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Promoting EFL learning towards peaceful global citizenship

Eleanore Hargreaves, Dalia Elhawary and Mohamed Mahgoub

Abstract

This paper addresses SDG target 4.7 through the lens of Nancy Fraser's (2008) conceptualisation of parity-of-participation. Her three-pillar conceptualisation includes the equitable distribution of material wealth, egalitarian status among all people, and equal access to representation. This paper attempts to apply her three pillars of participation to the primary classroom which has rarely been attempted before and never in the context of a middle income country. Drawing on interviews, surveys and drawings with nearly 400 primary-school children in Egypt, we explore how they perceive participation within their classrooms and how participation may influence learning and future life. We conclude by noting that there is an irony in some children's responses, whereby they display a strong ambition to speak English well, yet believe that they will learn to speak by being passive and silent in the classroom. Other children, however, critique the status quo and suggest more participatory approaches to learning English that will both improve their English mastery and model parity-of-participation in ways that may support their development into adults who strive to live peacefully together as global citizens.

Introduction: living peacefully as global citizens suggests inclusive participation

In the context of SDG target 4.7, we present in this article one way through which teachers may help children acquire knowledge and skills needed for promoting a culture of peace, non-violence and global citizenship. We propose that teachers can help children by encouraging their full participation while at school and helping them to experience peaceful global citizenship on a micro level in order to sustain it at a macro level in due course. To make such a link effective, we propose that children will need to reflect critically on the process.

Participation is a noun of action, stemming from the Latin *participare*, which denotes an individual sharing in, partaking of and contributing to something. This may be contributing to a small group or to the whole population globally. Nancy Fraser (2008) uses the words parity-of-participation to refer to an adult having 1) the resources to take an active and equal part in social interaction with others in society, 2) equal social status among others, and 3) equal access to social decision-making. Parity-of-participation in these three senses directly relates to the promotion of a culture of peace, non-violence and global citizenship. This includes opportunities to join in 'actively in community life and be creative in an environment of dignity and freedom' (United Nations Development Plan, 2019). Such participation has been acclaimed as 'crucial for health, well-being and longevity' (Marmot, 2004, p. 2).

In this paper, we suggest that Fraser's conception of parity-of-participation can also be applied to the classroom context. Its three aspects of participation can be applied in the schooling context as follows: 1) distribution of resources allowing all children to take an active and equal part in classes, 2) equal social status being experienced among all children, and 3) all children experiencing equal access to classroom decision-making. A particular

aspect of interest in Fraser's definition of parity-of-participation is her emphasis that full parity-of-participation can be embodied by an individual regardless of their attainment, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or social background. In the schooling context, the fulfilment of the three constituents of parity-of-participation would imply that every child in class, regardless of their attainment, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or social background, has equitable access to material resources including teachers, lessons and subjects; equal status among all other children; and has their voice heard as they make an equitable active contribution to decision-making in schooling. The purpose of distinguishing among the three constituents at school is to provide more refined tools for interpreting children's words about participation within the schooling context and how these can inform us about working towards peaceful global citizenship; that is, parity-of-participation on a global scale.

Distribution of material resources in schooling

Firstly, in global terms, lack of wealth distribution denotes some peoples living in poverty while others have more than they need. In the classroom, this poor distribution might entail certain children having better access than others to the best teachers, or more access to the teacher in any given class. They may therefore have access to more opportunities for participating in the class. In addition, they may have resources outside school that make school-work easier or more comfortable, such as family members who help them, access to supplementary learning materials, or online facilities. Some may have more access than others to suitable equipment in the classroom itself, such as enough space to sit, with space for writing, or access to textbooks or worksheets helpful for learning.

Recognition of social status

Secondly, the recognition aspect of parity-of-participation includes the concept of recognition of status. Fraser wrote about the global stage that when:

> Institutionalised patterns of cultural value constitute some actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other or simply invisible, hence as less than full partners in social interaction, then we should speak of misrecognition and status subordination (2018, p. 24).

In relation to classrooms, status relates to the institutionalised patterns of cultural worth in schooling, how children experience their own status in the eyes of teachers and other children, and how their opportunities for full participation can thereby become eroded. In this paper, we explore in particular the narratives of children about feeling subordinate to others, for example, being humiliated by other children or the teacher when they make mistakes or cannot answer a question. This might mean that only some children are enjoying access to their rights to well-being during the school day (Lundy, 2007). Fielding (1996) has emphasised that in order for all children in a community to feel they have equal status, relationships must be free and equal among everyone in the community and each person must play an agentic role, accessing opportunities to shape, as well as be shaped by, the community.

Representation

Fraser's third pillar in parity-of-participation constitutes voice and representation, by which she means all sectors of the global community taking part in deciding how resources are distributed and how status is defined. Such shared decision-making is often constrained in LMIC. However, representation during schooling can be fulfilled by all children having a role

in deciding what and how they learn and what the social norms become (Kohn, 1996). The very act of listening to young children is an example of a participatory culture in which all individuals have their perspectives represented. Listening to children also makes sense because children are the highest authority about their own experiences and education – and whether it is available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable to children themselves (Tomasevski, 2001). This gives their voices a unique value. Secondly, when children reflect on and review their own learning, this is likely to benefit their learning and support them to become critical global citizens. Thirdly, children have the right, like adults, to have their voices represented in decisions made about their own learning and this right applies in school as well as elsewhere in their lives. Ruddock, for example, argued about schoolchildren:

> We need explicitly to signal our respect for what they have to say about their experiences as children (Ruddock, 1999, p.42).

Noddings (2005) advised teachers to engage with children in "critical and thinking dialogue directed to mutual understanding" (Noddings, 2005, p. 157) so that they could together identify and negotiate children's needs and find ways to integrate them within the existing pre-set curricula. This is particularly important as researchers have shown that learning outcomes identified by teachers, policy makers and curriculum developers do not necessarily match those considered important by children. This mismatch could eventually have a negative impact on children's participation and learning enjoyment in class and, in the long-term, their capacity to participate in peaceful, global citizenship with teachers and other adults (Nation & Macalister, 2010; Noddings, 2005). Such dialogue is, however, not the norm in European contexts and is even less common elsewhere in the world. However, as Alexander (2001) suggested, dialogue can take different forms in different settings, and children's insights can be sought in a range of ways. It is important to emphasise, however, that children's insights should not be "used" by adults to inform teaching, policy-making and curriculum design. Such a use could be seen as *dis*respecting children's participation. Children's voices need to be valued as an essential part of the decision-making processes, not as information for others to use.

The process of consulting children could positively re-balance power relationships between teacher and child and support children to exercise agency, self-esteem and control over their learning and progress (Cook-Sather, 2009). However, in his extensive study of classrooms in different parts of the world, Alexander (2001) described how a common feature of many classrooms is the dominance of the teacher's talk, compared to the rare occasions when children are encouraged to participate through talk. In such classrooms, the balance of authority lies with the teacher despite the children's own 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992), possibly creating an environment in which some people may act on their agency more than others. Such a model is likely to obstruct the goal of peaceful global citizenship which demands participation and contribution by all members.

Aims of this paper

This paper aims to explore the voices of primary school children in order to address the issue of participation, both in the classroom and by inference, more globally. Our context is the EFL classroom because our funding came from the British Council and because the subject of English links to questions of identity and status in the conceptions of some children. This context also permitted smooth communication between an English visiting researcher and the teachers in the research although most interactions were conducted in

Arabic by the Egyptian researcher. We focus on the children representing to a global readership their desires, experiences and suggestions within the classroom context. In this sense, they are simultaneously enacting their representation as a step towards global participation as well as reflecting critically on how classroom participation influences both cognitive and socio-emotional learning in schooling. The paper builds on the assumption that how schooling is experienced affects how children develop as they grow up into adulthood. Its originality lies in the choice of sample: disadvantaged children in the primary schools of Alexandria, Egypt, who are a community with limited access to material resources and whose status and representation on the global stage is greatly limited.

Research design

The research described in this article aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What aspirations do the sample children have for learning English?

2. What actions do they perceive helpful to realize these aspirations?

These questions were included in our original study along with others. We focus here on these two in particular because of their potential relevance to a global audience who may be familiar with the English language being seen as a prestigious and global language. This study was conducted at three under-privileged government-funded primary schools in Alexandria, Egypt during the academic year 2015–16. At all three schools, English was taught from age 4. All three schools had limited access to resources and accommodated few teachers who had good command of English. Two of these schools accommodated class sizes of around 70 pupils [schools 1 and 2], while school 3 had smaller class sizes of around 35 pupils. Participants for this study were 393 pupils aged 10–11 in fifth grade of primary school. The participants were selected to represent an approximate balance in gender, with 213 girls and 180 boys.

[We labelled students' responses as boy or girl B/S; School S1/S2/S3; and data collection vehicle INT=interview; SS=sentence-starters].

Data collection

The research was designed to allow pupils to freely tell their own stories and express what thoughts and feelings they had about their learning experiences. Therefore, we used multiple sources for data collection including: (a) a set of open, simple sentence-starters of a generic nature, (b) drawings of the kind of English class pupils wished to have, and (c) semi-structured individual interviews with 38 pupils selected from those who responded to the sentence-starters. Data collection procedures took place over two stages.

During the *first stage* (November 2015), the following data were collected:

1. Three classes from each participant school were selected and observed twice, with a total of 18 classes. After each observation, the three researchers shared and discussed their observation notes.

2. Sentence-starters: these were short sentence stems that required open and short answers. They were translated into colloquial Arabic to ensure that all children could express their feelings and thoughts freely without constraints. As a research team, we explained the aim of the research and how we would handle data. We answered

all individual pupils' questions about the research procedures and outcomes. We had already gained school principals' consent, and we also gained pupils' oral face-to-face consent. We explained research ethics (BSA ethical guidelines 2002) and stressed confidentiality.

3. Drawings: after they had completed responses to the sentence-starters, we asked the children to draw their dream English class, which they believed would support them to learn English well. We asked them to label the drawing and write a short sentence to explain it. One hundred and thirty-two pupils drew pictures of their 'dream English classroom'.

During the *second stage* of data collection in April 2016, the following were conducted:

4. Semi-structured individual interviews: the research team selected 38 interviewees by reading through their written responses. All interviews were conducted in Arabic and were audio taped and transcribed. We selected interviewees who: (a) could write well and those who couldn't, (b) were outspoken and those who were withdrawn, and (c) were boys and girls. These selection criteria aimed to allow the researchers to give voice to everyone and to have a wide range of perspectives. Each child gave their specific oral permission to be interviewed and audio-recorded.

Data analysis

Our research deliberately used open-ended questions to allow pupils to express how they experienced learning English. Our methodology was interpretivist, whereby we aimed to explore and interpret meanings in pupils' narratives and refrained from imposing pre-set themes. The research team used NVivo12 to code emerging themes from pupils' written responses to the following two sentence-starters (all originally through colloquial Arabic):

1) 'I like to learn English so that…' and

2) 'These are the things I do that help me learn English…'

We ran a cross analysis of the pupils' drawings of their "dream English classroom", focusing on two questions: 1) What did pupils draw themselves doing? What could this mean? and 2) How did pupils position themselves in relation to the teacher and other pupils in class? What could this mean?

Findings

Children described their priorities for learning English

By far the most frequently mentioned reason for learning English by all children was to learn to speak and communicate well in English. Nearly half of the children mentioned *speaking* English in response to the open sentence-starter: "I like to learn English so that …" Children described the classroom they wished to have as the one in which they spoke in English "with the teacher and the other pupils" (SS GS1). However, more frequently they described aspiring to develop the skills they needed to communicate with foreigners. One boy described why he needed to speak English; he wrote: "if someone comes from China, who studies English in their country, English is the common language between us" [SS BS1]. The children's words reflected their wish to be able to use English with each other and to connect with people from all over the world. They thought that speaking English well would give them the confidence and tools they needed to "travel to distant countries", "not to feel afraid or shy", and to "explore different countries and learn about their history". One girl

reflected on how learning to speak would make children of her age proud of themselves, and feel well-educated. She told us:

> When they grow up and travel abroad, they can communicate with foreign people and understand them. Even if they won't travel, at least they will know many languages. You will feel self-confident because you feel that you are educated. (Rania INT GS1)

It seems that these children were aware of the role English played, as a worldwide spoken language, in connecting people and giving access to knowledge and opportunities. For example, one pupil explained: "English is the first language in the world. Every time I hear someone speak English well, I wish I would speak like them. And people would say to me 'you learned English properly'. English would make a lot of difference in my life." (Rami, INT BS2) In these cases, children were requesting access to a commodity (spoken English) that would allow them improved social interactions that could be crucial for peaceful global citizenship now or in the future. This was also related to their desire to have their voices represented in their immediate and more distant communities, via the medium of English.

This desire to be socially connected and have a voice was connected to the status-related goals mentioned by the children. Someone who spoke English well had social status, as they perceived it. Children perceived being able to speak English to be key for bright careers for themselves and even for a better future for their country. Yousry explained:

> I wish for all students, my age and younger than myself, to be able to speak in English… It is important for our careers; all jobs need English. It is important for Egypt to be among the best countries and important for the national income. (Yousry INT BS2)

For these children, learning to speak English meant an opportunity to advance in life and have better social and professional status; and this was linked to their access to material resources, and to greater representation in the global dialogue. This is significant, considering the fact that most of these children came from deprived social backgrounds and that Egypt as a country is designated as low-middle income.

Children described how they could learn English by showing disciplined behaviour

When asked about the actions they could take to facilitate their *learning* of English, many children described being recipients of knowledge, which is typical of learners' role within traditional classrooms. For example, Sohir told us: "Pupils should be quiet. The teacher should control" (Sohir INT GS1). In spite of the fact that these children wanted to be able to speak English and use it to communicate efficiently, when suggesting how to reach this goal they mentioned being silent in the classroom, being attentive to the teacher and talking only when asked to. These behaviours seemed to indicate their acceptance of their lower status in the classroom and the denial of their role as full participator. For example, when we asked Reem, who aspired to be able to speak English with people, about what children can do to speak English well, she explained: "The English teacher explains in a good way and I understand pretty well. If we all sit quietly in class, we will understand" (Reem INT GS2).

The quotes above illustrate the paradox that they believed that by *keeping silent* they could learn to speak. It also exemplifies the disparity between how the system presented schooling goals and the aspirations the children themselves had, illustrating the lack of representation the children could claim in their learning. It also indicates the low status they felt in terms of their authority to decide how and what to learn in the classroom. For

example, when asked to give advice to other classmates on how to develop spoken English skills, one pupil told us that: "They [pupils] shouldn't speak with each other during the class and never make teachers angry with them". When asked to imagine a scenario of the perfect English lesson, Somaya narrated:

> The teacher sat down and everyone was quiet. No one was talking; no one was rude to the teacher … And of course, the teacher spent time explaining slowly, step by step, and repeated any parts that we did not understand. (INT GS2)

Children associated this state of being quiet with the idea of displaying expected required behaviour in class, which they believed to be the prerequisite to successful learning. This seemed to place the teacher's authority and experience in a more elevated position than their own. This may have denied them access to the "commodity" of spoken English, to a sense of good social status in the classroom, and to a sense of representation in the classroom. For example, Younis considered how children could develop their spoken English best by working together to complete tasks in English, but then proceeded to explain that this was not feasible because: 'The teacher may get upset and think that we are chatting and not paying attention to her… The teacher does not want anyone to speak in class; we shouldn't speak to each other' (Younis, INT, BS2). In other words, the social interaction the children aspired to, by learning to speak English, was denied in the very site where it might have been most enthusiastically encouraged.

Many of the drawings that illustrated the "dream English classroom" showed children sitting at rows of desks, separated from each other, and seemingly following the teacher. The teachers in the drawings stood next to the board or at the front of the class, explaining and talking. The drawings provide a representation of the teacher as the active player in the scene who leads; while the pupils act as passive followers. The separation of pupils from one another seems to preclude any possibility for social interaction among pupils. One pupil commented on her drawing: "This is my dream classroom. The teacher explains very well and repeats more than once. Pupils are quiet and the class is quiet…" (G S1). The drawings below illustrate very vividly such scenes of teachers positioned at the centre as the key active player, and learners positioned at the margins as passive recipients. There were even drawings of the children's dream class with only the teacher present in class next to a board full of writing. This representation of teacher-only classes may suggest that these children may have not experienced the possibility of themselves directing their own learning, and enforces the concept of learning as being taught and controlled by some outside agent. In these cases, the teacher embodied the desirable commodity of English; s/he had the high status; and s/he made the decisions.
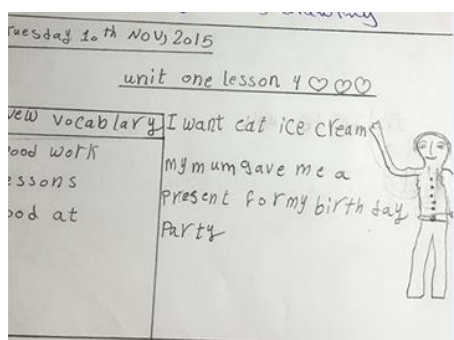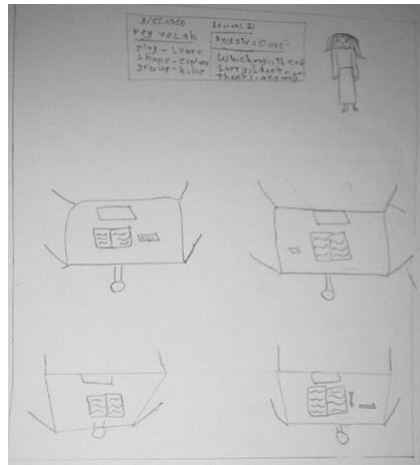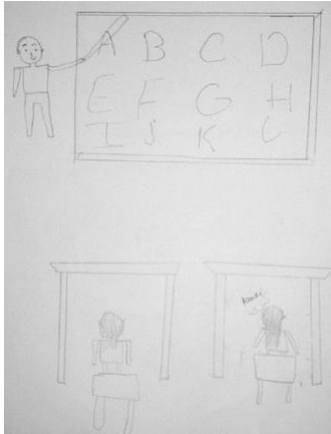
Children suggested how teachers could support their active participation in class

A minority of children, however, took a very different approach, which correlated more closely to their stated aspirations for learning English. They took a critical stance towards the institutionalised patterns of behaviour in these English classes. Such children explained that to gain access to the speaking of English, they needed to claim responsibility for their learning and make decisions on how to better develop their spoken skills. One pupil wrote about the value of children being trusted to find answers to questions themselves and ask for help only when they needed it; and of teachers respecting this and giving children the space to direct their own learning. When asked to give advice to classmates on how to improve their English, pupil Osama challenged the teacher being the sole embodiment of English in the classroom and challenged her/his role as the high status figure who made all the decisions:

> They [children] shouldn't depend only on the teacher. They should search the internet and read subjects and don't rely only on the school... You should have access to other resources… Surf the internet and read different topics. (Osama INT BS1)

According to the above quote, children needed to control their own learning and seek resources beyond what teachers and schools were offering, perhaps because they were not gaining full access to this in the current classrooms. As these children described wanting to take more responsibility for their learning, they seemed to reconsider the teacher's and the child's roles in the class. These children described actions that would extend their roles from non-participatory passive recipients of knowledge in the class to active participants who constructed contributions and interacted socially. For example, they could take on some of the roles teachers assume for themselves, such as teaching other children. One pupil gave a detailed description of how taking on some of the teacher's roles could simultaneously provide opportunities for interacting in English:

> If there is a part of the lesson I understand pretty well, the teacher lets me come to the front and write on the board … if there is someone who does not understand anything, I can explain for them … I speak with my classmates in English and they speak with me in English and we can understand each other. (Modi INT BS2)

A few other children described how to extend their speaking time in class, seeking to re-balance the dominance of the teacher's voice. One pupil wrote, for example: "I pay attention to the teacher and if she makes mistakes, I correct her. In all cases, I speak, and she speaks." (SS, GS2) Children also suggested that they could take part in giving feedback to each other as this would help increase their speaking time and participation in class. One boy described learning from his mistakes by hearing other children speak English: "I answer and then my peers say another answer that is correct, and I feel relieved and I learn from my mistakes". (SS BS1)

These children illustrated in writing, speaking and drawing how working with peers could support learning by enhancing their English spoken skills. One pupil explained how group work gave them increased access to speaking English since they felt less afraid to speak among friends: "I feel relaxed among my friends. And we listen to the teacher as she explains. We answer her questions in an atmosphere of fun and we talk about the things that we do not know" [SS BS1]. In addition, in a participatory classroom, children were more likely to feel safe and supported, by teacher and peers, and become therefore more likely to take risks and speak in English. Their sense of status in the classroom was presumably also

enhanced by feeling more relaxed. Another child, taking on the role of the teacher, proposed to:

> … pair the struggling children with the good ones so that they help each other… maybe, I can put students who have internet with those who don't, and they can study together. (Morsi INT BS2)

The implication here is that peer learning could help to improve access by all children to limited resources of different kinds. Such an environment is central to an inclusive classroom, and is therefore likely to be more conducive of learning and advantageous to less privileged children who are either struggling, shy or lacking in resources.

In the "dream English classroom" of some of these children (n=62), there were illustrations of themselves working and interacting with other pupils in class. They positioned themselves at the centre or the front of the classroom: in other words, they, and not the teacher, occupied the focal point in these drawings. These illustrations suggest that the dream classroom would grant children active roles, social interaction and voice, all of which represent a rebalance of teacher/learner power relationships. For example, in some of the drawings the children drew themselves standing next to the teacher and leading activities with the teacher such as helping out in the explanation of a language item; in other words, sharing authority with the teacher. Other drawings seemed to portray the children working together in groups or seeking peer support while turning their back to the teacher, suggesting a shift in authority from teacher to pupil. In one of the drawings, a pupil was standing next to the board busy writing while another pupil was reading, and the teacher was standing sideways listening attentively to these children, rather than speaking and being listened to. Other pictures had groups of children sitting in circles and working on a task while the teacher circulated in the class. They had children working on [imagined] tablets and searching for information; or children facing each other and talking together. In all these drawings, peer social interaction rather than individual isolation dominated. These drawings depicted participation which depended on them having higher status than usual and where their skills and voices were represented.
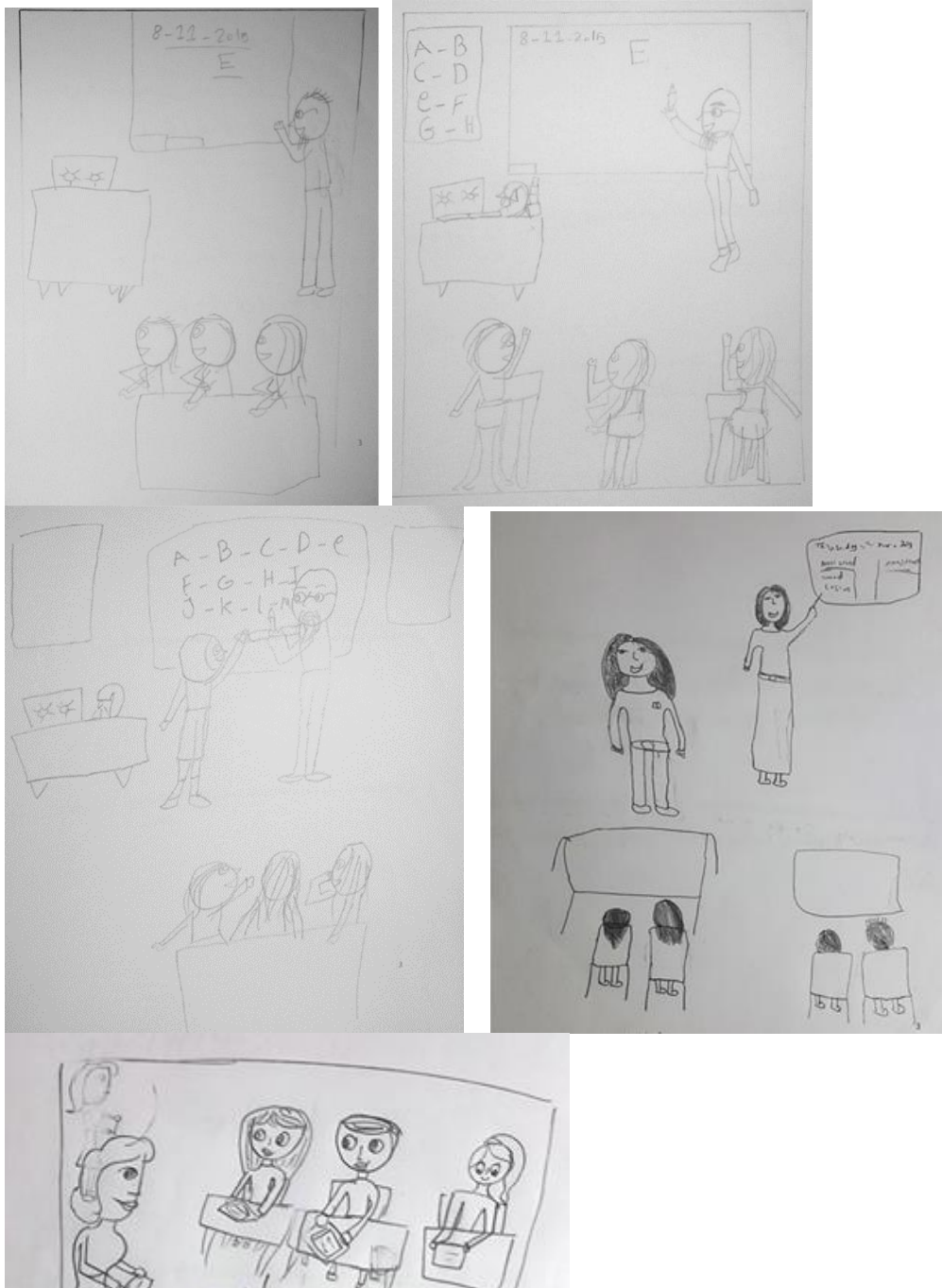
Discussion

Our findings from this research project suggest that the grade 5 children in our study perceived some areas for improvement in making the classroom a site of parity-of-participation, in which all children had equal access to the necessary resources to learn English. The children were competent in pinpointing the disadvantages facing children who are treated as having lower status than the teacher. Despite the faith that so many of the children held in non-agentic learning-by-listening, a minority of them were also able to claim their right to representation of voice during classes. This was ironically particularly relevant to the subject being taught, spoken English, the skill that so many of these children aspired to master for their future status on the global stage.

Based on our findings, we propose in this article that Nancy Fraser's (2008) three-pillar conceptualisation of parity-of-participation is a useful model to apply to the EFL classroom. Based on our findings, we propose that for quality English language teaching to be effective, all children must have equal access to the learning resources (ie the teacher); all children must feel that they have the competence and confidence to succeed as they have equal status to all others as learners; and in order to learn, children must represent their own voices and the potentially critical views these express. These findings indicate that some of these disadvantaged children in poorly-resourced primary schools in Egypt perceived the need for parity-of-participation in the EFL classroom, that is, for the equitable, inclusive classroom. Our proposal, in the context of SDG target 4.7, is that teachers may help children acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for the promotion of a culture of peace, non-violence and global citizenship as they teach in everyday EFL classrooms. We adhere to the belief that such education will help promote a fairer, more collaborative world.

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