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The Place of Global Issues in Foreign Language Classes from the Perspective of English Lecturers: A Critical Look

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ABSTRACT

Background: As an approach aiming to increase students' knowledge and awareness of the world they live in, global education includes using global issues in the lessons. While English language courses offer a flexible platform for discussing global issues, their systematic incorporation remains inconsistent. This situation necessitates the analysis of the integration of global issues in EFL contexts and the revelation of current practices by English lecturers.

Purpose: This case study examines the place of global issues in the English courses offered in Turkish higher education institutions by using critical theory and critical pedagogy as guiding frameworks.

Method: This qualitative study adopts a case study design through interviews with 13 English lecturers from various universities in Türkiye. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common patterns in lecturers' approaches to global issue integration.

Results: The findings reveal that while lecturers recognize the benefits of incorporating global issues, some challenges hinder effective implementation. These include strict curricula, reliance on standardized coursebooks, institutional limitations, and concerns over including sensitive topics. Moreover, despite the adoption of a critical pedagogical approach by some lecturers, the majority tend to engage with global issues in a superficial manner and this limits their transformative potential in language education.

Conclusion: The study emphasizes the need for well-designed professional development programs to support lecturers in integrating global issues effectively. Language learning programs could be enhanced through a shift toward a more systematic and critical engagement with global topics in English language instruction. Future research should explore students' perspectives on global issue integration and examine institutional policies that influence teaching practices on the incorporation of global education.

KEYWORDS

global education, global issues, English language teaching, critical theory

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INTRODUCTION

Considering the developments in many fields today, education has been subject to changes, and it needs to be transformed to keep up with the necessities of the era. Global education is one of the responses to these changes, offering a new approach to education. Global education aims to enhance students' knowledge and awareness of the world by addressing global problems in lessons (Erfani, 2012; Jacobs & Cates, 1999). In the framework of global education, global issues are handled in the lessons. Global issues are defined as problems that tran-

scend borders, and require collaboration among countries for resolution (Arslan-gilay, 2017; Bhargava, 2006).

Global issues can be incorporated across various disciplines. English classes, with their flexible content, are ideally suited for incorporating discussions on global issues (Pratama & Yuliati, 2016). English teachers play a key role in shifting foreign language learning from a focus on grammar and target culture to one that engages students with global issues (Byram, 1989; Erfani, 2012; Hosack, 2011; Pratama & Yuliati, 2016). Popular foreign language teaching methods, such as the



communicative approach and content-based instruction, emphasize the importance of meaning in language education. Language teachers have a unique advantage in that they can incorporate a wide range of topics into their classes (Jacobs & Cates, 1999).

Although global issues have been emphasized recently, global coursebooks must be more open to including them. World problems should be addressed more in coursebooks, but the themes they choose often reflect a romantic view of British and American culture (Akbana & Yavuz, 2020; British Council, 2009¹; Erfani, 2012; Pratama & Yuliati, 2016). In this context, teaching English through global issues requires language teachers to use different materials and methods independently. Assuming they are responsible for providing their students with a meaningful context, language teachers could find ways to infuse global issues into their classes (Al-Jarf, 2022).

Despite the existence of some studies on the use of global issues in foreign language teaching in other countries (Al-Jarf, 2022; Cates & Jacobs, 2006; Erfani, 2012; Omidvar & Sukumar, 2013; Pratama & Yuliati, 2016; Yakovchuk, 2004), studies on this topic or similar topics are rare in the context of Türkiye (Akbana & Yavuz, 2020; Arslangilay, 2017; Başarır & Sarı, 2022; Kaplan, 2019; Ordem & Ulum, 2021). This scarcity can be attributed to the dominance of traditional teaching methods that prioritize exam preparation and standardized curricula. Additionally, there is limited access to teaching materials that incorporate global perspectives, making it challenging for educators to consistently address global issues in their lessons in Türkiye. Therefore, the current study is especially significant for revealing the current situation and guiding decision-makers and practitioners in utilizing global issues in language teaching.

The difficulties outlined in this study are relevant to educational situations around the world, even if Türkiye offers a special case for comprehending the importance of global issues in English language classes. Rigid laws and restricted access to resources that promote global awareness make it difficult for many nations with standardized, exam-focused curricula to incorporate global issues (Kaplan, 2019; Ordem & Ulum, 2021). Incorporating global education into language lessons becomes not only a pedagogical choice but also a need as transnational challenges like economic disparity, migration, and climate change continue to develop (McGregor, 2023; Pratama & Yuliati, 2016). Therefore, even though the current study is centered on Turkish context specifically, its conclusions may influence policies in other countries with comparable educational systems and constraints (Cates & Jacobs, 2006).

Considering this situation, it seems feasible to organize English lessons under the scope of global issues (Arslangilay, 2017; Cates, 2005; Yakovchuk, 2004). Given students' age, developmental level, and future goals, addressing global issues at the university level is essential, as these students are more suited to discussing complex, abstract concepts. For this reason, it is crucial to investigate the place of global issues in the English courses offered at the university. Using critical theory and critical pedagogy as a framework, this study investigates how global issues function in English language instruction. By adding global concerns like social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability into language instruction, instructors may help students develop critical thinking and active citizenship in addition to improving their language proficiency. This study explores the extent to which English lecturers in Türkiye adhere to the critical pedagogy principles and how they include global topics in their lessons. The answers to the following research questions are sought in this study:

- RQ#1: What are the perspectives of English lecturers regarding the inclusion of global issues in their language lessons?
- RQ#2: How do English lecturers implement global issues into their classroom practices?
- RQ#3: How do the cultural and social dynamics of the classroom influence the lecturers' approach to global issues?
- RQ#4: To what extent do the lecturers' practices reflect a critical pedagogical approach when addressing global issues in their lessons?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Education

In recent years, global education has been on the agenda of those who want to add a transformative function to education. It is regarded as a pedagogical approach rather than a teaching technique (Pratama & Yuliati, 2016). There are lots of pedagogical approaches that fit well with global education. These approaches range from Freirian methods to content-based language teaching, from cooperative to project-based learning (Cates & Jacobs, 2006). Rather than a mere content addition, it involves a pedagogy, putting global education with a paradigm change in education.

Global education focuses on introducing students to the knowledge and abilities necessary for them as global citizens (McGregor, 2023). Cates (2000) suggests that global education goals could be categorized as knowledge, skills, attitudes, and action. Knowledge comprises information on other nations and civilizations and the reasons and solutions

¹ British Council. (2009). Equal opportunity and diversity: The handbook for teachers of English. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/eod_handbook.pdf

to major international issues. Critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, resolving conflicts, and viewing problems from several angles are all examples of skills. Global awareness, cultural appreciation, tolerance for diversity, and empathy are examples of attitudes. Global education's goal is to actively resolve global concerns and difficulties, starting with local issues and progressing to global ones (Cates, 2000; Pratama & Yuliati, 2016). These educational approaches form a foundation for preparing global citizens capable of addressing transnational concerns.

Global Issues

Global education includes learning about problems that transcend national borders but also covers the interconnection of economic, political, technological, and cultural systems (Cates & Jacobs, 2006). Global issues are defined as "issues of global significance" or "problems in the world" (Omidvar & Sukumar, 2013, p.151). As the content of global education, it is possible to mention at least four issues "peace, human rights, development, and environment" (Pratama & Yuliati, 2016, p.719). Although there is no limitation on the global issues, the ones most mentioned could be listed as gender equality, migration, environmental problems, health, poverty, respect, solidarity, and peace (British Council, 2009²; United Nations, 2023³). Yakovchuk (2004) lists environmental issues (pollution, global warming, recycling), peace education issues (wars, refugees), human rights issues (racism, gender), intercultural communication issues (global citizenship, multiculturalism), socio-economic issues (poverty, advertising), health concerns, and linguistic imperialism. Similarly, Bhargava (2006) categorizes global issues under local economy, environmental and natural resources, human development, peace and security and global governance. A similar categorization regarding global issues is offered by Kaplan (2019) as follows: environmental education, gender issues education, health issues and education, human rights education, linguistic issues education, peace education, socio-economic issues, and others. For this study, global issues are defined as transnational problems that have widespread impacts across nations and regions. These issues encompass challenges such as environmental crises, human rights violations, and socio-economic inequalities, with a focus on concerns that often affect developing regions and the disadvantaged areas.

While some scholars and teachers may assume that addressing global issues in the classroom could foster pessimism among students due to the nature of the challenges discussed, it is essential to present these issues in a way that highlights positive solutions and encourages proactive thinking. For example, Cates and Jacobs (2006) give examples of optimistic issues that could be covered, such

as efforts to eradicate poverty and initiatives to struggle with prejudice. Students are taught how to connect and get deeper insights into global problems, trends, and developments (McGregor, 2023). Global concerns are often not handled rationally by the media, and reasons and causes could be neglected or overlooked. Therefore, it is essential to give students the knowledge and skills to critically evaluate these concerns (Omidvar & Sukumar, 2013). Burnouf (2004) suggests using various angles in social sciences by distancing from a dominant European perspective.

Global issues are critical, so students must respond to them as world citizens (Pratama & Yuliati, 2016) by moving from a mere understanding of each global issue to an awareness of their interrelationships (Çavdar, 2006). It is important to acknowledge that while students may not have the direct power to solve these global issues, developing awareness and empathy can be a vital step toward understanding and addressing such challenges. However, showing sympathy and attention and developing understanding and responsibility toward those issues could serve to reduce these problems (Bland, 2015; Pratama & Yuliati, 2016). Otherwise, educators continue their work, neglecting global problems.

Global Issues in Foreign Language Education

These issues could be covered in all disciplines using appropriate methods. The relationship between language instruction and global challenges has grown in importance in recent years. Global issues transnational concerns that call for cooperative solutions offer a crucial framework for the reform of education (Bhargava, 2006). In the context of foreign language education, the integration of global issues serves not only as a medium for language learning but also as a pathway to engage students in real-world challenges. This integration, however, presents unique pedagogical demands, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, where teachers are tasked with both language instruction and raising global awareness.

Global issues are included into English language instruction in ways that go beyond adding new material. It provides a chance to include pupils in conversations about real-world issues that improve language learning (Cates, 2022). For instance, teachers can promote critical thinking while also advancing language proficiency by discussing issues like gender equality, migration, and climate change in English lessons (Pratama & Yuliati, 2016). Global concerns are incorporated into language education to enable meaningful interactions and allow students to address matters of global importance in the target language as the field moves away from traditional grammar-based instruction and toward more communicative and content-based approaches. This

² British Council. (2009). *Equal opportunity and diversity: The handbook for teachers of English*. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/eod_handbook.pdf

³ United Nations. (2023). *Global issues overview*. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues>

strategy is in line with the objectives of global education, which aim to equip students to be knowledgeable global citizens who can comprehend and interact with complicated international issues (Cates, 2005). As a result, including global issues into education is not just an instructional decision but also an essential pedagogical technique that improves language competency and global consciousness.

The flexible curricula of foreign language classes in terms of content also facilitates the use of global issues (Byram, 1989; Erfani, 2012; Hosack, 2011). As the world's most learned language, English has become an international language many cultural groups speak. This fact necessitates using global education while learning English because students need to understand global problems through English. Teaching English does not include the four skills of reading, listening, writing, and speaking anymore. Instead, it must include ways to develop the student's thinking skills and worldviews regarding world issues. In this way, students' awareness of global concerns could be raised, and they can learn a foreign language effectively simultaneously (Cates, 2005). Some initiatives such as GILE (Global Issues in Language Education), Linguapax by UNESCO, PGL (Peace as a Global Language Conference), and AYF (The Asian Youth Forum) are among the examples that show effort to connect global issues and language education (Gürsoy & Sağlam, 2011).

Including global issues as «subject matter» (Yakovchuk, 2004, p.30) ties nicely with content-based language teaching. The world's problems are a meaningful context for language education (Gürsoy & Sağlam, 2011). Language learners' fluency is no longer critical if students lack communication skills and are ignorant of global concerns (Erfani, 2012). Different materials on global problems could be employed by language teachers, leading to an increase in the thinking and communication abilities of students (Omidvar & Sukumar, 2013). Therefore, content-based instruction through global issues effectively teaches a language because thinking critically is stimulated by a context of challenging topics (Cates, 2005).

Despite the growing importance of global issues in language education, it is impossible to assert that language coursebooks align with these changes and requirements. Global foreign language coursebooks usually deal with topics regarded as harmless (British Council, 2009⁴; Erfani, 2012; Pratama & Yuliati, 2016), and they do not focus on controversial topics that affect the different parts of the world, although this would be more useful for students in terms of connecting the language learning and daily life issues (Akbana & Yavuz, 2020; Ordem & Ulum, 2021). If a global concern is included in a coursebook, it is primarily superfi-

cial and trivialized (Çavdar, 2006). Considering the emphasis on global issues in EFL classes (Council of Europe, 2020⁵; Erfani, 2012), some addition and adaptation are required by language teachers. In the absence of support from global coursebooks to include global issues, the responsibility is on the shoulders of language teachers. Teachers could find new ways to integrate these issues into classes, and students could be confronted with different perspectives (Akbana & Yavuz, 2020; Al-Jarf, 2022; Arslan & Curle, 2024; Renner, 1993).

In order to develop globally conscious citizens, the literature on global education mentioned above highlights how crucial it is to address transnational concerns in the classroom (Cates & Jacobs, 2006). This objective is in line with critical theory's emphasis on comprehending and questioning societal power structures (Thompson, 2017). Through the incorporation of global topics like climate change and human rights into English language instruction, teachers provide pupils the chance to critically interact with their environment. Furthermore, the incorporation of global issues in the classroom advances the transformative learning objective of critical pedagogy, which encourages students to challenge social conventions and act on urgent global crises (Freire, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

Although it is discussed that global education needs a well-designed theoretical framework, there are valuable attempts at this (Burnouf, 2004; McGregor, 2023). However, global education practitioners do not use them most of the time, which might cause ineffectiveness, although this result is not their intention. Therefore, it is essential to be aware of the frameworks and theories related to global education and include them in the curriculum design process (Mc Gregor, 2023).

One of the most well-known attempts belongs to Pike and Selby (1988). Their conceptual framework regarding global education is called «the four dimensions of globality» These four dimensions are spatial, temporal, issues, and process. This framework emphasizes the impossibility of handling global challenges through Newtonian thinking and requires holistic, systemic thinking that could address the interconnectedness and complexity of the world (McGregor, 2023). Another well-known contribution to global education is made by Hanvey (1976), who suggested a comprehensive definition of global awareness based on five qualities. These include perspective consciousness, state-of-the-planet awareness, cross-cultural awareness, knowledge of global dynamics, and awareness of human choices (Burnouf, 2004).

⁴ British Council. (2009). Equal opportunity and diversity: The handbook for teachers of English. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/eod_handbook.pdf

⁵ Council of Europe. (2020). Common European Framework of Reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume. Council of Europe. www.coe.int/lang-cefr

The mentioned frameworks are valuable since they set some boundaries and suggest ways to include global education for theorists and practitioners. Although not mentioned much in the literature, global education and addressing global issues are highly tied to critical theory. The larger paradigms of critical theory and critical pedagogy, which both highlight the role of education in challenging power structures and advancing social justice, are the framework in which this study is situated (Bozkurt & Topkaya, 2023; Freire, 2005). Through its emphasis on identifying and resolving systematic injustices, critical theory offers a lens through which the teaching of global challenges in language education can be seen. It encourages educators to critically assess the information and methods they use, ensuring that instruction goes beyond rote memorization or surface-level engagement with global subjects.

Similarly, critical pedagogy promotes a participatory approach to education that gives students the tools they need to question prevailing viewpoints and take part in life-changing experiences (Freire, 2005; Kaplan, 2019). The synthesis of these two theoretical frameworks is crucial for this study, because it serves as the basis for analyzing the methods English lecturers use to address global concerns in the classroom. The study examines power dynamics in the classroom and how they could impact how global concerns are taught by employing critical theory. In addition, critical pedagogy provides a useful framework for putting these ideas into practice. Together, these theories highlight how important it is to incorporate global issues into English language instruction in order to promote critical consciousness and language proficiency.

To link critical pedagogy and language education, Ordem & Ulum (2021) explain the participatory approach and claim that second language teaching needs to include political and social issues. However, they state that the participatory approach is utilized rarely, considering textbooks and curricula that keep up with the requirements of neoliberalism. This neglect causes students to lack the chance to discuss sociopolitical issues through language education (Ordem & Ulum, 2021). On the contrary, the participatory approach in the framework of critical pedagogy highlights real-world events to be used as discussion content in language classes. showed that participatory approaches help students to engage critically with social issues such as racism and sexism. Their findings suggest that when students have a say in content selection, their motivation and critical engagement increase, and this reinforces the potential of critical pedagogy in language instruction. This finding moves the discussion on the use of global issues in language education one step further because just adding content or theme related to world issues may not serve the goals of global education (Cates & Jacobs, 2006; Yamashiro, 1996). Instead, as a global educator, a language teacher must focus on sociopolitical concerns by selecting themes on the problematic reality in the learners' lives and aiming at "not only changing

the nature of schooling but the wider society" (Erfani, 2012, p.2415). To do this, students' engagement is also important, and their ideas need to be considered through negotiation as the study of Essabari and Hiba (2025) revealed. By situating the current study within critical theory and critical pedagogy frameworks, it is aimed to determine whether language instruction reinforces or challenges prevailing beliefs and how students' critical consciousness might be fostered by utilizing global issues.

METHOD

Research Design

The holistic single case study design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used because the study aimed to analyze the use of global issues in foreign language classes in depth with an integrative approach (Yin, 2003). According to Yin (2003), the single-case approach fits well for testing theories using crucial cases and examining explanatory situations. The case study design is also connected with critical theory, which sets the overarching understanding for the discussion of this study. Critical theorists utilize case study methodologies (Peca, 2000). However, critical theorists go beyond a methodology and focus on self-reflection to understand the individual and social reality through the exposition of power structures.

Participants

In Türkiye, many universities offer education in English, which causes students to study in preparatory classes before starting their departments. This preparatory class includes intensive exposure to English and prepares them to reach the B1+ level. This study focuses on the use of global issues in the context of preparatory classes. Considering this, the data for this study were obtained from 13 English lecturers working at five different universities in İzmir, Türkiye. İzmir is a developed city in the west of Türkiye with many universities. The reason for choosing that city to get the data was because the researcher also worked and lived in İzmir, making it easier for her to reach the participants.

Using a maximum variation sampling method, the researcher tried to include lecturers from different genders, nationalities, and years of working experience to enrich the data. A detailed breakdown of the participants' demographics is provided in Table 1. The names of the universities that participants worked were coded to provide confidentiality. Two of the lecturers were not Turkish, and there were nine female and four male participants. Their work experience ranged from four to 25 years. Two lecturers had a Ph.D. degree, eight had a master's degree, and three had a bachelor's degree. All the participants stated that they had been abroad for professional purposes.

Table 1
Demographic Information about the Participants

Participant Code	Workplace	Years of Experience	Gender	Nationality	Educational background	Experience abroad
P1	University A	10-15	Male	Turkish	PhD	Yes
P2	University A	10-15	Female	Turkish	Master	Yes
P3	University A	15-20	Female	Turkish	Master	Yes
P4	University B	15-20	Male	Turkish	Bachelor	Yes
P5	University B	0-5	Female	Non-Turkish	Master	Yes
P6	University B	25-30	Female	Turkish	Bachelor	Yes
P7	University B	0-5	Female	Turkish	Master	Yes
P8	University C	10-15	Female	Non-Turkish	Bachelor	Yes
P9	University D	5-10	Female	Turkish	Master	Yes
P10	University E	5-10	Male	Turkish	Master	Yes
P11	University E	10-15	Female	Turkish	Master	Yes
P12	University E	20-25	Female	Turkish	PhD	Yes
P13	University E	5-10	Male	Turkish	Master	Yes

Data Collection Tools and Methods

The researcher prepared a semi-structured interview form consisting of seven main questions. The questions were designed considering the related studies and experience of the researcher as an English lecturer and a researcher working on multicultural education and curriculum development. The construction of the interview questions was based on the critical dimensions of the study's theoretical framework. The questions mostly focused on understanding what perceptions English lecturers had in their minds regarding global issues, what practices they made in their classes, and the advantages and disadvantages of using global issues in EFL classes, all of which helped to collect data regarding the first and second research questions of this study. The two interview questions asking information about the cultural diversity in their English classes and the effect of that diversity on including global issues were covered to answer the third research question. Lastly, the lecturers were asked about whether there were things that they took into consideration while using global issues and this provided data for the last research question. Moreover, all the interview questions provided data for the last research question because most interview questions aimed to get the opinions and classroom practices of English lecturers and the responses explored the link between critical pedagogy and classroom practice, addressing both the theoretical and practical aspects of this research.

After the form was arranged, an expert opinion was taken from two academicians. One of them had experience in qualitative research and curriculum, whereas the other

one's experience was related to social sciences education and using values in education. Based on their suggestions, minor editions were made to clarify the interview questions. A pilot interview was conducted with an English lecturer, and the questions' understandability was tested.

Although interviews are a useful tool for understanding lecturers' perspectives, it is more difficult to completely comprehend how these impressions are translated into actual classroom practices when classroom observations are lacking. A deeper, more complex knowledge of how global challenges are incorporated into English language instruction could have been obtained from observational data. However, because of time limitations and institutional contexts during the time of data collection, observational data was not obtained and this limitation caused this study to end up with interview data. Especially, the second and third research questions were tried to be analyzed based on the participants' opinions although observations could have provided richer data.

The data was collected during the spring term of the 2021-2022 academic year. Five participants agreed to join the face-to-face interview in their rooms at school. In contrast, eight participants accepted online interviews because of pandemic conditions, which affected the whole world due to COVID-19. The duration of the interviews changed from 15 minutes to 41 minutes, with a total record of 310 minutes. Eleven of the interviews was conducted in Turkish and two of them with non-Turkish participants were conducted in English. The Turkish transcripts were translated into English by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The content analysis methodology used in the data analysis was that of Creswell and Poth (2018). Open coding was used to find early themes about the lecturers' incorporation of global issues in the classroom following the transcription of the interviews. Axial coding was then used to further develop the emerging topics and create links between the lecturers' methods and the critical pedagogy theoretical framework. This procedure made it clearer how global issues were handled as both a subject and a means of promoting critical consciousness. To make sure that every code addressed the theoretical issues as well as the research topics, the thematic organization was continuously reviewed.

Procedures

The researcher believes that using global issues in language education is a good idea, and she works to include this idea in her teaching. As a result, from the study's design through the presentation of the results, the researcher's viewpoint may be present throughout the entire process of the investigation.

This study's ethics committee approval was attained by considering the relevant research ethical guidelines. A consent form containing information about the study's objectives was given to the participants.

In qualitative research, ensuring the trustworthiness of the study is crucial. Instead of focusing on traditional concepts of validity and reliability, this study adopts criteria for trustworthiness such as confirmability, transferability, credibility, and dependability. To ensure these criteria, several measures were taken. First, the interview questions were pilot tested with an English lecturer not involved in the final sample. This pilot test helped refine the questions for clarity and relevance, enhancing the reliability of the data collected.

Moreover, expert reviews were sought from two academicians familiar with qualitative research methods and global education. In terms of validity, the triangulation method was employed by selecting quotes from diverse sources. Additionally, exercising confidentiality by using pseudonyms for each participant and releasing detailed participant information and context enhanced the trustworthiness of the study.

RESULTS

Emergent Themes

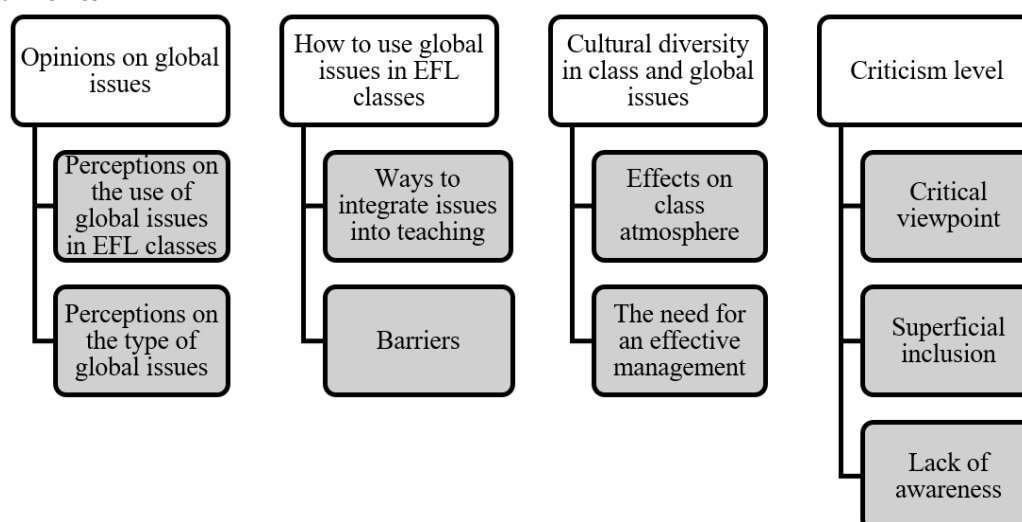
Based on the data collected from 13 lecturers working at five different universities, four themes emerged: (1) Opinions on global issues, (2) How to use global issues in EFL classes, (3) Cultural diversity in class and global issues and (4) Criticism level. Under these four themes, nine sub-themes and 18 codes were reached. The themes and sub-themes can be viewed in Figure 1 below. All the themes and codes are explained with the contribution of quotations.

Opinions on Global Issues

The first theme gathered the findings related to the participants' opinions on using global issues in EFL settings. Firstly, almost all participants reflected a positive view and stated that global issues did not take place much in the main materials used as coursebooks. Still, they were necessary for university students considering the requirements of multicultural countries today: «We are trying to make reinforcements to open up their worldview a little more» (P10); «Especially for university students, I attach great importance to the youth following the agenda and their development of general culture» (P12); «Talking about real life and interesting topics when students lose their motivation, and to do this on a global scale as much as possible is important because we teach English. They will need this in different parts of the world» (P7).

Figure 1

Themes and Sub-Themes



The advantages of using global issues in EFL classrooms was explained by the participants as follows: raising awareness, gaining 21st-century skills or higher order thinking skills such as critical thinking, better communication in class, staying updated for the lecturer, having an interest in world issues, sharing ideas, thinking in the long term, breaking prejudices, and motivating the students: *"They can take a very narrow perspective from time to time. To improve this, I would like them to gain 21st-century skills, such as creativity and critical thinking, and to gain awareness for the problems existing in the world"* (P10); *"Since there is a generation that also likes to express their opinions, I think they like to give their opinions on such serious issues"* (P11); *"I think that talking about things that happen in many countries with different people will give them a perspective that will enrich their conversations when they go abroad"* (P2).

The last code under this sub-theme was about the disadvantages of using global issues in EFL classrooms. Although they were usually on the side of the advantages, a few lecturers pointed out possible drawbacks such as sensitivity on some topics, overemphasis on global issues, the lack of preparedness, and transfer to L1: *"The disadvantage is that since we live in Türkiye, some students can show various sensitivities when such issues are sometimes related to immigration, Syrians or trans people"* (P1); *"Yes, there is an input in English, but if there are situations such as moving away from the subject or students shifting to Turkish, then, of course, it may be risky for lectures"* (P7).

The second sub-theme, perceptions on the type of global issues, showed what participants regarded as a global issue. Some issues emphasized mainly by the participants were as followed: environmental problems, global warming, globalization, sustainable development goals, war, discrimination, pandemic, vaccination, human rights, animal rights, child brides, gender, refugees, tolerance: *"Women, I can say gender issues. Climate, environment, nature issues"* (P11); *"A lot of topics, like environmental problems. The inequality between men and women falls under this. Early marriage of women and human rights. Such political events that can arise at a time that concerns the whole world can be included"* (P9).

Although they listed many topics under global issues, some participants explained that some issues would be avoided in a class environment. They named these topics as sensitive, dangerous, taboo, or knife-edge. These topics were mostly related to gender, LGBT, democracy, politics, and religion: *"Because I stick to the rule: no politics, no sex, talks on no war during the lessons. That may create a dispute in class"* (P8); *"I don't go into some issues at all; the first of them is politics"* (P4); *"It is always said that we should not get into sensitive issues. Among sensitive issues, politics, religion, etc., yes, I do not prefer"* (P11).

However, some lecturers believed all topics could be discussed in class, provided the country's cultural context is

respected: *"Refugee topic was opened. I put that issue on the shelf at that time. As I said, this is not my discomfort, but because I avoid any potential thing that may come from the country and the institution"* (P9).

Some topics would be sensitive. For example, poverty. I had a student from Yemen. Yemen is a country which has this problem, so talking openly about these things may hurt him or other students may not have full knowledge about this topic (P5).

Regarding the topics participants favored or disfavored, their educational background and interests were seen to be the leading indicators of this preference: *"The training I received and my perspective on life. Because my education is related to cultural studies and social studies, it is highly related to such subjects"* (P1); *"Obviously, I think I always take advantage of my interests. As I just said, I use gender issues a lot because I am interested in gender studies at work"* (P11); *"I love to talk about the environment. It seems more important to me that if the teacher has a tendency, s/he directs the student to certain subjects in that way, the student inevitably approaches them"* (P9).

How to Use Global Issues in EFL Classes

Under the second theme, how to use global issues in EFL classes, the findings related to what the participants do on global issues in their classes were categorized under two sub-themes: ways to integrate them into teaching and barriers. As some lecturers stated, integrating global issues into education was mainly done by aligning these issues with the objectives, the primary material, and the assessment. They added some extra materials to the existing themes in the main coursebook, and they said different viewpoints that did not take place in the coursebook: *"I determine the themes myself in line with the objectives in my curriculum. I can change those themes according to different needs and interests in different groups"* (P3).

All the selected books have themes. I am developing those themes. For example, suppose it is family. In that case, I can provide extra materials about women's rights, the situation of women at home, or the inclusion of multiple studies from gender and queer studies. These are often not found in mainstream educational materials (P1).

Regarding the methods they used to integrate global issues into their teaching, participants explained that they usually applied discussion activities, used authentic materials, collected information on the topic beforehand, and used important days such as Women's Day as a context for this process: *"When I write questions and examples, I try to use more sentences about these subjects. Since it is not a direct target of the education curriculum, I usually use it as the implicit curriculum"* (P1); *"I link it to the day in the warm-up section. I pay attention to them as if I am trying to make students sensitive to the agenda and to attract them into my lesson gradually"* (P12).

Although participants were in favor of using global issues in their classes, some also focused on the workload because of

this process: «*These are things that always steal time*» (P12); «*Things are going well when there is such a preparation stage at the beginning, but of course, extra time is always required for this*» (P9); «*It's very challenging for me because I'm always trying to find new themes, new activities. But I think it's worth it*» (P3).

Some factors prevented lecturers from using global issues, as explained by a strict curriculum, a global coursebook, and a standard assessment system. Because they had to comply with the other classes, enough time could not be given to global issues: «*Unfortunately, we are very intense on schedule, and we have to stick to the book, main coursebooks. We should be consistent in what we teach so it creates a problem*» (P8); «*It is needed to mention the disadvantage of working at the preparatory school because of the lack of movement as a result of a structured curriculum. Unfortunately, I cannot design a course from scratch because of the strict curriculum*» (P12); «4» (P13).

It doesn't work because, of course, you can always make individual efforts, but when the program is intense, and the evaluation is made directly from the book, that ability does not develop, it remains barren. Unfortunately, what you do does not go anywhere in the eyes of the student because it will not come out in the exam (P2).

On the other hand, some lecturers did their best to include global issues despite a busy syllabus, though since these topics were more important for them: «*Sometimes the program is hectic, but I usually give priority to it if there is such a topic in my mind, the other can be completed next week. Such a topic is current and needs to be discussed at that moment*» (P9); «*Yes, I do not use the main material. I can justify it even if there is trouble, and I don't plan to give up on this implementation*» (P3).

Another barrier mentioned by some participants was the language. Some lecturers believed that teaching a higher language proficiency was necessary to discuss global issues: «*I honestly don't have time for this in level one, so I can cover them more at higher levels*» (P11); «*Talking about politics may be something that might lower the motivation of an elementary-level student rather than raising them*» (P7).

Interestingly, we observe that as the student's proficiency level increases, the rate of general knowledge increases. The child with a higher language proficiency is more sensitive and more knowledgeable. When we look at it that way, I practice debate in high level classes (P12).

However, a few lecturers stated that global issues could be used at every level: «*No, I do not discriminate. I try to use them in all levels*» (P1).

Usually, we open a discussion in the class, and they want to say something, but their English is not enough. Then they say 'I won't say it'. Then I try to encourage them. Because I see that the biggest problem is not that they can't think or not be aware of it (P9).

It's going pretty well. I use authentic material accordingly. I always guide them in the difficulties experienced at the language proficiency. I allow them to use it in Turkish at times

because they need to acquire that skill, especially in critical thinking (P3).

Cultural Diversity in Class and Global Issues

The third theme was determined to be cultural diversity in class and global issues. It included the findings on the effect of using global issues in a diverse class and how the integration could be managed effectively. Most lecturers stated that their classes had students from different cultural backgrounds. This diversity mostly had a positive effect on their classes in terms of the feeling of not being alone, comparisons between countries, developing respect for differences, enriching class discussion, and providing a safe environment for discussion: «*I had a Syrian student last year, we were talking about the war and that girl told us about the war. The story of someone who experienced it directly affected the students a lot, creating a different awareness*» (P2).

I like it very much that they respect each other's opinion and are together. It enhances the instruction because, as I said, I get different answers when I ask a question, and it takes me to other places. It can help students get to know different cultures. They can develop their empathy, put themselves in their shoes and question what kind of life they can have (P4).

Although the contribution to the class atmosphere happened more when global issues were included, the undeniable fact that some conflicts could arise was also emphasized by some lecturers. This situation was mainly linked to the country they live in, the lack of similar activities in the educational lives of students before, and family backgrounds of some students: «*When there are social taboos and pressures they feel, there are students who are very closed to those subjects. They say 'No, don't ask me, I don't talk like that'*» (P9); «*It may create some conflicts, they might hold different views on certain subjects, and teacher might be in between trying to calm people down*» (P8); «*When we ask students a question, they may take the question to other places, such as east-west conflicts in Türkiye. In some cases, that's why I think attention should be paid to this*» (P13).

Considering the possibility of some conflicts in the classroom, different techniques could be used, or teachers could be more careful while using global issues. Participants emphasized the need for using appropriate language, avoiding discriminatory behaviour, having a balanced stance for every culture, being impartial, and determining class discussion rules with students: «*I think it's up to the teacher's skill, you know, it's about how they give this subject. They should pay attention to their language; above all, they should not use discriminatory language. They should choose their words carefully*» (P1); «*I don't underestimate any culture in any way I care about the most. I don't overestimate our own culture either*» (P4); «*So I say I can talk to you about some dangerous topics, friends, in any way possible, but the classroom is not suitable for this. I have often said that we can have tea and talk outside*» (P6); «*I think it is necessary to look at such matters objectively,*

not as humiliating, or judgmental. As I always say, that matters» (P13).

Criticism Level

The last theme was about the criticism level of the participants regarding global issues in language education. Three sub-themes emerged in this part, critical viewpoint, superficial inclusion, and lack of awareness. There were only a few participants (P1, P2, P3, P9) that focused on the criticism of global issues and think that the inclusion of different viewpoints, power dynamics, and causes of the current situation need to be mentioned in classes: «*The perspective given by the book may be different; the point of view that I have added may be different. I don't change the theme in that context; only the viewpoint*» (P2); «*I think people should face the facts; that's the reality of our lives. I think this is another problem; we are trying to bury our heads in the sand, which I sometimes do. Some things might hurt us*» (P3).

Most participants' opinions on including global issues in language education reflected a superficial infusion (P10, P13, P12, P11, P4, P7, P5). They either included global problems that existed in the coursebook by aligning with the objectives of the curriculum or avoided their use depending on the type of global issue. However, they would favor this inclusion in a different academic or country setting: «*If it's relevant to the lesson in some way here, of course, the target structure is also essential. Ok, it's authentic, but it needs to be meaningful as well. It must match the course's objectives*» (P7); «*Of course, I would like to use these topics. It shouldn't be enjoyable to use the book all the time*» (P10). In the last category, the opinions of two participants (P6, P8) showed that their global awareness is low, and they could not integrate it into their classes using appropriate methods: «*Personally, these topics wouldn't be my first choice*» (P8).

DISCUSSION

Tendency to Integrate Global Issues

The results of this study indicate that the lecturers generally held positive views regarding the inclusion of global issues in English teaching. Lecturers favored topics such as environmental issues, discrimination, and gender, which align with global concerns. Other studies in Turkish context (Arslan & Curle, 2024; Çavdar, 2006; Kaplan, 2019; Ordem & Ulum, 2021) support this view, emphasizing the sympathy of teachers toward socio-political issues. In this study, topics like environmental issues, discrimination, and gender were mainly favored. However, a few lecturers explained that the use of

global warming topic was emphasized in the coursebooks, thus causing boredom for some students. The educational level of the participants seemed to affect using global issues positively in this study because having a graduate degree was mentioned to show them other paths to teach English, including questioning the teaching of language education.

The advantages of using global issues as listed in this study are compatible with other studies (Başarır & Sarı, 2022; Omidvar & Sukumar, 2013). These contributions were on raising awareness, sharing ideas, an opportunity to speak, becoming sensitive about these issues, creating curiosity, improvement in the skills of research and higher-order thinking skills. In another study conducted in Türkiye, students' opinions were taken and the advantages mentioned were learning to look from different perspectives, gaining knowledge about the world and improvement in speaking skills (Bayraktar-Balkır, 2021). Those results also coincided with the current study.

Another important finding in this study was some participants' acceptance of some global issues as sensitive, dangerous, or taboo. They mostly listed politics, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion under these issues. Similarly, topics such as terrorism seem to be controversial (Attou et al., 2024). However, this is not surprising because teachers' hesitation to use these subjects is known (British Council, 2009⁶; Kaplan, 2019; Yoshihara, 2011). Despite the reluctance of the lecturers for the inclusion of some issues, students show more positive reactions to the issues, such as homophobia, philosophical approaches and gender equality (Bayraktar-Bozkır, 2021).

Similar to the findings of Ordem and Ulum (2021), the participants in this study also mentioned the context of the country and the existence of a strict curriculum as excuses for their neglect of global issues. It was seen that some participants were motivated to use them if the conditions were changed for them in their school and country. As emphasized by Atkinson (1997) and Şirin (2017), teachers may not feel ready and competent to discuss such issues critically in countries such as Türkiye. Therefore, professional training on including these issues appropriately and critically emerges as an immediate need (Yakovchuk, 2004).

How to Integrate Global Issues

The results show that there are differing opinions about how to incorporate global issues into English language instruction. A few lecturers encouraged students to engage closely with global concerns, demonstrating a commitment to critical pedagogy; others, on the other hand, tended to

⁶ British Council. (2009). Equal opportunity and diversity: The handbook for teachers of English. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/eod_handbook.pdf

approach them more superficially. Moreover, the educational level of participants seemed to influence how they incorporated global issues, with those holding graduate degrees more likely to engage with global concerns critically. Such shallow involvement reduces the possibility of transformative learning, often a result of curricular restrictions or lecturers' hesitation to tackle controversial subjects (Kaplan, 2019). Negotiated syllabi through student engagement could be a solution to deal with complex issues in EFL classes as suggested by Essabari and Hiba (2025) because their study revealed that when given the autonomy to shape classroom discussions, students were more likely to critically engage with global challenges and teachers were able to move beyond superficial treatment of topics.

Critical pedagogy emphasizes empowering students to challenge societal beliefs and systems, fostering critical engagement with global issues (Freire, 2005). In line with this framework, the findings of this study suggest that while some lecturers are committed to critical pedagogy, others hesitate to fully integrate global issues into their teaching. The global issues covered in class were frequently presented in a way that precluded critical engagement with underlying power dynamics, which served to reinforce rather than to challenge the current quo. Similarly, Ordem and Ulum (2021) found in their study that only some participants had knowledge of concepts such as critical pedagogy and participatory approach, which led to the inclusion of global issues at a superficial level in classes because the participants in their study opted for a superficial overview of sociocultural issues by including soft issues that would not cause disagreement in class.

The fact that the lecturers' interest and experience were important in choosing their favorite global issues is an appropriate stance considering that the lecturer's expertise is vital while discussing global issues; otherwise, conflicts could become inevitable in a class environment. The need for a teacher to have good knowledge of a global problem is also explained in other studies (Dimici & Başbay, 2021; Pratama & Yuliati, 2016). The choice of a global issue was also related to the coursebook used, as confirmed by other studies (Ordem & Ulum, 2021). Participants demonstrated an understanding of global issues, aligning with findings by Akbana and Yavuz (2020).

The methods used by the participants to integrate global issues mainly included using discussion, using these topics as a warm-up for classes, or designing a lesson based on a global issue from scratch. Akbana and Yavuz (2020) also explained that their participants used these issues in their classes as pre- or post-activity to raise awareness. Some lec-

turers stated that they used questioning techniques to understand the hidden messages and different perspectives as mentioned by Bozkurt and Topkaya (2023). While there were some good examples, most participants lacked a systematic approach, and a critical perspective was seldom observed in their handling of global issues, which is similar to what Akbana and Yavuz (2020) reached in their study. Starting discussions with local issues before expanding to global contexts can make global issues more relatable for students. By drawing connections between local and global challenges, teachers can help students understand the interconnectedness of the world's problems.

Challenges in Addressing Global Issues

The finding showing that English teachers' capacity to properly incorporate global themes is hampered by Türkiye's exam-driven curriculum is experienced by similar educational institutions around the world. Teachers' flexibility is frequently restricted in nations with strict curricula, which might hinder pupils' ability to engage effectively with global issues (Erfani, 2012; British Council, 2009⁷). Similar findings were reported by Al-Jarf (2022), who found that EFL instructors often avoid global themes due to a lack of institutional guidance and training. These obstacles highlight the necessity of flexible, content-rich curricula and professional development to empower teachers to cultivate students' global citizenship and critical thinking abilities (Cates, 2005; Bozkurt & Topkaya, 2023). By putting these strategies into practice more widely, foreign language instruction can become a more effective means of fostering global awareness by better preparing students to handle and respond to transnational issues (Omidvar & Sukumar, 2013).

The existence of a strict curriculum, a global coursebook, and a standardized assessment system caused participants to follow the main material and use global issues if coursebooks included them. Similarly, Akbana and Yavuz (2020) and Çavdar (2006) also found that most teachers follow course-dependent methods because of the need to stick to the curriculum. This dependence often causes them not to integrate global issues in EFL classes (Al-Jarf, 2022). However, considering that many textbooks avoid controversial topics (Ahmed, 2022; Ordem & Ulum, 2021), this might result in a lack of understanding of global issues in a critical way. Banks (2010) also states that when diversity is superficially added to the curriculum, such as mere content addition, this might cause some misunderstandings in the classroom and suggests using transformative and action-based methods. The need to integrate global issues into the whole curriculum rather than just adding content is also highlighted by Başarır and Sarı (2022).

⁷ British Council. (2009). *Equal opportunity and diversity: The handbook for teachers of English*. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/eod_handbook.pdf

Given the limitations of standardized coursebooks, it is important to allow flexibility in how these materials are used. By adapting coursebook content and supplementing it with additional resources, teachers can create opportunities for deeper discussions on global issues. Kumaravadivelu (2003) argues that educators should exercise autonomy in their classrooms to design materials that are contextually and culturally relevant, as this enhances students' engagement with critical global topics.

Language was also claimed to be a barrier to discussing some issues. Some lecturers preferred to use global issues at only upper language proficiency, whereas some lecturers favoured using effective strategies at every level. Language competence as a favored criterion while selecting global issues is also addressed by Yakovchuk (2004) and Akbana and Yavuz (2020). However, the fact that lower language proficiency could also be used to discuss global issues is asserted by a few participants. Likewise, Erfani (2012) and Yamashiro (1996) suggest that global issues could be employed in every language.

Independent of language proficiency, the preparedness of students to discuss these issues in the classroom might be a problem in any case. Ordem and Ulum (2021) and Başarır and Sarı (2022) also support this result, stating that schooling experience until university may not have allowed students to share opinions on sociocultural issues. Translanguaging, the use of multiple languages in the classroom, offers a valuable strategy for reducing linguistic barriers when discussing global issues. By allowing students to express themselves in both their native language and the target language, teachers can create an inclusive environment that fosters participation (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

Cultural diversity in class was usually effective while using global issues since the discussion around these topics was enriched. Nevertheless, the possibility of a conflict over these issues in a culturally diverse classroom was also mentioned by some lecturers (Gürsoy & Sağlam, 2011). Since the participants mentioned some sensitivity and chaos that could arise in the classroom, they preferred to avoid some issues, which led them to exploit the international coursebook more because it was called safe (Ordem & Ulum, 2021). This possibility signals the necessity to carefully design the integration of global issues into language education (Başarır & Sarı, 2022).

Some attempts of a few lecturers in this study to critically include global issues in their lessons emerge as promising results, and their reasons for being independent and using recent and updated materials align with the results of Akbana and Yavuz (2020). However, these attempts by some teachers cause more workload for them because of the lack of easy access to materials, as mentioned in their explanations (Muhaimin, 2014). Fortunately, as Pratama and Yuliati (2016)

stated, some coursebooks are showing an effort to include global issues in recent years; therefore, when choosing the coursebook, this could be a criterion for lecturers.

CONCLUSION

The current study provided valuable insights into English lecturers' perspectives on integrating global issues into English language teaching. While most participants showed a willingness to include these topics, barriers such as curricular constraints, lack of training, and concerns over controversy limited their effectiveness. Some participants employed critical pedagogical approaches, yet a systematic, well-supported framework for integrating global issues remained lacking.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in critical pedagogy and critical theory, both of which emphasize the role of education in challenging societal power structures. By incorporating global issues into language lessons, lecturers not only enhanced students' language proficiency but also promoted critical consciousness. While some lecturers demonstrated an awareness of the transformative potential of global issues in the classroom, the overall lack of a systematic approach to incorporating these topics critically suggests that more professional development is needed.

For global education to be truly effective, English language lecturers must move beyond merely mentioning global issues and instead integrate them in ways that encourage critical thinking and action. Lecturers play a pivotal role as agents of change within the classroom, especially when addressing global issues. By fostering critical thinking and encouraging students to engage with global challenges, lecturers can help shape socially responsible and globally conscious citizens. One way to support lecturers in integrating global issues into their lessons is through the establishment of professional learning communities (PLCs). These communities provide a platform for educators to collaborate, share resources, and develop personalized materials. Therefore, organizing professional development training on the use of global issues in English teaching is essential for English lecturers, and global issues need to take place in foreign language teaching at every step, from curriculum design to assessment.

The key considerations for language teachers could be to be aware of the context of the workplace and the country they live in while determining the topics, using local examples or materials to discuss global issues in order to make the learning process meaningful for students, increasing their expertise on specific global topics, managing the classroom in an equal, and careful manner, making negotiations with the students at the beginning of term on which topics to include and determining some rules while discussing these

issues such as not using discriminative statements and respecting the opinions of others.

Since this study is limited to data from 13 lecturers from a specific city, it could be suggested that interested researchers conduct similar studies with different participants in different settings. In this way, the understanding of the infusion of global issues in language education and the proper methods for this could be revealed. Moreover, the study relied on self-reported data from lecturers, which may not fully capture their actual classroom practices, therefore future research including classroom observations or student perspectives could provide a more comprehensive understanding. Finally, the current study focused on lecturers' perspectives, therefore, future research could evaluate the effectiveness of different pedagogical strategies in enhancing students' critical engagement with global issues.

DISCLAIMER

This manuscript was refined using AI-assisted tools, specifically Grammarly and ChatGPT, to improve language clarity and coherence. AI was primarily used for language editing and for incorporating reviewer feedback, particularly in integrating critical theory with the study's scope. However, all conceptual arguments, analyses, and interpretations were developed independently by the author and critically reviewed to ensure originality and scholarly integrity.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared.

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