

The Hegemony of the Center: A Meta-Aggregation of English Linguistic Neo-Imperialism in Philippine Education

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Abstract:

This study synthesizes qualitative evidence on the persistence of English linguistic neo-imperialism in the educational landscape of the Philippines. Employing a qualitative meta-aggregation approach, the research integrates findings from multiple peer-reviewed qualitative studies to examine how standard English ideology continues to shape language practices, educational policies, and identity formation. The analysis reveals that despite the institutionalization of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) and the constitutional recognition of Filipino, the socioeconomic prestige associated with Standard British and American English remains dominant. This preference reinforces linguistic hierarchies that marginalize local languages and Philippine English, perpetuating a neo-imperialist cycle rooted in historical, economic, and institutional forces. Furthermore, the findings highlight the tension experienced by Filipino learners and educators as they negotiate global linguistic demands alongside local linguistic identities. The study underscores the need to decolonize English language teaching (ELT) through the adoption of pluricentric pedagogical approaches, the promotion of linguistic justice, and the recognition of Philippine English as a legitimate variety. These reforms aim to transform English from a mechanism of linguistic dominance into a tool for empowerment, inclusivity, and culturally responsive education.

Keywords: English linguistic neo-imperialism, linguistic identity, language ideology, English language teaching, pluricentric approach

Introduction:

The Philippines, a former colony of the United States, remains a critical site for examining the complex role of English as both a medium of global mobility and a mechanism of cultural and linguistic displacement. Within postcolonial contexts, English linguistic neo-imperialism represents a contemporary form of language hegemony sustained not through direct political domination but through economic, educational, and cultural structures that privilege Western

linguistic norms. This modern phase of linguistic dominance is driven by global political and business interests that position English as a marker of prestige, employability, and intellectual authority (Le Ha, 2018; Hamid, 2024).

In the Philippine context, this phenomenon is evident in the persistent “English-only” orientation in professional and academic spaces, as well as in the high value placed on “native-like” fluency, particularly American and British standards. Such preferences reinforce what Ngoei (2025) describes as Anglo-American neo-colonial influence in Southeast Asia, where linguistic practices continue to reflect historical power relations. Similarly, global studies on linguistic imperialism demonstrate that English language policies often produce tensions between domination and resistance, shaping local strategies of appropriation and negotiation (Aponte Andújar, 2023).

Despite the constitutional recognition of Filipino and the institutionalization of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), English continues to function as a form of “linguistic capital” associated with upward social mobility and socioeconomic access. This dynamic reflects broader global patterns in which English operates as a gatekeeping mechanism within neoliberal educational systems (Sato, 2019). Empirical studies further reveal that while Filipino learners increasingly recognize Philippine English as a legitimate variety within World Englishes, many still perceive it as subordinate to Inner Circle norms, highlighting the persistence of standard language ideology (Pablo et al., 2023).

Given these tensions, this study synthesizes qualitative research to examine how English linguistic neo-imperialism is reproduced, negotiated, and contested within Philippine educational settings. By aggregating qualitative findings, the study aims to illuminate how Filipino students and educators navigate the competing demands of global English proficiency and local linguistic identity in the contemporary era of globalization.

Literature Review:

The global dominance of English has been widely examined through the lens of linguistic imperialism and language hegemony, which frame English as a medium through which cultural and ideological power is reproduced. Scholars argue that English has evolved from a colonial instrument into a global linguistic system sustained by economic, political, and educational structures that privilege Western norms.

Jun Zeng and Jian Yang (2024) describe English language hegemony as a historically embedded phenomenon that continues to shape global knowledge production and social mobility. Similarly, Donaldo Macedo (2019) argues that foreign language education, particularly English language teaching, often reinforces colonial hierarchies by privileging dominant linguistic practices while marginalizing local knowledge systems. These perspectives provide a critical framework for understanding how English operates as both a global lingua franca and a mechanism of cultural dominance.

The expansion of English is also closely linked to globalization and the ideological construction of the “West” as a center of knowledge and authority. Phan Le Ha (2018) examines how higher education institutions in the Global South reproduce Western epistemological norms through English-medium instruction, positioning English as a gateway to modernity and global participation. This reinforces the perception that Western linguistic standards represent intellectual legitimacy and professional success.

Complementing this view, Mohammad Omar Hamid (2024) highlights the growing dominance of English in global education systems and its implications for the marginalization of other modern languages. The increasing centrality of English in academic and professional domains underscores its role in shaping linguistic hierarchies and educational priorities.

Historical analyses further reveal that contemporary linguistic hierarchies are rooted in colonial and neo-colonial relations. W. Q. W. Ngoei (2025) explains that Anglo-American influence in Southeast Asia extended beyond political governance to include cultural and linguistic systems that continue to shape national identities and institutional practices. This perspective is particularly relevant to postcolonial societies where English remains embedded in

governance, education, and economic structures. In such contexts, language becomes a site of ideological struggle, reflecting tensions between national identity formation and global integration.

Comparative studies from other postcolonial settings demonstrate similar dynamics of linguistic dominance and resistance. Pedro Aponte Andújar (2023) explores English language policy in Puerto Rico and reveals how linguistic imperialism produces both resistance and appropriation among local populations. The study highlights how English is negotiated as a tool for socioeconomic advancement while simultaneously threatening local linguistic identities. These findings parallel experiences in many postcolonial societies, suggesting that English language policies often produce complex processes of adaptation, contestation, and hybrid identity formation.

The neoliberal transformation of education has further intensified the role of English as a form of linguistic capital associated with employability and global competitiveness. Tatsuro Sato (2019) introduces the concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism to explain how plurilingual students strategically adopt English while maintaining local linguistic identities within neoliberal educational environments. Similarly, Fang Rong Chang (2022) demonstrates that English functions as social capital in contemporary economies, where language proficiency is commodified and linked to professional advancement. These studies illustrate how English proficiency becomes a form of symbolic and economic capital that shapes individual and institutional practices.

Empirical research on learner attitudes toward English also highlights the persistence of standard language ideology. B. I. A. Pablo, E. K. C. Gruta, J. C. O. Mandac, and N. B. Tabios (2023) found that Filipino college and senior high school students increasingly recognize Philippine English as a legitimate variety within World Englishes; however, many still perceive Inner Circle varieties as superior. This reflects the internalization of linguistic hierarchies shaped by global norms. Such attitudes demonstrate how standard English ideology continues to influence language learning motivations and identity formation in educational contexts.

Studies across diverse educational settings also confirm the global reach of English linguistic imperialism. Farhad Namiq and A. M. Zafarghandi (2025) show that Iraqi postgraduate students perceive English as an imperial language that provides academic opportunities while simultaneously reinforcing Western dominance. Likewise, C. M. Lee (2019) discusses how English for Academic Purposes is shaped by global market forces and neo-colonial associations within higher education institutions.

These findings suggest that the ideological positioning of English as a marker of professionalism and academic competence transcends national boundaries. Critical perspectives on language policy and knowledge production further highlight the need for linguistic decolonization. D. M. M. San Juan (2024) critiques the dominance of English in Philippine academic publishing, arguing that privileging English marginalizes Filipino scholarship and local epistemologies.

Meanwhile, John Knagg (2018) questions the global privileging of English and calls for greater recognition of linguistic diversity in education. Collectively, these studies underscore the importance of challenging dominant language ideologies and promoting more inclusive linguistic practices. They provide a critical foundation for examining how English linguistic neo-imperialism operates within Philippine education and how learners and educators negotiate its implications.

Methodology:

This study employed a qualitative meta-aggregation research design to systematically synthesize existing qualitative evidence on English linguistic neo-imperialism in the Philippines. Qualitative meta-aggregation was selected because it emphasizes the systematic integration of findings from primary qualitative studies to generate synthesized statements that inform policy and practice. Unlike interpretive approaches such as meta-ethnography, which reinterprets data to construct new theoretical meanings, meta-aggregation seeks to preserve the original meanings of the findings while organizing them into coherent categories. This pragmatic orientation aligns with the study's objective of addressing linguistic inequities in Philippine education by producing evidence-based insights grounded in existing research.

A systematic literature search was conducted across major academic databases, including Google Scholar, Philippine E-Journals, and ERIC (Education Resources Information Center). The search utilized keywords such as “English linguistic imperialism Philippines,” “qualitative study ELT Philippines,” and “Philippine English ideologies” to identify relevant studies. To ensure rigor and relevance, the inclusion criteria specified peer-reviewed qualitative studies employing methodologies such as narrative inquiry, case study, and phenomenology. Additionally, studies were required to be published between 2018 and 2024 and to focus specifically on the Philippine English subject or educational context. These criteria ensured that the analysis captured contemporary perspectives on language ideology and educational practice.

Data extraction and synthesis followed the methodological framework established by the Joanna Briggs Institute for qualitative meta-aggregation. Relevant findings from selected studies were systematically extracted and grouped according to thematic similarity. These categories were then synthesized into broader analytical statements that represent shared patterns across the literature. Through this process, three overarching synthesized findings were generated, providing a comprehensive understanding of how English linguistic neo-imperialism is constructed, experienced, and negotiated within Philippine educational settings.

Findings and Discussion:

The "Native-Speaker" Pedestal

The meta-aggregation revealed a persistent “native-speaker” pedestal as a dominant theme across the reviewed studies, reflecting the continued influence of standard language ideology in educational contexts. Filipino learners frequently perceive Philippine English (PhilE) as an inferior variety and aspire instead to “Inner Circle” norms, particularly American and British accents.

This orientation reflects a neo-imperialist linguistic structure in which the “periphery” continues to seek validation from the “center,” reinforcing hierarchical distinctions between global and local varieties of English. The findings suggest that language preference is not merely a pedagogical concern but a manifestation of broader sociocultural power relations embedded in postcolonial educational systems. The privileging of standard English is closely linked to professional and academic expectations. C. M. Lee (2019) explains that English for Academic Purposes is shaped by global standards of professionalism that associate native-like fluency with competence and intellectual authority.

Such expectations create implicit norms within educational institutions that encourage learners to conform to dominant linguistic models. This reinforces the perception that deviations from standardized English represent linguistic inadequacy rather than legitimate variation. Consequently, Philippine English and other localized forms of expression are often marginalized despite their communicative effectiveness and cultural relevance. This hierarchy is further reinforced by technological and institutional developments that privilege standardized language forms. H. H. M. Albeihi and M. F. Rice (2025) argue that emerging technologies, particularly generative artificial intelligence systems, tend to reproduce dominant linguistic norms, potentially limiting language diversity and reinforcing standard language ideology.

Similarly, M. Ali, S. Ali, and M. U. Ghani (2020) demonstrate how global English standards are maintained through comparisons with British linguistic norms, further solidifying the authority of Inner Circle varieties. These developments illustrate how technological and institutional practices contribute to the continued dominance of standardized English in global and local contexts.

The persistence of standard language ideology also affects learners’ linguistic behavior and identity formation. N. Noorashid and H. Jamil (2024) highlight that the pressure to conform to native-speaker norms can generate foreign language anxiety among learners, particularly when linguistic competence is measured against unattainable standards. This anxiety reflects internalized linguistic hierarchies that shape learners’ perceptions of their own language abilities. In the Philippine context, such pressures may contribute to the devaluation of local linguistic identities and reinforce the belief that social mobility is contingent upon mastery of standardized English.

Studies on linguistic hybridity further demonstrate how neo-imperialist dynamics influence everyday language practices. B. Faizin and N. U. Kalsum (2024) suggest that language mixing and code-switching practices may reflect broader processes of linguistic influence and power negotiation within globalized environments. Rather than representing linguistic deficiency, these practices may indicate adaptive responses to dominant language systems. Similarly, S. A. Mirhosseini (2025) notes that institutional environments often normalize English dominance even in cultural or local contexts, demonstrating how English becomes embedded in everyday academic practices. These findings highlight the subtle mechanisms through which English linguistic hegemony operates within educational settings.

Historical and sociopolitical analyses also contextualize the native-speaker pedestal within broader anti-imperialist discourse. J. Narayan (2019) emphasizes that linguistic hierarchies are intertwined with broader struggles against imperialism and cultural domination, where language serves as a site of ideological resistance and identity formation. In the Philippine context, M. M. Harris (2018) discusses how historical activism against United States imperialism reflects ongoing tensions surrounding cultural and linguistic autonomy. These perspectives suggest that the preference for native-speaker norms is not only an educational issue but also a reflection of historical power relations and cultural negotiation in postcolonial societies.

At the household and community level, global linguistic pressures also shape everyday practices and values. C. J. R. Castro highlights how global economic and cultural forces influence Filipino family practices, including language preferences associated with perceived social advancement. Such dynamics demonstrate how linguistic hierarchies extend beyond formal educational settings and become embedded in social and economic aspirations.

The aggregated findings confirm that the “native-speaker” pedestal is sustained by interconnected historical, institutional, technological, and sociocultural forces. This reinforces a neo-imperialist linguistic order in which local varieties of English remain subordinated, shaping how Filipino learners and educators negotiate identity, competence, and social mobility within the contemporary educational landscape.

The Socioeconomic "Gating" of English

Qualitative narratives from teachers consistently describe English as a “passport” to upward mobility, where linguistic competence becomes closely tied to employability, academic success, and social prestige. However, this framing also produces structural inequalities, as students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often experience linguistic exclusion due to limited access to English-rich learning environments.

The education system’s emphasis on standardized English usage frequently penalizes non-standard forms, reinforcing disparities in academic performance and professional advancement. Historical analyses help contextualize this linguistic hierarchy within broader colonial and postcolonial structures. Renato Constantino (2022) argues that the institutionalization of English during the American colonial period established enduring systems of cultural and educational dependence.

English became embedded within governance, schooling, and economic structures, positioning it as a marker of social status and intellectual authority. Similarly, M. M. Harris (2018) highlights how resistance to United States imperialism reflects broader struggles for cultural and linguistic autonomy. These historical dynamics illustrate how contemporary linguistic inequalities are rooted in colonial legacies that continue to shape educational practices and social mobility.

The socioeconomic gating of English is further reinforced by neoliberal transformations in global education systems. K. Lê (2023) explains that neoliberal policies position language education as an investment in human capital, where English proficiency becomes commodified and linked to economic competitiveness. Such frameworks prioritize market-oriented skills over linguistic diversity, encouraging educational institutions to promote English as a pathway to global participation. In this context, access to quality English education often depends on financial resources, creating disparities between students who can afford private instruction and those who rely solely on public schooling.

Comparative studies in other contexts demonstrate similar patterns of linguistic capital and inequality. F. Branschat (2019) emphasizes that linguistic imperialism can produce unequal access to linguistic capital, limiting opportunities

for marginalized groups while privileging those with greater educational resources. This dynamic resonates with findings from Philippine classrooms, where students with stronger English proficiency are often perceived as more capable or intelligent. The association of English with competence and authority thus reinforces existing socioeconomic hierarchies within educational and professional settings.

Psychological factors also contribute to the experience of linguistic exclusion. N. Noorashid and H. Jamil (2024) demonstrate that the pressure to achieve native-like proficiency can generate foreign language anxiety, particularly among learners who perceive their linguistic competence as inadequate. Such anxiety may disproportionately affect students from disadvantaged backgrounds who lack exposure to standardized English. This emotional dimension of language learning further reinforces the gatekeeping function of English, as learners internalize linguistic hierarchies that shape their academic participation and self-perception.

Institutional practices also play a significant role in sustaining English dominance within educational systems. S. A. Mirhosseini (2025) observes that English-medium instruction often becomes normalized even in contexts where local languages could be effectively utilized, reflecting institutional assumptions about linguistic prestige and global relevance. This prioritization of English can marginalize local linguistic resources and create barriers for students who are more proficient in their mother tongues. Such practices illustrate how educational policies and classroom norms reproduce linguistic inequalities under the guise of academic standards.

At the household level, global linguistic pressures shape family expectations and social aspirations. C. J. R. Castro notes that Filipino families often associate English proficiency with social advancement and economic stability, influencing language practices within the home. These expectations reflect broader global cultural and economic forces that position English as a pathway to success. Consequently, students who lack access to supportive linguistic environments may experience additional disadvantages, further reinforcing socioeconomic divisions.

Broader postcolonial and cultural analyses also emphasize how linguistic hierarchies intersect with identity, power, and global cultural influence. Studies of transnational language practices highlight how power differentials shape writing, translation, and knowledge production, privileging dominant languages over local expression (Tan, 2025). Cultural analyses likewise demonstrate the persistence of colonial influence in Filipino cultural narratives and identity formation (Locklin, 2024). Together, these perspectives suggest that the socioeconomic gating of English reflects a complex interplay of historical, institutional, economic, and cultural forces. The aggregated findings therefore confirm that English operates as a powerful mechanism of social stratification, shaping access to opportunity while reinforcing linguistic and socioeconomic inequalities within Philippine education.

Policy-Practice Decoupling

Although MTB-MLE policies aim to empower local languages and enhance learning outcomes through mother-tongue instruction, synthesized findings indicate that parents and teachers often prioritize English due to its perceived economic and social value. This preference reflects a pragmatic orientation toward global competitiveness, where English proficiency is viewed as a pathway to employment and social mobility. Consequently, economic considerations frequently override the pedagogical benefits of mother-tongue instruction, reinforcing the neo-imperialist cycle in which English maintains its dominant status in educational practice.

Historical perspectives provide insight into the roots of this policy–practice gap. Renato Constantino (2022) explains that colonial education systems institutionalized English as a central medium of instruction, embedding it within governance, economic structures, and national development frameworks. This historical legacy continues to shape contemporary attitudes toward language policy, where English is associated with progress and modernization. Such colonial influences contribute to the persistence of linguistic hierarchies that undermine policy efforts to promote local languages in formal education.

The tension between policy and practice also reflects broader debates concerning monocentric and pluricentric language models. Tomasz D. Kamusella (2018) argues that languages may function as either monocentric systems governed by a single standard or pluricentric systems recognizing multiple legitimate varieties. Similarly, T. G. Reagan (2025) proposes models that account for linguistic diversity within global language systems. These

perspectives highlight the challenges faced by multilingual societies attempting to legitimize local linguistic varieties while navigating global language norms.

In the Philippine context, the persistence of English as a dominant standard reflects the difficulty of implementing pluricentric approaches within deeply entrenched linguistic hierarchies. Global and regional dynamics further complicate the implementation of multilingual policies. N. Noorashid (2025) emphasizes the influence of transnational linguistic networks in shaping language practices across Southeast Asia, where cross-border communication and mobility reinforce the strategic importance of global languages.

Likewise, Kunal Plys (2025) demonstrates how geopolitical and ideological forces historically shaped cultural and educational systems in the Global South, influencing language policy and national identity formation. These transnational and geopolitical pressures contribute to the prioritization of English as a practical tool for global participation, often at the expense of local language initiatives.

At the sociocultural level, language policy implementation is influenced by identity, community practices, and everyday linguistic choices. T. Sykes (2018) highlights how urban experiences and social mobility in major cities shape language preferences and cultural identities. Additionally, K. H. Eng and D. W. Yang (2020) note that educational institutions in Asia often reflect broader social norms and power relations, including language hierarchies that influence inclusion and participation. These sociocultural factors illustrate how language policies are negotiated within complex social environments where institutional goals and community expectations may diverge.

Educational research also emphasizes the challenges of implementing inclusive language practices within formal learning environments. L. T. LeMaster and colleagues (2022) highlight the importance of resisting dominant communication norms to support diverse linguistic identities in education. Similarly, C. Wright-Taylor (2021) underscores the need to support translingual learners by recognizing linguistic diversity as a resource rather than a deficit. These perspectives suggest that the successful implementation of MTB-MLE requires institutional commitment to linguistic inclusivity and pedagogical flexibility, which may be difficult to achieve in systems that prioritize standardized English.

Cultural and ideological influences also reinforce the gap between policy and practice. A. Ang (2025) discusses how Anglophone cultural production in Southeast Asia continues to shape regional literary and intellectual traditions, reinforcing the prestige of English. Meanwhile, A. Bano (2023) advocates for decolonizing research practices to challenge hegemonic knowledge systems that privilege dominant languages. Popular culture and transnational cultural movements likewise influence language preferences, as global media consumption shapes aspirations and identity formation among Filipino youth (Benitez, 2022). These cultural forces contribute to the sustained appeal of English despite policy efforts to promote local languages.

The synthesized findings demonstrate that the policy–practice decoupling in MTB-MLE implementation results from the intersection of historical legacies, global economic pressures, sociocultural dynamics, and institutional constraints. While multilingual education policies seek to empower local linguistic identities, their implementation is often undermined by the perceived economic advantages of English and the enduring prestige associated with global language norms. This dynamic reinforces the neo-imperialist cycle in which English maintains its dominance despite formal policy efforts to promote linguistic diversity, highlighting the need for more context-sensitive and critically informed approaches to language policy in Philippine education.

Conclusion:

The meta-aggregation confirms that English linguistic neo-imperialism in the Philippines is no longer imposed through direct colonial authority but is sustained through subtle ideological and socioeconomic mechanisms. Central to this phenomenon is the notion of “linguistic entrepreneurship,” wherein individuals perceive English proficiency as an investment necessary for social mobility, professional advancement, and global participation. As a result, the dominance of English persists through institutional practices, market-driven motivations, and internalized language hierarchies rather than overt coercion.

This dynamic produces a continuing tension between local linguistic identity and the pursuit of standardized English competence, reflecting what Ruanni Tupas (2022) conceptualizes as the “coloniality of native speakerism.” Such tensions demonstrate how linguistic power operates within educational systems, shaping learners’ identities, aspirations, and perceptions of legitimacy in both academic and professional contexts.

The findings of this study highlight critical implications for English language teaching (ELT) in the Philippine educational system. First, there is a need to adopt a pluricentric approach to English instruction that recognizes Philippine English as a legitimate and functional variety rather than positioning American or British standards as the sole benchmarks of proficiency. Moving beyond a monocentric model of language teaching can help validate local linguistic practices, promote cultural identity, and foster greater inclusivity in the classroom. Second, the pursuit of linguistic justice requires systematic teacher training programs that address implicit biases toward local accents, dialects, and non-standard forms of English. Educators must be equipped with the critical awareness necessary to challenge linguistic hierarchies and support diverse forms of expression among learners.

Thus, English in the Philippines functions as a double-edged sword. While it provides access to global knowledge, economic opportunities, and international communication, its neo-imperialist implementation continues to marginalize the country’s rich linguistic ecology. The synthesis of qualitative evidence suggests that meaningful transformation requires a fundamental shift in teacher education, curriculum design, and language policy. By reorienting English instruction toward inclusivity, critical awareness, and respect for linguistic diversity, English can be repositioned from a tool of domination into a resource for empowerment and social equity.

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