



Value-Oriented English Language Learning in Higher Education

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Abstract: The paper explores value-oriented English language learning as a pedagogical approach that integrates linguistic competence with the formation of ethical, cultural, and social values in higher education. In the context of globalization and intercultural academic mobility, English language education extends beyond functional communication, requiring a value-based framework that fosters critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural responsibility. The study argues that language learning environments can serve as spaces for value construction through dialogic interaction, reflective practices, and culturally meaningful content. Drawing on contemporary perspectives in educational axiology and communicative language teaching, the paper examines how value-oriented learning supports learner autonomy, social engagement, and lifelong learning competences. Particular attention is given to the role of educators as facilitators of value awareness and to the selection of learning tasks that encourage ethical reflection and intercultural dialogue. The conclusions highlight the contribution of value-oriented English language learning to the development of holistic learner profiles and to the creation of inclusive academic communities that respect diversity and promote shared values within higher education.

Keywords: value-oriented learning; English language education; higher education; intercultural communication

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1. Introduction

In an era of intensified globalization and academic mobility, English in higher education can no longer be understood merely as a linguistic skill, but must be recognized as a primary medium through which students participate in global academic, cultural, and ethical practices (Block, 2007; Kramersch, 2009). This transformation necessitates a new educational responsibility for English language teaching, extending far beyond functional communication. Yet, mainstream English language teaching in higher education continues to operate under the myth of value-neutrality, predominantly framing language learning as a technical process focused on communicative efficiency and academic conventions (Pennycook, 2001; Norton, 2013). This skill-centrism paradigm, driven by instrumental rationality, risks reducing learners to functional language users or task performers, thereby systematically neglecting their identities, values, and ethical agency (Biesta, 2010; Barnett, 2007). Consequently, higher education faces a profound paradox: students may achieve high levels of linguistic competence in English while lacking the capacity for value-based judgment, critical positioning, and responsible engagement in academic discourse (Kramersch, 2009; Norton, 2013). This misalignment points to a critical shortfall. Higher education is not merely a site for skills training but a formative space for educating the whole person, charged with fostering autonomy, responsibility, and ethical awareness (Biesta, 2010, 2014; Barnett, 2011). As the dominant academic lingua franca, English language learning is inevitably a site of value formation, where learners negotiate meaning, identity, and moral positioning across cultural and epistemic boundaries (Kramersch, 1998, 2009; Kubota, 2004). If English language teaching fails to address these intrinsic value dimensions, it risks a legitimacy crisis by distancing itself from the broader educational mission of the university (Biesta, 2010; Pennycook, 2001).

This study, therefore, argues for a decisive shift toward Value-Oriented English Language Learning in higher education. It proposes to re conceptualize English learning as a value-laden, meaning making process that purposefully integrates linguistic development with the cultivation of learner subjectivity and ethical orientation (Biesta, 2010, Kramersch, 2009, Ushioda, 2010). The following sections will first construct the theoretical framework for this approach before exploring its practical implications for pedagogy.

2. Value-Oriented English Language Learning

Value-Oriented English Language Learning refers to an educational approach that purposefully integrates linguistic development with ethical, cultural, and social value formation. It explicitly rejects purely skill-based or instrumental definitions of language learning that reduce English education to the acquisition of communicative efficiency. Instead, it conceptualizes English learning as a meaning- and value-oriented practice, in which learners are positioned not as passive recipients of linguistic forms, but as active, value bearing subjects who negotiate identity, responsibility, and meaning through language use (Kramsch, 2009; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

From this perspective, language learning is understood as an educational process embedded in social relations, cultural interpretations, and ethical positioning. Consequently, the goal of English education extends beyond linguistic proficiency to include learners' capacity to engage reflexively and responsibly with diverse discourses and value systems.

To systematically conceptualize the value dimensions of Value-Oriented English Language Learning, this study adopts Gert Biesta's theory of educational purposes as its core analytical framework (Biesta, 2010, 2014). Biesta distinguishes three interrelated domains of educational purpose: Qualification, referring to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for participation in professional and academic practices; Socialization, involving initiation into existing cultural, social, and political traditions, norms, and forms of life; Subjectification, denoting the process through which individuals emerge as autonomous and responsible subjects capable of independent judgment and action beyond the given social order. When applied to English language education, these domains provide a nuanced framework for understanding the multiple value dimensions of learning. Qualification corresponds to the development of linguistic, communicative, and academic competencies; Socialization entails learners' participation in the discourses, conventions, and practices of academic and global communities; and Subjectification concerns the emergence of learners' own voices, ethical judgment, and critical autonomy in language use.

This framework enables a critical diagnosis of mainstream English teaching practices, which often exhibit a pronounced value imbalance. In many contexts, qualification is prioritized at the expense of socialization and, more critically, subjectification. As a result, learners may achieve high levels of linguistic

competence while remaining insufficiently supported in developing ethical agency and value-oriented judgment.

The processes of socialization and subjectification within Value-Oriented English Language Learning are further theorized through critical intercultural communication and sociocultural perspectives, both of which conceptualize learning as a process of value negotiation rather than value transmission.

From a critical intercultural communication perspective (Byram, 2008), value-oriented learning foregrounds ethical positioning and critical cultural awareness. Learners are encouraged to move beyond passive understanding of cultural difference toward reflective and responsible engagement with diverse perspectives, discourses, and value systems.

Sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) provides a complementary explanatory mechanism by viewing learning as a socially mediated and co-constructive process. Within this framework, meaning and by extension, value is shaped through dialogic interaction, mediation, and shared activity, emphasizing the inherently relational nature of learning.

A critical perspective (Kubota, 2004) is essential to this synthesis, ensuring sustained attention to power relations, ideological positioning, and questions of equity inherent in the use of a global language. From this standpoint, value negotiation is framed not as a neutral exchange but as a practice of ethical responsibility within unequal social and discursive conditions.

Taken together, this integrated theoretical framework combining Biesta's axiological structure with the dialogic and critical mechanisms of intercultural and sociocultural theory provides a robust foundation for analyzing and designing English language education that fosters not only linguistic competence but also critical intercultural responsibility and ethical subjecthood.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Value-Oriented English Language Learning is conceptualized as a multi-layered framework. Biesta's theory of educational purposes provides the normative anchor, while language learning is reframed as a value-laden practice enacted through processes of value negotiation. This framework serves as the analytical lens for the subsequent examination of English learning practices.

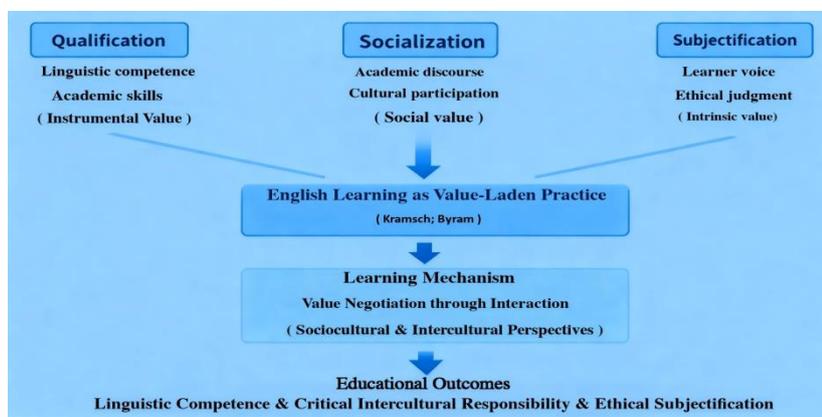


Figure 1. An Analytical Framework of Value-Oriented English Language Learning

3. Construct a Value-Constructive Classroom Environment

Translating the theoretical framework of Value-Oriented English Language Learning into pedagogical practice requires more than the addition of culturally themed content or interactive activities. A value constructive classroom environment must be intentionally designed to create conditions under which learners can encounter, negotiate, and reflect upon values through language use. In this sense, pedagogical design is not primarily concerned with increasing linguistic input or communicative output, but with structuring learning experiences that support ethical reflection, intercultural responsibility, and learner subjectification. Drawing on the theoretical framework outlined in Part 2, this study operationalizes value-oriented learning through three interrelated pedagogical dimensions: content, interaction, and assessment.

Building on the theoretical rationale of Value-Oriented English Language Learning, this section operationalizes its principles through an integrated pedagogical framework. Rather than presenting a set of discrete teaching techniques, the framework conceptualizes classroom practice as a systemic environment in which value awareness, value negotiation, and ethical subjectification are intentionally supported. To this end, three interrelated pedagogical dimensions content, interaction, and assessment are articulated as mutually reinforcing conditions for value construction.

Value construction in the language classroom begins with the strategic selection of content that embodies value tensions and invites ethical positioning (Kramsch,

2009). Within this framework, instructional materials such as literary excerpts, media texts, or multi modal narratives are selected not merely for thematic relevance or linguistic accessibility, but for their capacity to present dilemmas, competing perspectives, and culturally situated conflicts that resist straightforward interpretation.

Such materials function as pedagogical catalysts, creating discursive spaces in which learners are confronted with ambiguity, prompted to question assumptions, and required to articulate positions. In doing so, content serves as an initiator of value awareness rather than a vehicle for cultural information transmission (Byram, 2008). Crucially, the pedagogical value of this dimension lies not in the accumulation of cultural knowledge, but in its potential to provoke ethical reflection and value positioning. By engaging learners in what Kramsch (2009) characterizes as symbolic and ethical practice, value-laden content establishes the necessary conditions for subjectification as conceptualized by Biesta (2010).

While value-laden content initiates ethical inquiry, values are not formed through exposure alone but are actively shaped through dialogic engagement. Accordingly, classroom interaction within a value-oriented framework is intentionally designed to facilitate value negotiation rather than merely to increase communicative output.

Pedagogical formats such as reflective discussions, guided debates, and role-based simulations are employed not as fluency-oriented exercises, but as structured ethical spaces in which learners articulate, challenge, and re-evaluate perspectives under conditions of mutual accountability. Drawing on sociocultural theory, these interactions conceptualize meaning and value as co-constructed through mediated dialogue (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). From a critical intercultural perspective, such dialogic practices encourage learners to adopt reflexive stances toward both self and other, thereby supporting processes of socialization into discursive norms while simultaneously enabling subjectification as independent ethical positioning.

Within this framework, the primary pedagogical function of interaction is therefore not linguistic practice, but the co-construction and negotiation of values through language use.

If values are negotiated and constructed over time, traditional summary assessments are insufficient for capturing their development. A value-oriented approach consequently requires assessment practices aligned with the processional and reflective nature of value formation.

Assessment instruments such as learning journals, reflective portfolios, and project-based documentation are employed to trace learners' evolving ethical awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and reflexive capacity. These forms of assessment serve a dual function: they operate as evaluative tools while simultaneously functioning as pedagogical interventions that prompt learners' meta cognitive reflection on their own value positioning.

In Biesta's (2010) terms, while qualification including linguistic and academic competence remains an assessable dimension, subjectification cannot be standardized or measured through fixed criteria. Instead, it is documented and fostered through sustained reflective processes. Accordingly, the aim of assessment in this framework is not to judge the correctness of learners' values, but to trace the development of ethical awareness, responsibility, and reflective judgment.

The content, interaction, and assessment dimensions do not operate independently, but function as an integrated pedagogical system supporting value construction. Value-laden content initiates ethical inquiry; structured interaction sustains and deepens value negotiation through dialogue; and reflective assessment consolidates learning by making processes of subjectification visible to both learners and educators.

Taken together, these three dimensions translate the abstract principles of Value-Oriented English Language Learning into a coherent and executable classroom framework. In doing so, they ensure that the pursuit of linguistic competence is inseparable from the education of learners as ethically engaged and inter culturally responsible subjects.

4. Implications for Teacher Role and Pedagogical Design

Within a value-oriented pedagogical framework, the effectiveness of value construction does not rest solely on content selection or interaction formats, but critically depends on the transformation role of the teacher. Rather than functioning as a transmitter of linguistic knowledge or cultural facts, the teacher operates as a mediator of value negotiation and a facilitator of critical reflection. This role is central to activating the content, interaction, and assessment dimensions outlined in the previous sections, thereby ensuring that classroom practices genuinely support ethical reflection and intercultural responsibility.

4.1. From Knowledge Authority to Mediator of Value Negotiation

The teacher's primary pedagogical authority in this paradigm lies not in providing correct answers, but in structuring the conditions for ethical dialogue. Moving beyond the traditional role of a linguistic norm-transmitter, the teacher becomes a coordinator of value negotiation, responsible for creating and maintaining dialog spaces where multiple perspectives are articulated, examined, and contested (Biesta, 2010). As a mediator, the teacher scaffolds engagement by framing generative questions, sequencing tasks, and managing interactional dynamics to ensure a respectful yet challenging exchange. This role directly operationalizes the previous framework: the teacher selects and frames value-laden content, orchestrates the rhythm and ethical boundaries of dialogue, and guides reflective assessment to deepen, rather than judge, learner positioning.

4.2. Teacher as Facilitator of Critical Reflection

Without guided reflection, engagement with value-laden issues risks remaining at the level of unexamined personal opinion. Therefore, the teacher must also act as a facilitator of critical reflection, guiding learners to interrogate the why behind their thoughts. Through meta-discursive prompts and structured debriefing, the teacher helps learners surface underlying assumptions, cultural positioning, and the social implications of language use. This facilitation role is ethically oriented; it ensures that value negotiation contributes to the development of critical autonomy and responsibility, moving learners beyond the mere reproduction of existing biases toward informed, reflexive subjectification.

4.3. Task Design Principles for Value Construction

To translate this theoretical reorientation into practice, task design must adhere to three non-negotiable principles that move beyond communicative drills:

Principle 1: Ethical Openness. Tasks must be centered on issues that permit no single correct answer, thereby requiring learners to engage with ethical ambiguity and competing value positions.

Principle 2: Dialog Accountability. Tasks must require learners to articulate, justify, and revise their positions in direct relation to others, transforming interaction into genuine co-construction rather than parallel monologues.

Principle 3: Reflective Closure. Each task cycle must include structured opportunities for meta cognitive reflection, enabling learners to document shifts in perspective and articulate their emerging ethical awareness.

For instance, a task on global academic publishing ethics might involve role-playing different stakeholders, engaging in a structured debate, and concluding with a reflective journal entry. The pedagogical focus is not consensus but the cultivation of ethical awareness and intercultural responsibility through the process itself.

5. Practical Innovations and Acknowledged Challenges

This framework presents significant innovations: it redefines the teacher from a knowledge authority to an ethical mediator; it transforms tasks from communicative practice into value negotiation mechanisms; and it redirects classroom interaction from being fluency-oriented toward ethically structured dialogue.

Concurrently, it acknowledges real-world challenges that must be navigated professional discomfort with pedagogical uncertainty and value openness; the need for skills in managing potential classroom conflict; and the inherent complexity of assessing processes of subjectification. Addressing these challenges is not a negation of the model but a necessary step in its responsible implementation, underscoring the need for supportive teacher development within this new paradigm.

6. Conclusion

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This study has argued that value-oriented English language learning contributes to the development of learners not merely as competent language users, but as ethically responsible and critically autonomous subjects. By integrating linguistic qualification with processes of socialization and subjectification, the proposed framework supports learners' capacity to engage reflexively with diverse discourses, navigate value differences, and assume responsibility for their positioning in intercultural contexts.

Such learners are equipped not only to participate effectively in global academic communication, but to do so with ethical awareness and critical judgment. In this

respect, value-oriented learning directly addresses the limitations of skill-based approaches that prioritize communicative efficiency while neglecting the formative dimensions of higher education.

Beyond individual learner development, value-oriented pedagogical practices contribute to the cultivation of inclusive and dialog academic communities. Shared practices of value negotiation normalize disagreement, reflexivity, and ethical dialogue as integral components of academic life. Rather than treating diversity as a matter of representation alone, such practices foster substantive inclusion grounded in mutual recognition and responsibility.

By embedding ethical reflection and intercultural dialogue within everyday learning practices, value-oriented English language education strengthens the moral and relational foundations of higher education. It positions language classrooms as key sites for sustaining academic communities capable of engaging constructively with plurality and global interconnection. This study began by asking why value has become an urgent concern in English language learning within higher education. In response to the ethical and intercultural demands of global academic participation, it has proposed Value-Oriented English Language Learning as a theoretically grounded and pedagogically executable framework.

By conceptualization English learning as a value-laden, dialog, and ethically situated practice, the study demonstrates how language education can move beyond technical skill acquisition to reaffirm its educational legitimacy. In doing so, it positions English language teaching as a central site for cultivating ethical subjectivity, critical autonomy, and intercultural responsibility outcomes that are indispensable for higher education in an increasingly interconnected world.

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