

Unequal Englishes in Classroom Research: A Systematic Review (2016–2025)

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ABSTRACT

Unequal Englishes refer to the hierarchies among English varieties, where the Inner Circle Englishes are often privileged over the localized forms, such as Philippine English and Singaporean English. Introduced by Tupas (2015), Unequal Englishes serves as a theoretical lens for understanding the sociolinguistics of globalization and the power dynamics in language. This review addresses two key questions: (1) What empirical studies have examined manifestations of Unequal Englishes in classroom contexts from 2016 to 2025? and (2) What future research directions can be identified through the synthesis of classroom-based studies on Unequal Englishes published during this period? To accomplish this, a systematic review of the relevant literature was conducted. Multiple databases were searched using keywords and defined inclusion/exclusion criteria. After a structured screening process, four studies were selected. Using a qualitative approach, the review analyzes four peer-reviewed articles involving teachers and students, with data collected through observations and interviews. The analysis identified three major themes: (1) the dominance of Inner Circle Englishes, (2) social status and mobility, and (3) the level of English exposure in class. This review shows how Unequal Englishes are manifested in classrooms and how linguistic inequality contributes to the reinforcement of social hierarchies and the perpetuation of systemic biases in the educational setting.

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INTRODUCTION

English is widely regarded as a global language, a claim that is rarely questioned (Crystal, 2003). The continued dominance of English is deeply rooted in the global expansion of the British and American influence throughout the 20th century (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2017). In the 21st century, the language is assumed to have a major role in world communication, international business, social and cultural affairs, potentially benefiting the non-native-speaking countries (Graddol et al., 2001).

Traditionally, the language is often associated with the Western countries, as seen in Phillipson's assimilationist 'global English paradigm'. By contrast, contemporary viewpoints show that English is no longer exclusive to the traditional centers of power. Hence, the English language is now considered a shared language, accessible to everyone who uses it, no matter where

they come from (Holliday, 2009).

Literature Review

Historical Context of English in the Philippines

In the Philippines, English language was introduced during the American occupation. This was formalized when US President William McKinley announced through a Letter of Instruction that English should be the medium of instruction at all levels of the country's public educational system (Bernardo, 2008).

In 1987, Department Order No. 52, s. 1987, commonly known as the Bilingual Education Policy, was promulgated. With its primary aim to achieve competence in both Filipino and English, both languages are used as media of instruction across all levels. During the implementation of the Bilingual Policy, regional languages served as supplementary languages for the first two years of education (Department of Education, 1987).

The English-only-policy in the Philippines remains a current debate in educational policymaking circles. In the course of former President Gloria Macapagal- Arroyo's administration, concerns emerged regarding the decline in English proficiency, believing that this would lead to the weakening of the country's industry. From 2001 to 2009, 13 policy directives about language education policy were issued by the Department of Education and the Office of the President (Doplon, 2018). While during the 2005 session of the Philippine Congress, there were at least three legislative proposals advocating for the use of English as the medium of instruction across all educational levels (Bernardo, 2008).

In 2009, the MTB-MLE or the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education was institutionalized through the Order No. 74 of the Department of Education. Prior to this period, teachers had begun using mother tongue when it comes to their teaching, as seen in the empirical studies like the Lingua Franca Project and Lubuagan First Language Component (Department of Education, 2009). These projects concluded that learning outcomes in English, as well as in Filipino, mathematics, and science, improved with the initial usage of the MTB-MLE (Martin, 2015).

Under the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, the medium of instruction, teaching materials to be used, and assessment of students from kindergarten through the first three years of schooling were mandated to be in their regional or native language. Certainly, this policy which requires the MTB-MLE or the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education aims for a stronger development in terms of the Philippine language policy (Martin, 2015).

However, resistance emerged during the implementation of the MTB-MLE. Though favorable outcomes are evident, some see it as a hindrance to the country's growing proficiency in the English language. In congress, Cebu Representative Gerald Anthony Gullas Jr. called for the reinstitution of English as the primary medium of instruction across all levels. In his proposal, Gullas advocated the promotion of English as the main language of communication in schools (Martin, 2015).

These manifestations of how the English language is valued in the Philippines have intensified the sociolinguistic dynamics within the societal and educational contexts. This has resulted in varied forms of acquisition which reflect broader social inequalities. With the differing viewpoints on how English is perceived by many, research on how learners acquire the language has expanded.

In Mondez's (2013) study, children of families with a higher socio-economic status are more exposed to the English language, as seen in their educational toys, books, and surrounding environment. Furthermore, Santos et al (2022) reported that learners from higher socio-economic levels usually outperform the learners from lower socioeconomic groups because the former have more opportunities to learn English at an earlier age.

Another factor is the acquisition of the English language through the socialization process. This process is characterized as the combination of family, media, external role in language

formation, environmental cues, and seeking assistance (Santos et al., 2022).

Hence, the learners' varying levels of exposure to English open a new perspective on how English is experienced and acquired unevenly. Despite the extensive literature available on English language education, a critical gap remains in understanding the unequal ways in which English is acquired and developed in classrooms. With this, the investigation will focus on the available research to map the implications of Unequal Englishes observed in classrooms.

Unequal Englishes

Linguists and researchers have developed differentiated visions about the nature and role of language. These perspectives recognize that language is a dynamic, socially embedded medium shaped by historical, cultural, and political forces. Thus, these differentiated visions critically examine how English is acquired, used, and valued.

In 1985, Kachru described the distribution of English in three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. This gave rise to what is now known as Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model (Al-Mutairi, 2020). Kachru's paradigm of concentric circles was further developed and modified by linguists. His theory labeled the world Englishes paradigm as a well-recognized thought in linguistics (Borlongan, 2016).

In 1987, Tom McArthur proposed that there is a central idea of 'World Standard English'. He elaborated this idea by creating his own diagram of Circle of World Englishes. In his conclusion, McArthur (1992) identified two rapidly changing elements, first is the language itself while the second is the people's perception towards the language. These visions have explored language as a tool for communication, a medium of instruction, and an identity marker. However, beyond these renowned views, another lens emerged, interrogating the ideological forces on language use, acquisition and development.

Tupas (2015) introduced the concept of unequal Englishes, arguing that restricting legitimacy to speakers from Inner Circle countries marginalizes the vast majority of English users. Specifically, he identified the unequal ways and contexts in which the English language is structured, configured and challenged. While this concept does not dismiss the notion of linguistic equality, it reframes the idea as a deeply political and ideological issue. In this view, linguistic equality acknowledges the power structures and social hierarchies which shape language. Thus, unequal Englishes assume linguistic equality, recognizing that English varieties are structurally equal, yet recognizing that their sociopolitical legitimacy is unevenly distributed. Rather than romanticizing this equality, the framework examines the inequality among Englishes, exposing and challenging the conditions which sustain them.

Tupas's approach negates the celebration of linguistic diversity, hence, it investigates the persisting systemic inequalities beneath the surface of pluralism. Moreover, unequal Englishes seek to uncover the underlying structures, contexts, and configurations which produce and maintain linguistic hierarchies (Tupas, 2015). In this framework, he also challenged the concept of 'Global English'. Tupas illustrated that when English enters a community, it changes form and is appropriated by its speakers. English is not limited to one central language, but is pluralized into many. He then accepted that 'Global English' operates as local English, emerging only if the language is localized, indigenized and pluralized (Tupas, 2024). The lens of unequal Englishes reminds us that an excessive focus on 'Englishes' can prevent researchers from looking at the immense social inequalities that characterize the everyday local dynamics of power between the speakers and within the community.

Unequal Englishes Observed in Classrooms

While the concept of unequal Englishes has been examined across various social domains, its implications remain pronounced in the classroom setting. As a primary site of language development and socialization, it becomes a site where broader linguistic hierarchies are reproduced. Both teachers and students engage with the diverse forms of the English language,

shaped by social and institutional factors. Hence, this opens a critical research gap: the urgent need to investigate how unequal Englishes are experienced within classroom environments.

In Singapore, Tupas and Weninger (2020) discussed the politics of Unequal Englishes by mapping the inequalities observed in classrooms. Similar to the Philippines, Singapore has many languages; however, they suffer from the effects of ambilingualism by not perfecting any of these (Santos et al., 2022). In the critical observation conducted, the linguistic problem in Singapore centered on their use of Singaporean English or Singlish. The use of this local vernacular variety is often discouraged within educational institutions. While there is ample evidence on the politics of English language, there is still a limited amount of empirical research which focuses on the ‘Singlish problem’, like how this problem shapes both the teachers and learners’ ideologies and practices (Tupas & Weninger, 2020).

In another study, Tupas (2020) addressed the suppressed linguistic repertoires of students by looking into the teacher’s strategies during the teaching-learning process. He explored how some Englishes are considered as ‘more privileged’, in this case the Singlish language. Tupas then highlighted the need to dismantle the systems surrounding linguistic inequality. Moreover, the study seeks to disrupt the dominant societal norms, specifically the native-speaker ideologies in education by empowering students to express themselves freely without inhibitions (Tupas, 2020).

While Tupas and Weninger (2020) explored the ‘Singlish problem’ in Singapore, similar ideological tensions exist in the Philippines with Philippine English and other local vernaculars. Locally, Canilao (2020) foregrounded the Philippine English in order to critically examine the diverse linguistic repertoire through the lens of unequal Englishes. While positioning the issues of power and inequality at the heart of language teaching and learning, Canilao also challenged the dominance of American or ‘standard’ English varieties evident in the classroom. Her study then emphasizes how linguistic hierarchies are present in the marginalized localized forms of English. Another study observed in the Philippines focuses on how unequal Englishes is experienced by students with differing backgrounds. The problem concerns how students encounter difficulties in the abrupt shift from an MTB-MLE approach to an English-oriented approach. Moreover, the absence of bridging programs intensifies the struggles of these students in adjusting to the new curriculum, resulting in a weaker academic performance.

The above-mentioned studies show how investigations have attempted to map out the linguistic inequalities observed. However, the gap remains on how these inequalities are resisted in localized classroom practices, particularly in multilingual contexts like the Philippines and Singapore, wherein English language is deeply intertwined with issues of identity, access and power. This research seeks to map the linguistic inequalities associated with English use in classroom settings and to explore ways to advance the unequal Englishes research agenda in the Philippines. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What empirical studies have examined manifestations of unequal Englishes in classroom contexts from 2016 to 2025?
2. What future research directions can be identified through a synthesis of classroom-based studies on unequal Englishes published during this period?

Methodology

This section presents an overview of the data collection and data analysis process used in this systematic review. Focusing specifically on unequal Englishes in classrooms, Figure 1 shows the visual schematic of the methodology employed in this study:

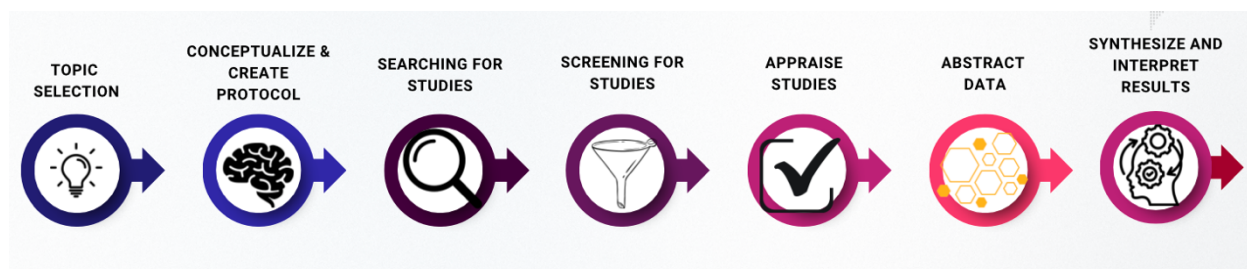


Figure 1. Framework of the Study's Review Process
[Source: Karolinska Institutet University Library]

The review process employed in this paper was adapted from University Library Web Team's (2024) process in conducting a systematic review. Systematic review, as defined by Newman and Gough (2020), is used to address what new research is needed to identify questions that are left unanswered. In conducting a systematic review, a well-planned methodology is implemented — from formulating research questions and establishing a protocol, searching the relevant literature, and culminating in the collation, examination and analysis of the results (University Library Web Team, 2024).

Data Collection

Initially, the first step in the process is the selection of a topic. With the keen interest in Tupas's (2015) concept of unequal Englishes, I chose to examine the inequality observed in the classroom using the English language. This topic is selected to gain valuable insight and deeper understanding of the included studies, in relation to my future dissertation topic. Consequently, the SPIDER framework was used as a search tool for the qualitative systematic review. Compared to the PICO search tool, the SPIDER search tool shows a greater specificity of hits, resulting in a more comprehensive search (Methley et al., 2014).

Sample: Teachers and students

Phenomenon or Interest: Unequal Englishes observed in classrooms

Design: Observation, interview

Evaluation: Mapping out the inequalities

Research type: Qualitative

Next, I conceptualized the review by accomplishing a protocol template fitted for a systematic review. The protocol included a quick background which examined the implication of the topic to the English language studies research and policy, along with the research objectives and the significance for the review. The protocol served as a guide in conceptualizing the review, including the methods and process to be used, and the timetable to monitor the review process. After the creation of protocol, the search for relevant studies followed. Clear eligibility criteria were set for the selection of studies.

The following inclusion criteria guided the selection process:

- Published articles
- Research project
- Teachers/ students as data source
- Unequal Englishes observed in classrooms

Meanwhile, the following exclusion criteria were applied:

- Book chapters
- Meta-analyses
- Book reviews

Following the development of Tupas's concept of unequal Englishes, studies published from 2016 through 2025 were examined. No additional limits were imposed, although only English-language studies were included. Multiple databases were searched for related studies: 1) Taylor & Francis 2) ScienceDirect, 3) Wiley Online, 4) SAGE Publications, 5) ProQuest, 6) Philippine e-

Journal, 7) ERIC. Handsearching was done wherein the reference lists of the studies were scanned to look for additional similar research. Moreover, a grey-literature search was conducted, using other sources like relevant journals and articles from Google Scholar to provide further information.

To delve into the deeper realm of unequal Englishes, Boolean operators were utilized to refine the search results by combining and excluding keywords. The principal search terms included the following: unequal Englishes in classrooms, English-only policy, unequal Englishes in the Philippines. To manage and organize the references extracted, Zotero, a reference management tool, was used to collect, organize, annotate, and cite the obtained studies.

As the sole reviewer, I manually applied the selection criteria in two phases. Study selection began with title screening, followed by the abstract screening. During the title and abstract screening, a table was used to mark the studies as include, exclude, or uncertain, wherein studies which do not meet the criteria are immediately omitted. This phase was followed by a full-text screening, ensuring that the included studies are potentially eligible studies. The reviewer then determined whether the articles meet the criteria based on the previous inclusion and exclusion criteria. To carefully assess the value and relevance of the selected studies, the critical appraisal checklist available in the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, n.d.) was used. Focusing on the systematic review checklist, 10 questions were considered, looking into the broad issues considered when appraising a systematic review study:

1. Did the review address a clearly focused question?
2. Did the authors look for the right type of papers?
3. Do you think all the important, relevant studies were included?
4. Did the review's authors do enough to assess quality of the included studies?
5. If the results of the review have been combined, was it reasonable to do so?
6. What are the overall results of the review?
7. How precise are the results?
8. Can the results be applied to the local population?
9. Were all important outcomes considered?
10. Are the benefits worth the harms and costs?

Following the critical appraisal process, four articles have met the inclusion criteria. These four articles were subsequently selected as the final set of studies to be reviewed in the study.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis, the four chosen articles were methodically read and analyzed. To start the analysis, I created a standardized data extraction form designed for the purpose of the review. The standardized data extraction form is presented using tables and narrative summaries, allowing the researcher to extract the information obtained from the available studies.

Table 1. Standardized Data Extraction

Title	Foregrounding Philippine Englishes in fostering linguistic equality	Unequal Adjustments: The Effect of "Unequal Englishes" on the Adjustments of 7 th Grade Students to a STEM High School and its Implications on the STEM Curriculum	Mapping out unequal Englishes in English-medium classrooms	Fostering translingual dispositions against Unequal Englishes
Year	2020	2021	2020	2020
Author	Maria Luz Elena N. Canilao	Filbert Joseph A. Ubanos	Ruanni Tupas and Csilla Weninger	Ruanni Tupas
Country	Philippines	Philippines	Singapore	Singapore
Participant	12 teachers; 6 Grade 3 teachers and 6 Grade 4 teachers	5 students in the 7 th and 11 th grade of PSHSS; from low-income household with Full Scholarship, and experienced	2 secondary school English teachers	1 secondary school English teacher

			difficulties adjusting to the PSHSS curriculum due to language use		
Data Collection Methods	Interview, recordings	video	Interview	Observation, interview, video recordings, FGD, collected materials	Observation, interview, video recordings, FGD, collected materials

The key data extracted includes the title of the study, year it was published, author(s) of the study and the country where the research is done. After identifying the general information, the more specified data were also investigated — the nature and number of participants involved in the study, the study design utilized by the author, the data collection method, and the use of Unequal Englishes as the author’s theoretical framework. Lastly, the following were identified: the gaps presented in the research, evidence in which unequal Englishes were observed or described in the study, and its results, conclusions and recommendations.

Once data were extracted, I analyzed the data using inductive coding. In this process, codes were not predefined, allowing the themes to emerge naturally inductively. It is then followed by the organization of codes into descriptive themes and connecting them to the research aims as the framework for interpretation. The presentation of the results followed, followed by the presentation of conclusion, while using the major themes identified as anchor to future research recommendations.

Findings and Discussion

This article aimed to review the published studies on unequal Englishes manifested in classrooms to synthesize prior work and identify possible future research on the topic. The review recognized three major themes: (1) the dominance of Inner Circle Englishes and the marginalization of other Englishes, (2) social status and mobility, and (3) exposure to English in classrooms.

Dominance of Inner Circle English

As the pioneer of the unequal Englishes framework, Tupas himself took a critical step by conducting his own empirical investigation on how linguistic inequality is observed in the classroom. Tupas and Weninger (2020) mapped out the manifestations of unequal Englishes within classrooms in which English was used as the medium of instruction. Set in Singapore, the study involved two secondary-school English teachers who shared their ideologies and strategies in teaching the English language through observations and interviews.

The findings showed that one teacher encouraged her students to conform and speak English adhering to the Inner Circle standard, promoting a ‘standard form’ of English in class. This stance unintentionally reinforced language ideologies and policies at the classroom level, in favor of the Inner Circle standard, while marginalizing their localized English variety, Singaporean English. To add another dilemma, the teacher herself experienced an ideological insecurity— while she discourages her students to use their localized English variety, she unconsciously used the language in her own speech. To ‘reprimand’ herself with this contradiction, she labeled her use of Singlish as ‘wrong’ during class, using it as a justification to signal its perceived inappropriateness. The teacher then acknowledged that Singaporean English helped her build rapport with the students and contributed to an inclusive learning environment with them.

In a similar study conducted by Tupas (2020) in Singapore, the participant expressed a contradictory ideology. While believing that Singlish has the linguistic grounds to be considered as a language in the classroom, she nevertheless believed that it did not qualify as a ‘legitimate language’ as compared to the Inner Circle or ‘standard Englishes’. This situation reveals a tension between the long-standing competing linguistic ideologies surrounding the use of Singaporean English and Inner Circle Englishes. While Tupas and Weninger (2020) discussed the evident

‘Singlish problem’ in Singapore, similar ideological tensions occur in the Philippines with the emergence of Philippine English and its local varieties.

Canilao (2020) foregrounded Philippine English in her study to investigate the delimitation of the language in basic education. In this exploratory-interpretive study, observations, interviews and video recordings were conducted to investigate the unequal Englishes in classrooms. During her classroom observations, she found that many English teachers attempt to pronounce words in an Americanized manner, the English that is usually ‘standardized’ in the Philippines. One example is when a student pronounced a certain word in a localized manner; while the teacher accepted the way it sounded, she then later ‘raised awareness’ by explaining to the remaining students that it is of a local English variety.

Similar to the study of Tupas and Weninger, linguistic insecurity was also observed when one of the teachers being observed pronounced a name but later corrected herself to conform to its pronunciation within the Inner Circle English. In another study conducted in a school in the Philippines, particularly the Philippine Science High School System, Ubanos (2021) stated that students felt that the entrance examinations have a strong innate bias towards the English language. They later expanded that there were no Filipino or native language-based exams, putting much emphasis on how English language is used throughout the assessment. Lastly, all subjects are taught in English, with a stricter condition when it comes to their academic outputs, to adhere to the globalized English in submitting their works and assignments.

Social Status and Mobility

Another element observed in the review is the emergence of social status and mobility as one of the key themes. In his research, Ubanos (2021) looked into the adjustment of students studying in the Philippine Science High School System. Drawing on five students from low-income households, he utilized Tupas’s framework of Unequal Englishes as his theoretical lens. The findings of his study revealed that one of the many problems experienced by the students was the sense of alienation from their batchmates. Reflecting on their social status, students who experienced this social disconnection from their classmates are usually those who are from the provinces and are funded to have a full scholarship in the institution. Hence, these scholars encountered cultural disorientation upon entering a new environment wherein speaking and communicating using English is viewed as a symbol of higher social status.

Meanwhile, Canilao (2020) discovered an interesting gap between the students’ socio-economic status in relation to their linguistic inequalities. In her observation, many children in advanced classes have greater access to the English materials since most of them are from affluent families. While considering English as their first language, these students also have tutors at home who monitor and help them with their schoolwork. The classrooms for advanced classes are also equipped with LCD projectors, computers and decorated with appealing visuals and toys available for the students. On the other hand, most of the children in regular schools have more difficulty in understanding and expressing themselves in the language. Generally, they belong to the economically disadvantaged groups, wherein basic needs are considered their priority.

English Exposure in Class

In Canilao’s (2020) study, six multilingual public elementary schools participated: two city schools and two municipal schools in Visayas and two city schools in Mindanao. To maintain objectivity and ensure that both groups were represented, a leading school and a regular school were included for each city or municipality. In her observation, enriched classes use English exclusively as the primary language of communication during classroom discussion.

Learners in these classes are more inclined in English, as shown by how they answered questions, followed instructions, and gave immediate and confident responses. On the other hand, learners in regular classes had difficulty understanding the questions of the teachers in English. Students from regular classes are quite hesitant to express their ideas, while the teachers employ

the use of local words to help the students understand the language.

In the Philippine Science High School System, Ubanos (2021) noted that English is used as the main language of instruction across all subjects, including Araling Panlipunan. However, most of the students from the public schools often attain only a foundational level of English proficiency, which made it difficult for them to adapt to an English-speaking environment. Moreover, students mostly use Filipino as their medium of instruction in Filipino-based subjects.

In contrast, students from the private schools generally have better access to educational resources and funding, enabling them to develop stronger English language skills. The students then stated that their constant exposure to English in their daily conversations helps them understand their lessons better, while increasing their confidence in speaking the language.

Discussion

The systematic review mapped the emerging linguistic inequalities in classroom-based studies, with the main goal of identifying the progress and the remaining gaps in the chosen studies. Through a systematic analysis of the empirical research published between 2016 and 2025, three major themes emerged, showing the evolving factors of linguistic inequality in the educational setting. These were 1) dominance of Inner Circle English 2) social status and mobility and 3) English exposure in class.

Regarding the existing dominance of Inner Circle English, factors include the continued dominance of ‘standard’ English as observed in classrooms, promotion of ‘standard’ English in classrooms while disregarding other Englishes (Canilao, 2020; Tupas & Weninger, 2020; Tupas, 2020), biases towards English language when teaching (Ubanos, 2021) and exposure to Americanized media (Canilao, 2020).

In terms of social status and mobility, several strands emerged on how it is observed: the social status of students (Canilao, 2020; Ubanos, 2021; Tupas & Weninger, 2020), classroom environment and classroom equipment (Canilao, 2020), social use of English (Ubanos, 2021), and repeatedly, the students’ frequent exposure to Americanized media (Canilao, 2020).

Lastly, the students’ level of exposure which includes the classroom interaction (Canilao, 2020) the medium of instruction (Ubanos, 2021), gaps in previously learned English (Ubanos, 2021), the usual English used in Philippine public schools (Ubanos, 2021) and the usual English observed in Philippine private schools (Ubanos, 2021).

Interestingly, this review found that the predominant use of ‘standard English’ over its local varieties in the remaining concentric circles is still a contributing factor. Two of the reviewed studies recommended ways to address linguistic inequality by raising the critical awareness of both educators and learners toward their views on socio-political dimensions of language usage. Tupas and Weninger (2020) concluded that both teachers and students are affected by experiencing the persistent effects of unequal Englishes, which complicates their language and practices within their political, economic, and cultural dimensions, particularly the relationship between power and prestige associated with the ‘standard English’. Hence, one possible approach is to raise the teachers’ awareness of their teaching ideologies through training that encourages them to reflect on their personal beliefs on language and whether these beliefs support or prevent the promotion of linguistic justice in classrooms. Similarly, Canilao (2020) then recommended the recognition of the presence of Philippine Englishes, including its local varieties, to address the linguistic inequality in educational settings. Moreover, teaching students about the conventional language norms without strictly adhering to the ‘standard Englishes’ supports the achievement of the national and international standards while maintaining the value of our own Philippine English varieties.

Therefore, a potential direction for future research could involve designing localized teacher training programs on language use. Beginning with a diagnostic evaluation, followed by a structured implementation plan and the culmination of its full execution. Additionally, exploring linguistic inequality in classrooms by using alternative theoretical frameworks may offer further

valuable insights.

Another highlight is that the students' differing socioeconomic circumstances influence the linguistic inequalities observed within the educational settings. As noted by Tupas and Weninger (2020) in their study, both teachers and students contribute to the continuous presence of unequal Englishes due to underlying power structures, cultural contexts and observed political dynamics. Two similar studies addressed these issues by proposing interventions that promote inclusivity in language education. Canilao (2020) recommended revisiting the Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum or LAMC to ensure a more effective promotion of sociocultural inclusivity. In support, Ubanos (2021) emphasized the importance of implementing bridging programs and supplementary classes to help students adjust in their school environment. Furthermore, Tupas (2020) explained that Singapore's deep-rooted colonial history and strong focus on global competitiveness encourage both teachers and students to operate within the mandated practices and frameworks of the institutions. Accordingly, a possible research topic could focus on how the integration of localized language policies and pedagogies would influence the students' linguistic identity, engagement and academic performance across socioeconomic groups.

Lastly, this review found a few articles which explain how teachers' language choices can either reinforce or challenge the linguistic hierarchies in the classroom. Canilao (2020) mentioned that linguistic insecurities can emerge as early as primary education, putting weight on how teachers play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. Meanwhile, in Tupas's (2020) study, while one teacher appears hesitant to fully employ the use of Singlish in the classroom, she incorporated it as a teaching strategy. While she remains conflicted on the language, the teacher still acknowledges its importance, recognizing it as a legitimate and logically structured mode of communication. Despite these conflicting ideologies, she continues to integrate Singlish in her lessons, driven by its effectiveness as a teaching strategy and its role in preserving the students' linguistic and cultural identities both within and beyond the classroom. Although the studies discussed the disruption of linguistic hierarchies, there remains a lack of focused research on the tensions they experience between their professional language norms and personal beliefs, particularly wherein local varieties of Singlish or Philippine English are at play. Investigating these tensions could offer insights in developing teacher education programs promoting critical language and sociolinguistic awareness.

Examining classroom research on unequal Englishes conducted between 2016 and 2025 highlights the potential for future investigations to come up with a more extensive and diversified body of data compared to the gathered sources. Although the number of studies remains limited, the current findings identify the emerging patterns of linguistic inequality, particularly those associated with the usage of Singlish in Singapore and Philippine English in the Philippines. The systematic review of studies from 2016 to 2025 maps out how unequal Englishes are acknowledged, reinforced and challenged inside the classroom. With the previous discussion on how future studies can be established based on the results, implications for language studies can be drawn.

Regarding pedagogical implications, curriculum revisitation and reform (Canilao, 2020) may support the need to revise the language curricula to include, legitimize and accept the use of the local English varieties. Teacher training (Tupas & Weninger, 2020) can also help them recognize and address the underlying linguistic bias they possess, thus promoting a more inclusive classroom practice. While bridging programs (Ubanos, 2021), for instance, may provide aid and support specifically for struggling speakers of the English language.

Another one is its sociolinguistic implications, specifically the language ideology awareness (Canilao, 2020) which can help uncover how dominant ideologies about the 'standard English' shape the students' identities. Despite the suggested interventions proposed to address the linguistic inequalities in the classroom, the concept of unequal Englishes remains relevant. Further research should therefore examine this concept and propose a more effective strategy towards

linguistic equality.

Conclusion

This systematic review examined classroom-based research on unequal Englishes published between 2016 and 2025 and identified three key findings: the continued dominance of Inner Circle Englishes, the influence of socioeconomic status and mobility, and unequal levels of exposure to English in the classroom. Across the four reviewed studies, localized varieties such as Philippine English and Singaporean English were frequently positioned as less legitimate than so-called standard English. These linguistic hierarchies shaped teachers' instructional practices, students' language choices, and learners' access to educational opportunities. The findings imply that language education should recognize local English varieties as legitimate communicative resources while developing teachers' critical awareness of the social, cultural, and ideological dimensions of language use. More inclusive curricula, reflective teacher education, and appropriate bridging programs may help reduce linguistic inequality and support students from diverse socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds.

Nevertheless, the conclusions of this review should be interpreted cautiously because only four studies met the inclusion criteria, and the evidence was limited to classroom settings in the Philippines and Singapore. The small number of studies, restricted geographical coverage, qualitative emphasis, and use of a single reviewer limit the generalizability of the findings and may have introduced selection or interpretive bias. Future research should therefore include larger and more diverse samples, additional national and educational contexts, multiple reviewers, and mixed-method or longitudinal designs. Researchers should also examine how localized language policies, teacher-training interventions, and bridging programs affect students' linguistic identities, classroom participation, and academic achievement. Such work could strengthen the evidence base for developing pedagogical practices and language policies that challenge linguistic hierarchies while promoting greater equity in multilingual classrooms.

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