learning that values independent thinking, cooperation, and social responsibility rather than rote memorization and standardized testing.

Dewey's ideas remain highly relevant in the contemporary era, particularly in light of rapid technological advancement and increasing global interconnectedness. Modern societies require individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also capable of adapting to change, communicating effectively, solving problems, and collaborating with others. Educational institutions that embrace Dewey's principles are better positioned to prepare learners for active citizenship and meaningful participation in society. Such institutions emphasize interactive learning experiences and the cultivation of critical thinking skills, enabling

students to engage with complex social issues and contribute constructively to their communities (Noddings, 2015; Paul & Elder, 2019a).

Within the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), these demands are especially significant. Language learning today extends beyond grammatical competence and vocabulary acquisition; it involves preparing learners to engage in authentic communication and social interaction across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Although many contemporary EFL practices implicitly reflect Deweyan principles—such as collaborative learning and communicative language teaching—explicit discussions of education as a social function in relation to EFL remain limited. Therefore, this article aims to translate John Dewey's concept of education as a social function into EFL teaching practices by examining his key ideas and exploring their pedagogical implications for language instruction

METHOD

This article adopts a qualitative conceptual approach in the form of a commentary or perspective paper. Rather than employing empirical data collection, the study is grounded in an interpretative and reflective analysis of John Dewey's philosophical works, particularly his notion of education as a social function. Relevant literature in the fields of philosophy of education, critical pedagogy, and EFL teaching is examined to support and contextualize the discussion.

The analysis focuses on synthesizing Deweyan concepts with contemporary EFL teaching practices. Through theoretical interpretation and pedagogical reflection, the article proposes instructional principles and classroom activities that align with Dewey's educational philosophy. This approach allows for a meaningful exploration of how education as a social function can be operationalized within EFL contexts without relying on experimental or survey-based research methods.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
Dewey's Concepts of Education as a Social Function

A thinker and teacher, Dewey conceived of education as a social tool in the early 1900s. He believes that schools should do more than simply teach facts and prepare children to join society; rather, they should prioritize hands-on learning, sharp thinking, and problem-solving (Garrison, Neubert, & Reich, 2015; Noddings, 2015; Paul & Elder, 2019). Dewey argues that schools must adapt to the fast-changing and challenging world in which we live (Dewey, 2001). His perspective challenges the conventional wisdom of the time, advocating for classrooms that are more collaborative and engaged with real-world issues. Despite this, his ideas continue to influence the way most educational institutions teach today, demonstrating the close relationship between schools and society (Noddings, 2015).

Dewey initiates a transformative shift in education. He advocates for a multifaceted approach to learning that transcends the limitations of the traditional classroom. His emphasis on experiential learning and the practical application of knowledge has profoundly influenced how educators plan their lessons and interact with students (Noddings 2015). Dewey's legacy continues to reverberate in contemporary educational settings. We observe its reverberations in the emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving, as well as in the promotion of collaborative learning (Noddings 2015). As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, Dewey's ideas serve as a reminder of the vital role that schools play in society. His key concepts of education as a social function address the following points.

Firstly, Dewey (2001) conceptualizes education as a means of social progress. He posits that education should advance democratic ideals, facilitate collaboration between individuals from disparate backgrounds, and prepare citizens to influence societal development. He contends that schools should facilitate social progress rather than merely transfer knowledge; thus, schools should not simply impart book learning but also cultivate thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and community engagement (Pérez-Ibáñez, 2018; Schecter, 2011;
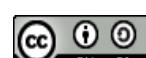
Van der Ploeg, 2016; Williams, 2017). These approaches have consequences for the way students learn. Experiential learning encourages students to become involved with social issues, emphasizing the value of community involvement. Learning by doing allows students to apply their knowledge in real-world situations. This combination of approaches enables students to interact with their environment outside of school, helping them to gain a deeper understanding of social problems and to work towards solving them in their communities (Schecter, 2011; Williams, 2017). Dewey's concept of education as a means of social progress can be interpreted as preparing students to facilitate positive change and contribute to the growth of society. This entails encouraging teachers to provide opportunities for students to engage with local communities, participate in service activities, and advocate for fairness (Dewey, 2001). Such experiences encourage the development of empathy, responsibility, and initiative, which collectively contribute to the construction of a more equitable world.

Secondly, Dewey (2001) considers education to be a process of social reconstruction. This entails the active engagement of students in the reconstruction of knowledge and the creation of new social realities. In order to achieve this, education should serve as a tool to reshape society (Chengbing & Ming, 2019). However, this is impossible to achieve if schools continue to focus on passive learning. Consequently, he condemns traditional educational systems for placing too much emphasis on rote memorization and passive learning, which he believes to be destructive to creativity and social progress (Garrison, Neubert, & Reich, 2015; Bleazby, 2013; Lind, 2023). As a consequence of his criticism of the traditional educational approach, Dewey (2001) advocates for a learning approach that places greater emphasis on collaboration, inquiry, and problem-solving based on real-world scenarios. By engaging students in their communities and encouraging them to challenge authority and question societal norms, Dewey (2001) believed that education could be a catalyst for social change and reconstruction. Furthermore, he views that it can contribute to the creation of a more just and democratic society.

Thirdly, Dewey (2001) assumes that education should be conceptualized as a collaborative endeavor. In his view, the classroom serves as a microcosm of society, where students and teachers collaborate to examine, explore, and resolve issues collectively. Students must learn to collaborate in the classroom; therefore, schools and teachers must design curricula that include collaborative learning activities. Furthermore, collaborative learning is an active, not passive, learning approach. It allows students to share ideas, discuss, listen to different perspectives, negotiate meaning, and learn to make collective decisions (Frank, 2017; Shuffelton, 2018). These processes serve as a tool to train students to participate in societal activities.

By establishing collaborative relationships with students, educators have fostered a learning environment that encourages active engagement and constructive dialogue. This approach enables students to express their ideas, interact with their peers, and work collectively towards shared goals. In light of this, Dewey's (2001) conceptualization of education as a collaborative endeavor resonates with the notion that social interaction and experiential learning are equally pivotal in the formation of a competent character, one that is equipped to guide the ever-evolving landscape of the modern world.

Fourthly, Dewey (2001) conceives that education is a vital component of the sustainability and advancement of a democratic society. He asserts that education should equip students with the capacity to engage actively in the democratic process, thereby empowering individuals to become well-informed and engaged citizens. To this end, Dewey (2001) views that educational institutions must cultivate students' abilities to think critically and solve problems effectively. He argues that critical thinking and problem-solving skills are indispensable for the formation and sustenance of a democratic society. Individuals must be allowed to think critically to make sound decisions and actively participate in society. Training students in critical thinking and problem-solving skills is the only way to develop their capacity to question assumptions, analyze information, think things through in careful dialogue, and solve problems (Dewey, 2001). Fostering a culture of these two skills in

educational settings can encourage students to contribute positively toward the upholding of democratic ideals within society and democratic values (Larsson, 2017; Paul & Elder, 2019b).

Finally, Dewey (2001) emphasizes the significance of community in education. He recognizes the necessity of community involvement in the educational process, thereby challenging the conventional practice of schools operating in isolation from their surrounding communities. Dewey (2001) states that schools should integrate activities within the community. He views learning as a dynamic and interactive process that extends beyond the classroom and is embedded in a larger community. He advocates for an education that prepares students to actively engage with society by combining experiential learning with academic knowledge and real-world experiences. Dewey's (2001) philosophy highlights the importance of community involvement in education as a means of fostering comprehensive knowledge and empowering students to contribute to the betterment of both themselves and society.

Applying Dewey's Ideas to EFL Teaching

The application of Dewey's ideas of education as a social function to EFL teaching entails the recognition that language learning should be contextualized within the realms of contemporary life and authentic societal contexts. Dewey (2001) asserts that students must engage with their surroundings and apply knowledge in a meaningful manner, rather than merely learning facts or repeating phrases. This can be achieved within an EFL classroom by designing tasks, activities, and projects where students are engaged with the target language and encouraged to participate in the community. The objective of the writers is to translate Dewey's ideas into EFL classroom activities that will enable the field of EFL to prepare students for active participation in society and positive contributions to their communities. The writers, through independent thinking and perspective, put forth EFL activities as a result of the interpretation of Dewey's ideas, which are divided into the following sub-headings: (1) promoting authentic communication, (2) fostering a sense of community, (3) developing critical thinking and problem-solving, and (4) promoting student agency and ownership of learning.

Promoting Authentic Communication

EFL teachers should prioritize the use of English for meaningful interactions over the exclusive focus on grammar and vocabulary drills. This approach fosters the development of real communication skills. Such an approach will empower students, enabling them to communicate in English more effectively, thereby facilitating the expression of their ideas and thoughts (Al-Sofi, 2016; Sevy-Biloon & Chroman, 2019; Shaaban & Ghaith, 2005; Wijayanto & Hastuti, 2021). In addition to enhancing language proficiency, this practice fosters a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and cultures. Furthermore, utilizing English as a medium facilitates engagement with a broader audience and participation in global discourse, thereby expanding networks and opportunities for collaboration (Chen & Wright, 2017; Zhou & Burhanudeen, 2023). An intensified emphasis on meaningful communication in English would, therefore, contribute to more effective intercultural competence, stronger interpersonal relationships, and enhanced performance in personal and professional domains.

It is similarly imperative to integrate tasks and activities that emulate authentic language usage in authentic, real-world contexts. Placing students in exercises that imitate real-life interactions can facilitate the acquisition of practical skills for guiding a diverse array of linguistic scenarios beyond the classroom. In an EFL classroom, the aforementioned skills can be obtained through meaningful activities, including role-playing, group discussions, and problem-solving activities (e.g., McDonough, Crawford, & Mackey, 2015; Krebt, 2017; Prayoga, 2018; Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018; Shen, 2013). These activities facilitate the development of confidence in one's ability to communicate effectively. Additionally, they encourage critical thinking (Arifin, 2024; Ilyas, 2023) and linguistic creativity by challenging learners to adapt their language skills to varying social settings and cultural contexts. By

integrating authentic communication exercises into lesson plans, students can gain the skills necessary to engage in real-life conversations.

An additional method for promoting authentic communication is the creation of an environment where students are encouraged to openly share and discuss matters pertinent to them, thereby enabling them to identify solutions to their challenges. Integrating authentic scenarios into lesson plans facilitates meaningful engagement and enhances learners' capacity to contextualize their knowledge. Inviting learners to address issues that are connected to them boosts participation, thus motivating them to contribute to discussions and problem-solving exercises (AlShehri, 2019; Schmid, Kienle, & Şahin, 2023). This approach not only reinforces the teacher-student relationship but also develops peer collaboration, which is instrumental in fostering successful individuals in the classroom and beyond.

As previously stated, EFL instructions that facilitate authentic communication include role-plays, group discussions, and exercises based on real-life scenarios. Role-playing activities assist students in assuming the roles of different characters and communicating with one another in a hypothetical situation with a high degree of realism. This approach encourages the development of natural conversation and problem-solving skills. Additionally, they provide students with a secure setting in which to reduce their apprehension about speaking and to experiment with language usage. Group discussions allow students to express opinions, exchange ideas about a specific topic, and engage in meaningful conversations (Silvana, Kustati, & Darmayanti, 2018). Furthermore, group discussions facilitate the acquisition of collaborative and critical thinking skills, which are essential for learning, by teaching students to listen, respond, and negotiate with their peers.

In regard to real-life situational exercises, examples may include making a telephone call, ordering food in a restaurant, visiting a medical practitioner, or attending a job interview. Situational exercises in the real world simulate situations that exist outside the classroom, placing students in contexts relevant to practical language use. This allows them to gain the skills necessary to approach day-to-day interactions with confidence. Generally, interactional activities provide students with a dynamic and active environment in which to learn effective and fluent communication in a target language.

Fostering a Sense of Community

The field of EFL must foster a sense of community in accordance with Dewey's conceptualization of education as a social function. To this end, EFL teachers should endeavor to develop collaborative learning as a means of preparing students to achieve superior learning outcomes and more active engagement in the community. It is recommended that teachers facilitate an environment that encourages collaboration, communication, respect, and mutual support among students (Chen, 2018; Kuo, Chu, & Huang, 2015). Such an environment can foster positive interactions, enhance students' social fluency, and facilitate the exchange of diverse perspectives and creative thinking. This approach allows students to learn from each other and develop empathy, which can be beneficial in future professional settings (Chen, 2018; Jiang & Gao, 2020). Additionally, it can equip students with valuable life skills that can contribute to their overall development.

Furthermore, teachers should encourage students to engage in community-oriented projects. Such initiatives can foster a sense of collective responsibility and civic engagement within the educational context (Fearn, 2022). Examples of such projects include organizing food donations, beautification and cleanup activities in parks and neighborhoods, or participating in fundraising events. Such experiences allow students to hone their communication, problem-solving, and leadership skills in a real-world context. These competencies are fundamental for academic and professional success. Furthermore, community-oriented projects foster a sense of responsibility and pride in students, instilling in them the values of active and engaged citizenship (Porto, 2016; Swatitis, 2020). Ultimately, community service projects benefit the local area while preparing students to contribute positively to society.

In the context of EFL teaching instruction, teachers can facilitate the development of a sense of community among learners by incorporating group work projects, class discussions, and activities that require learners to work collaboratively. A group project is an effective method for fostering group cohesion and serves a more significant purpose than merely facilitating teamwork and communication. It allows students to exchange ideas, collaborate on problem-solving, and celebrate collective achievements (Alfares, 2017; Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014). When students work collectively to accomplish a task, it fosters a sense of friendship, brotherhood, and inclusivity within the classroom, ultimately creating a supportive and engaging learning environment.

Other examples of EFL classroom instructions that facilitate community-building include peer reviews, group discussions, and activities that can enhance team-building. Peer review allows students to engage in constructive feedback, collaboration, and mutual support within the classroom setting. Peer review activities facilitate the development of linguistic competence, appreciation of diverse perspectives, and the formation of an inclusive and bonded atmosphere in the classroom (Elboshi, 2021; Moloudi, 2011). Moreover, class discussions permit students to articulate their perspectives and disseminate their cultural and personal experiences, thereby reinforcing their sense of belonging to the group and the interconnectivity between them (Ren & Hu, 2012). When integrated into EFL instruction, these practices facilitate the establishment of a supportive community where students feel empowered to communicate effectively and develop their language skills in a collaborative setting, ultimately fostering a sense of community.

Developing Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

Dewey's concept of education asserts the development of critical thinking skills in students. It is becoming increasingly prevalent in educational systems across the globe and a prominent area of inquiry within numerous academic disciplines, including EFL. One of the most effective methods for fostering critical thinking and deeper understanding in students is through the use of thought-provoking, open-ended questions in lesson planning. When teachers pose questions that do not have a single, definitive answer, students are encouraged to utilize higher-order cognitive abilities, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In this way, students are encouraged to engage in critical thinking, to consider a range of perspectives on a given topic, and to reach well-reasoned conclusions (Feng, 2013; Goda et al., 2014; Wang & Seepho, 2017). Furthermore, open-ended questions have been shown to foster creativity and imagination among students. EFL teachers can facilitate students' independent thinking by incorporating activities into their lesson plans that get students to question assumptions, solve problems in creative ways, and make informed decisions in academic and real-life contexts.

Another approach to developing critical thinking and problem-solving in EFL students is for teachers to facilitate the analysis of social issues and the formulation of solutions in the target language, English. By analyzing and proposing solutions in English, students will develop abilities in critical and creative thinking, problem identification, examination of perspectives, and the development of feasible solutions (McGregor, 2007; Tosuncuoglu, 2018). Furthermore, such analysis concerning social problems extends the critical thinking process beyond the enhancement of English language proficiency only (Brookfield, 2012; Paul & Elder, 2019a). It also equips students with the capacity to direct practical challenges in their lives. By integrating guided discussions, research projects, and presentations into the syllabus, EFL students can engage with global matters, thereby developing a more comprehensive understanding of recent social issues, for example, poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, etc. This approach not only enhances knowledge of the world (Paul & Elder, 2019a) but also encourages the ability to participate in constructive dialogues and innovative solutions for a better society.

An additional approach to fostering critical and creative thinking in EFL students is to design instructional materials that inspire them to reconsider their assumptions. The act of challenging assumptions stimulates students to approach the problem with a questioning

mindset, thereby enhancing the depth of analysis and comprehension of the underlying concepts. The capacity for critical and creative thinking allows students to consider alternative perspectives on a given issue and to devise original solutions. Such an approach will not only enhance their linguistic abilities but also equip them with valuable skills that are essential for academic and professional success. This can be accomplished effectively by teachers through the implementation of activities that will prompt students to engage in critical and creative thinking, such as debating controversial topics, problem-solving exercises, analysis of media, creative writing exercises, or reflective writing (Aclan, Abd Aziz, & Valdez, 2016; Arabloo et al., 2021; Iman, 2017; Pederson, 2023; Sabah & Rashtchi, 2016; Trang & Anh, 2020). This approach develops a comprehensive set of skills in learners that are essential for success in a globalizing society, which is becoming increasingly complex. It is further theorized that fostering critical and creative thinking in EFL students by encouraging them to challenge assumptions promotes intellectual growth (Brookfield, 2012; Paul & Elder, 2019a) and prepares them to confront the challenges that lie ahead, both in their future academic studies and in pursuit of a career.

Alternative EFL teaching methods that foster critical and creative thinking skills include project-based learning (PBL) and inquiry-based learning (IBL) (Bashith & Amin, 2017; Cosgun & Atay, 2021; Sari & Prasetyo, 2021). Notable examples of PBL include the design of a sustainable city or the preparation of a multimedia presentation about any historical event. In PBL, students engage in critical and creative thinking about the subject matter by analyzing different perspectives to approach innovative solutions. Similarly, IBL, in which students formulate their questions and find the answers themselves, requires students to engage in critical and creative thinking (Wale & Bishaw, 2020; Zou & Lee, 2023). Furthermore, it will undoubtedly facilitate the development of independent thinking and problem-solving skills that are creative. It is possible to make students more analytical, open-minded, and imaginative learners in EFL classroom environments by using such alternative strategies in teaching.

Promoting Student Agency and Ownership of Learning

Student agency refers to the capacity of students to exercise control over their learning processes, encompassing the ability to make decisions and take action within the classroom setting (Klemenčič, 2015; Stenalt & Lassesen, 2022). In the EFL context, fostering student agency is of paramount importance, as it encourages learners to become more independent and critical thinkers (Liao, 2019). EFL teachers may facilitate student agency and learners' ownership of learning through various approaches, for instance, allowing students autonomy in task and assignment selection, encouraging self-reflection and goal-setting, fostering a growth mindset through praising effort rather than intelligence, and providing regular feedback and support (Liao, 2019). By doing so, students may perceive themselves as controllers of their learning process, leading to enhanced effectiveness, motivation, independence, and confidence in both academic and non-academic contexts.

By fostering student agency in the classroom, educators can establish a responsive and engaging learning environment where all students feel empowered to pursue their interests and to experience a sense of agency in controlling their own lives. This can enhance their motivation to engage in learning. It also facilitates the acquisition of the competencies and mindset necessary to journey the complexities of modern life. In essence, if EFL students have a sense of agency, they are significantly more resilient and adaptable, developing into independent learners who are better equipped to cope with challenges in their academic and personal lives.

CONCLUSION

The ideas of John Dewey are numerous and significant. His most notable concept is that of education as a social function. This asserts that students should not only be taught rote learning and memorization but also be encouraged to actively participate in society. To

achieve this, Dewey encourages educational institutions to serve as agents of social progress, facilitating the process of social reconstruction and contributing to advancement through the promotion of collaborative endeavors, active engagement, constructive dialogue, independence, and critical and creative thinking. The field study of EFL, which constitutes a component of the educational process, can play an instrumental role in achieving Dewey's philosophical vision. EFL teachers may therefore create, provide, and assign students instructions that foster active learning activities, including role-plays, group discussions, class discussions, exercises based on real-life situations, project work, collaborative work, peer reviews, team-building activities, critical thinking activities, creative thinking activities, problem-solving activities, debates, and inquiry-based learning activities. The completion of these activities within the context of EFL will not only facilitate the enhancement of students' language abilities but will also prepare them to engage in active participation within their communities and societies. This exemplifies the social function of EFL.

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