



**CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN THE IRANIAN EFL CLASSROOMS :
FROM THEORY TO TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICE**



Mohammad Forouzani

Department of Foreign Languages

University of Nizwa, Oman

forouzani@unizwa.edu.om

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this panel study was to investigate whether student teachers in Iran who were doing their master's studies in TEFL practiced critical pedagogy in their classrooms, and to study their beliefs about critical pedagogy and its challenges. Thirty-four student teachers who were employed by the government and private sectors and took courses in Methodology, Syllabus Design and Materials Development, and ESP at a state and a private university in Iran agreed to participate in the research. After loss of individuals, thick narrative data were collected from the remaining twenty-eight participants during the two semesters of the same academic year. The participants' beliefs, discussions, interviews, written comments, and reports on their individual practice in their own classrooms were carefully recorded and analyzed for any changes in behavior patterns during the two semesters. QSR NVivo-11 was used to categorize and summarize the written and transcribed narratives besides the careful content analysis of the same. Results revealed that the participants considered critical

pedagogy as a move forward to liberating teachers and students, and as a consciousness raising approach toward social and political issues of their context of teaching. The participants also argued that critical pedagogy would jeopardize the teachers' career, and the critical pedagogues have to accept the consequences if they opt for it. Finally, the participants who were officially employed by the government sector mostly preferred not to practice critical pedagogy compared to those working in the private sector. The debatable findings of this study may be helpful for teacher educators who believe in and/or practice critical pedagogy to reflect more on the language teaching context they work in and then decide whether or not, to what extent, and how they can or should advocate critical pedagogy in teacher training programs.

KEYWORDS

critical pedagogy, critical thinking, teacher education

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

In most educational contexts nowadays, rarely would anyone inquire about how knowledge is produced or who benefits from this knowledge. All that is taken into consideration is how much of this knowledge as standardized input is converted into intake or is memorized by the defined learners. One way to change this dominant acceptance of the way things are is to have recourse to problem-solving education. Teachers can problematize situation by asking students to think about the context they are familiar with but in new ways (Freire, 1985; Monchinski, 2008). Freire gives an example of this from his work with the Chilean farmers. Shortly after the farmer apologizes to him, the dialogue goes on as follows:

- "You're the one who should be talking, sir. You know things, sir. We don't."
- "I know. You don't. But *why* do I know and you don't?"
- "Because you're a doctor, sir, and we're not."
- "Right, I'm a doctor and you're not. But why am I a doctor and you're not?"
- "Because you've gone to school, you've read things, studied things, and we haven't."
- "And why have I been to school?"
- "Because your dad could send you to school. Ours couldn't."
- "And why couldn't your parents send you to school?"
- "Because they were peasants like us."
- "And what is being a peasant?"
- "It's not having an education . . . not owning anything . . . working from sun to sun . . . having no rights . . . having no hope."
- "And why doesn't a peasant have any of this?"
- "The will of God."
- "And who is God?"
- "The Father of us all."
- "And who is a father here this evening?"

Almost all raised their hands, and said they were.[Freire asks one of the farmers how many children he has and the man answers three]. "Would you be willing to sacrifice two of them, and make them suffer so that the other one could go to school, and have a good life . . . ? Could you love your children that way?"

- "No!"

- “Well, if you . . . a person of flesh and bones, could not commit an injustice like that—how could God commit it? Could God really be the cause of these things?” A different kind of silence [ensued] A silence in which something began to be shared. Then:

- “No. God isn’t the cause of all this. It’s the boss!” (Freire, 1992, pp. 38–39).

This account shows that the farmers begin to question the necessity of a reality and the person who benefits from this reality, for that matter, when they are faced with a problematic situation. By the same token, students can be made aware of their rights, wants, and needs, as well as issues outside the classroom context that may in one way or another affect their education, future career, and personal life. As a result, they will be able to see the reality as it is out there, and challenge the lifelong educational beliefs and practices that they have accepted as the only reality. This is what *critical pedagogy* is all about: a teaching method that aims to help students challenge any form of social oppression and the related customs and beliefs (Freire, 1970). Hence, universalism is a related example of the situation which leads to such oppression and hegemony in the educational contexts. It dictates ‘*how to*’ rather than ‘*why*’ questions and the idea that the scientifically produced knowledge, no matter where or when, is always true. This universalism is mostly the results of the application of certain already-provided guidelines and procedures which are universally accepted. However, advocates of critical pedagogy argue that this proceduralization of the so-called knowledge does nothing but simplify teaching and learning activities by decontextualizing the same (Kincheloe, 2008).

What distinguishes critical pedagogy is an *epistemology of practice* that is different from the one applied by the standardized test-driven curricula in many educational systems around the world. In this form of epistemology, there is only one reality that the educators and learners should seek in a way that “traditional educational science reveals to practitioners the correct way to teach and the right way for students to learn” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 7). Teachers follow what the people in power ask them to do without questioning the validity of the set standards. The concept of ‘one reality’ creates certain challenges for teacher trainers when teachers ask how they can teach the same materials to different students in different contexts. This question shows teachers’ awareness of the impossibility of the application of mandated standardized procedures. Here is the point where critical pedagogy plays its role by highlighting the fact that the standardized mandates cannot make teachers successful in educating students who can independently decide for their own development and learning.

Epistemology, critical thinking, and critical pedagogy

Epistemology is at the core of critical thinking, and this the reason why some researchers have referred to critical thinking as applied epistemology (Battersby, 1989). Epistemology deals with the way we produce and analyze knowledge, how we consider it as true, and its status in the world. A complex critical epistemology does not view mind as a mirror, which reflects what is there to be reflected. Rather, it considers the mind as the means of creation. In a study with ten students of bioscience who participated in a problem-solving context of research, Hyytinen et al. (2014) found that the students' epistemological beliefs were closely integrated with their critical thinking. They regarded critical thinking as a tool for both understanding and verifying truth, and believed that knowledge is not absolute, but rather, falsifiable. Hyytinen et al.'s study implies that the re-construction of knowledge cannot be separated from the outside world, which is beyond the individual world of a person. In other words, such an epistemology considers knowledge as the result of the dialectical relationship between the knower and the known. This constructivist perspective helps students to cooperate with the instructor in connection with the physical and social world to construct their own epistemological foundation for interpreting the world and the events within it.

This requirement of the inextricable relation between the knower and so-called known makes the critical pedagogue examine the socially constructed dimension of language and discursive practices. According to Foucault (1990), discourses are bodies of regulations and structures that are based in the power relations which shape our views and constructions. Power makes dominant discourses firm and established in the process of the eradication of the marginal voices (Bakhtin, 1984). As language users, teachers and students may not be able to eschew the effect of the discursive practices on the ways of viewing oneself and the world. In Elgin's view (2000), "we forget, or are unaware of, the power that language has over our minds and our lives; we use that power ourselves as casually as we use the electric power in our homes, with scarcely a thought given to its potential to help or harm" (p.239). Therefore, language teachers and teacher trainers should be aware of the subtleties of the profession, and make efforts to go beyond a technicist view of foreign language teaching (Ragan and Osborn, 2002). Here again, the role of critical pedagogy is evident. Critical pedagogues guide students' attention toward the consideration of discursive formations in the classroom. They help students to see how power constructs particular discursive formats and in turn the consciousness. In the educational contexts, which apply top-down standardization, teachers and students may be prevented from thinking critically about the way they think in relation to themselves and the world around them. They are naively unaware of the forces that shape

them. As long as their situation is not challenged, the status quo is accepted in the way it is dictated. However, trying new paths of thinking requires personal and contextual transformation. Cox and De Assis-Peterson (1999) studied the Brazilian teachers' knowledge of and belief in critical pedagogy, and found out that the participants had no idea of critical pedagogy in a country where the Brazilian Paulo Freire first introduced the approach. Considering that Freire's seminal work *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published in the late 60s, the Brazilian teachers' lack of knowledge of critical pedagogy after thirty years does not seem to be justified. Having said that, Kincheloe (2008) states his concern about the standardized education of the twenty-first century that makes individuals comply with the needs and wants of corporations, the government, and the market. He also clarifies that "an epistemological examination of the origins of school knowledge unveils the hidden dimension of this process" (p. 33). With regard to the status of critical pedagogy in education, Kincheloe's concern may imply that the 21st-century has not yet provided a promising view as it could be expected. Critical pedagogy questions the social, cultural, political and linguistic constructions established by the people in power as the accepted status quo. Such an epistemology can help students and teachers uncover the socio-political dimensions of schooling and shed light on how these dimensions construct particular meanings in the classrooms and the way these meanings are inculcated into the students' consciousness.

The Role of Critical Pedagogy in Classroom

The epistemological shift from a routine and proceduralized knowledge production and application to appreciation of various perspectives on knowledge production and deployment seems to be practical in helping teachers with new and better understanding and implementation of educational activities. This is in line with Kincheloe's (2008) view of critical pedagogues who have been informed by a critical epistemology and who object to the standardized and prescribed curricula that could satisfy the minimum ability level of the teachers and students.

The present hegemonic classroom teaching methodology can be questioned if we consider the necessary elements of its epistemology. Freire (1970; 1985) and Shor (1992) have dealt with curriculum development in such a context introducing the concept of generative themes. Such themes represent the affective issues such as fears, anxieties and hopes of both students and teachers. The intersection of the students' personal lives with the globalized or societal world is the place where such themes show up.

There are similarities between Freire's 'generative themes' and Dewey's (1916) 'progressive education'. Dewey advised teacher to build classroom lessons based on students' life

experiences. In other words, both Dewey and Freire move beyond the acceptance of previously validated procedures and standards in the curriculum development and educational activities. Within this framework, students should be able to negotiate and make decisions with an expert teacher who works hard to “help them develop their epistemological consciousness, and their sense of identity as empowered democratic citizens” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 13). Critical pedagogy promotes social justice, and such an awareness on the part of the teachers and students may become a threat to the hegemonic epistemology and the status quo as well as the teachers’ career and social status. Nevertheless, the conceptual expansion of the issue has made it possible for the proponents of this perspective to be optimistic about the future of critical pedagogy in classrooms (Crooks, 2012).

There is a rich body of research on critical pedagogy in general and its status in language teaching in EFL/ELT contexts in particular (Shin and Crookes, 2005; Akbari, 2008; Breuing, 2011; Liyanage, 2012; Kohansal and Akbari, 2013; Yulianto, 2015; Sarroub and Quadros, 2015; to name a few). In addition, a number of studies have been conducted in Iran on teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about critical pedagogy in the Iranian EFL context. For instance, Sahragard, Razmjoo, and Baharloo (2014) found that Iranian EFL teachers are aware of the principles of critical pedagogy and its usefulness, but they rarely apply it in their classrooms for several reasons such as the top-down educational system, class size, teacher burn out, limited class time, and the teachers’ insufficient information about students’ learning styles. Similarly, Atai and Moradi (2016) and Sarvestani and Yamini (2015) found out that Iranian EFL teachers mostly agree with the application of critical pedagogy regardless of their experiences. In the meantime, Sarvestani and Yamini’s study showed that teachers developed a more positive attitude as their experiences increased. Sarvestani and Yamini’s research was mainly concerned with the teachers’ attitude, which was positive in both experienced and inexperienced teachers.

There is another study on the Iranian EFL teachers’ views of critical pedagogy in relation to their experience and academic degrees (Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh, 2015). However, contrary to the variables highlighted in the topic of their paper (teachers’ views, experience, and academic degrees), Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh’s research was concerned mainly with teachers’ *awareness of* critical pedagogy not their views about the concept in relation to their degrees. They concluded that teachers’ educational degree (BA, MA or PhD) positively correlated with their awareness of critical pedagogy, but they did not mention whether they had a positive, neutral or negative view in relation to their degrees and experience. They justified that PhD holders might have participated in teacher training programs in which

critical pedagogy had been advocated, which in turn contributed to their more awareness of this perspective. Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh also attributed the awareness of more experienced teachers to the third stage of their professionalism at which they feel confident enough to have a critical view of the educational system.

Safari and Pourhashemi's study in 2012 provided a thematic analysis of the challenges of doing critical pedagogy in the Iranian educational system. Among the eight findings of their study, they referred to the absence of the culture of critical thinking as well as the social and political barriers for the application of this approach in the country's educational system. However, there is no information about how many or what questions were included in the semi-structured interviews, whether the questions addressed certain topics, which would direct the responses to the eight key points, and whether all the eight key points received the same weight or they were randomly ordered in the report. In addition, no vivid conclusion was drawn as to whether there is or there is not room for the implementation of critical pedagogy in the Iranian educational system, a serious challenge that the topic of their study had addressed.

The sensitive issue, which motivated the present study, was not just the teachers' awareness of and /or attitude towards critical pedagogy. Rather, the present study aimed to see whether a certain group of Iranian student teachers of TEFL, who were aware of the principles of critical pedagogy were interested and willing in doing critical pedagogy in their EFL classrooms.

Method

The objective and scope of this study lent itself to a qualitative inquiry method which, based on Creswell's definition (2014), explores a social or human problem through holistic pictures and detailed reports on the views of the informants. Therefore, it relies heavily on texts and careful, step-by-step analysis of the data collected from the ever-expanding list of data sources.

For this research, convenient sampling procedure was followed for the selection of participants from one private and one state university in Iran. Thirty-four graduate student-teachers who were originally from Iran and Afghanistan and took ESP, Methodology, and Materials Development courses shared their beliefs about critical pedagogy in general and their decision about applying or not applying critical pedagogy in their EFL classrooms in particular. But, six participants left the research due to personal reasons, so data were collected from the remaining twenty-eight participants through rich classroom discussions and written responses in two consecutive semesters. The participants commented on the

applicability, value, and cost of doing critical pedagogy based on (1) the articles and references on critical pedagogy (e.g., Freire, Benesch, Kozol, etc.) covered during the semester, (2) their own teaching experiences, and (3) what they perceived from the teaching features of their professors.

Data collection and analysis

To collect data on the participants' beliefs about and willingness to do critical pedagogy, three discussion topics were raised at the beginning of the first semester of the academic when the students took Methodology course, and data collection continued to the second semester when they took ESP and Materials Development. The key queries that guided this research were as follows:

1. Do you apply critical pedagogy in your classrooms? Why or why not?
2. What are the challenges in doing critical pedagogy in EFL contexts?
3. Do you know of any friend, colleague, or instructor who apply critical pedagogy in their classrooms? What are (have been) the social effects of their practice on their own career and their students' thinking and performance?

Detailed notes were taken of (a) individual presentations, (b) email correspondence, (c) group discussions, and (d) informal gatherings at national conferences and seminars while the participants were sharing their ideas about the issue. Whenever taking notes was not easy to manage as in (d) above, discussions were mobile recorded with the participants' informed consent. All the data from individual participants were coded from the beginning to safeguard their identities. To this end and for validity purposes, for that matter, care was exercised that the coding of the recorded discussions match the coding of the written responses. Therefore, the transcriptions were later juxtaposed with the written responses previously collected, a section which in turn was open to add future notes.

Accessing and understanding the participants' individual and social construction of the reality was of utmost importance in this study, as the issue was situated in lived experiences. Finally, twenty-eight narratives were collected in detail in forty-two A4 sheets of paper, and were imported into QSR NVIVO-11 for analysis. Excerpts from the large narrative data are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Excerpts from narratives

Participant	Gender/ Experience	Narrative excerpts: practicing critical pedagogy (CP) in language teaching
1 Conservative	M Experienced 3+ yrs	Teacher should be highly proficient, socially and psychologically open-minded, be in good terms with students and care about their feedback and needs; I did and I got into trouble: I faced resistance and oppositions on the part of the manager; ... It's a matter of degree in being a critical pedagogue; ... I do not recommend CP for novice teachers....
2 Conservative	F Experienced 3+ yrs	CP is about dialogic teaching, but the problem is the tension b/w teaching-learning in the content-coverage tradition in which learner's voice is not heard, lack of time, lack of teacher's patience; CP should take care of learner's pace and questions; syllabus should be informed by the students' social and personal concerns, but not possible in Iran due to 1) lecturing tradition, 2) limited time to cover content , 3) institution's constraints, 4) learners' reluctance. CP teacher should be self-reflexive, state his/her views and seek actions to change status quo. (no mention of her preference)
3 conservative	F Experienced 3 yrs	When it comes to content coverage , little time is left to hear out students; Teacher should provide interaction b/w content, language, and learners; formal tests are another challenge to CP; CP reveals power relations, helps students have their own voice; If materials can't be changed, we can make much of them with a different view to bring about change. (no mention of her preference)
4 (+)	F Novice	Friere's ideology of Hope in terms of students' better life; CP is about dialogic teaching; Applying CP depends on local context; I can use some CP principles, but my context does not allow for it; school policies are another obstacle; I cannot challenge the status quo in my country, but learning about CP helped me a lot and I will apply CP in my classroom in future whether I am an EFL teacher or ESP teacher.
5 (+)	F Experienced 3 yrs	I think yes [I'd use CP], because it gives students freedom to question everything, which develops critical thinking skills in them. What was covered in this class [ESP] was relevant to students' real life and obsessions, and they can link what is practiced in the classroom to their own lives. The curriculum is not fixed or predetermined. It emerges from the students' political and social interests.

<p>6 (-)</p>	<p>F Experienced 3 yrs</p>	<p>I think CP in our context is a too complex matter to think about and give a simple yes/no answer. Frankly, when you find a relatively well-paid and stable job, you can't jeopardize it by raising political and sensitive social issues. When your students are teenagers, you will be questioned if you raise such issues in the classroom.... If I could have a safe professional life, I would use CP, but now I can at best stick to some basic tenets of the approach with limited application to my classroom context (e.g., using neutral topics for discussion).</p>
<p>7 (-)</p>	<p>M novice</p>	<p>If I taught subject matter courses, I could apply CP principles and get my students to generate new ideas, but as far as EFL classroom is concerned, I would not, because of the political and religious restrictions in my country as well as the educational forces to implement the syllabus of the institute you work in; I want to make ends meet, so I'd better follow the rules they have set. But in an ESP class, I would use CP as relevant discussions would pop up and lend themselves to doing CP.</p>
<p>8 (+)</p>	<p>F Experienced 3 yrs</p>	<p>Before I took this course, I can say I did apply CP principles in my classes, but I was not aware of the term "critical pedagogy." But it all depends on the context: in my hometown [a religious city in Iran] I can't, but in Tehran, it is possible to do CP in EFL classes. In my hometown, thinking does not happen in the young generation... I come from a lower part of a small city, but thanks to the few CP teachers I had, I no longer think of my nationality as a negative point.</p>
<p>9 (+)</p>	<p>M Experienced 3+ yrs</p>	<p>Yes; with the developments in all fields of knowledge including EFL and ESP, accepting the status quo without questioning it is wrong, and we should make every effort to change our lives. To teach English, we should change the status quo and let the students have their own voice- they should argue [object] if they feel their rights are being violated.</p>
<p>*10 (+)</p>	<p>M Experienced 3 yrs</p>	<p>I do critical pedagogy in my EFL classes, and I hope I am doing the right thing and will do that in the future. I pay attention to my students' needs and wants, and treat them differently according to their local needs; for instance, I do not talk about the poor or social problems such as addiction to students in affluent areas, as they need to know more about technology and the like! I bring up topics that they like according to what they face in their real life.</p>

11 (+)	F Experienced 3 years	I try to apply it as much as possible. I try to make them aware of the issues around them in the society. In my General English classes, I ask the students to bring pieces of news about the country to class and discuss it, or when a student has a problem, I ask others to think how they can help him/her. I agree with Benesch on the political nature of CP; I also believe that the teacher should reflect his/her own performance and problematize his/her practice.
12 (+) pessimistic about those who argue for CP	M Experienced 3 years	Critical pedagogy! It's a concept that remains just a claim. Apart your class where I found CP to some extent, other professors who claim to practice CP are doing far from it. But regardless of the community and the forgotten concept of CP, I will surely "try" to practice CP- I emphasize "try" because nothing is a 100% surety. CP is a political matter and therefore very difficult to practice, but I will try to apply it in my classes to bridge the gap b/w students and the teacher and motivate my students.
13 (+)	M Novice	I would certainly use CP in my classes to make my students think critically and analyze the issues rather than consume the huge volume of information transmitted to them in classes. CP is about teaching students how to learn.
14 (+)! Contrary to her interview!	F Experienced 3 yrs	Yes, I will apply CP... CP should not be depoliticized or domesticized... CP paves the way for rights analysis... <i>(This student teacher provided opposite views in the class discussions, interviews, and written response. She believed that CP would jeopardize her career and she would not go for it, but in her written response she claimed otherwise.)</i>
15 Conservative	M Novice	I learned CP in this course [ESP], and I became fond of it, but it's easier to be said than done. Teachers and students are not familiar with this concept and CP practice in my country. CP is a matter of hope which encourage students to think of a better life, but the practice is not easy.
16 (+)	M Experienced 3 yrs	Thanks to this course, the critical view toward ESP opened my eyes to the hidden aspects of power relations dominating the field.... We should first question and problematize our own stance and practice. I would personally opt for CP by first scrutinizing my own practice, and then by propagating ideas such as hope, transformation, etc. ... Questioning the status quo should not be considered as a deconstructive approach, but a constructive one... It provides opportunities for growth...
		Considering social justice as one of the main goals of CP, the

<p>17 (+) Conservative</p>	<p>M Experienced 3+ yrs</p>	<p>teacher should create a situation in which the learner finds him/herself in an equal position with the teacher... This means that the learner finds out that what s/he says could be equally true and the people in power positions are not always right... But the point is how willing teachers are to create such a situation which has its own risks to the teachers. In my opinion, presenting these ideas and accessing them theoretically are good while it is impossible operationally in our society.</p>
<p>18 Conservative</p>	<p>F Experienced 3 yrs</p>	<p>There are positive and negative aspects to CP: The good thing is that both the teacher and the students can hear a variety of ideas without the teacher's imposition of his/hers. The negative thing is that in the case of discussing sensitive issues like politics, the teacher may lose control over the direction of the discussions which could be dangerous and cause harsh arguments among the students. As a result, in my idea, critical material is a good theory but the teacher should be careful about choosing the topic for the class, and consider the culture and country and also the level of students.</p>
<p>19 (+)</p>	<p>F (experience not mentioned)</p>	<p>It's suitable to allow students to express their ideas about issues and it leads them to make decision about their future. In my opinion, it's better to mix teacher-student center. It would be better to focus on the students' necessities. Teachers should consider the students' ability. In critical teaching, there is reciprocity between the material and praxis. I think it's better to be an open-minded critical teacher because it would help the students to be responsible about their future and their jobs.</p>
<p>20 (+)</p>	<p>M (experience not mentioned)</p>	<p>I agree with Benesch's views of power and discourse, hope, possibility of change, etc. I agree with her position toward CP in EAP classes.</p>
<p>21 (+) (Conservative)</p>	<p>M Experienced 3+yrs</p>	<p>I had the same experience narrated in Benesch (Military recruitment in the campus): When I was doing my military service, I accomplished my duties and my commanders suggested that I stay in the army and offered me good salary, but I told them about my dream career: Teaching. In my opinion, any person should look at their work critically. If we do so, we will have an ideal society. Being critical has many problems. Let me clarify my words with an example; we know that our high school English books have many problems, so a teacher</p>

		should try to teach the material in best ways. No doubt that the material will change if the teachers try to do their best. In such situation, first, the teacher will face the principle of the school, then the head of the office of Education, and the hierarchy will continue.
22 (+) (Conservative)	F Novice	In our school system, students and teachers are not allowed to express their opinions and ideas about some political or religious areas. But Benesch makes it easy for herself and her students to express their opinions and elaborate them freely as a classroom discussion even outside of the classroom! By these discussions both teacher and learners' opinion will change.
23 (-)	F Experienced 3 yrs	In my book, it is not possible to practice CP in our context due to the political and religious concerns of different groups of people.
24 (+)	F Experienced 3 yrs	Sara Benesch's idea which focuses on critical thinking is very influential. In my idea, it should be performed in every situation especially in classroom. Of course, there are some limitations about performing such ideas in many countries but I think a good teacher should have the ability to teach student this way of thinking indirectly with some strategies. Of course, this is not an easy task but the teachers who study in different fields of psychological aspects of humanity and some other fields can achieve this purpose. A good teacher is one who attends to students learning both in training and education aspects. For achieving the educational purpose, they should direct students to the right way in their life even if it is not safe regarding the limitations of their society.
25 (+)	F (experience not mentioned)	In their research & teaching, critical applied linguists move from positivism, & viewing Lg as an autonomous object, toward a socially constructed paradigm. In my opinion, Lg teaching in Iran has failed to consider this important point. In other words, there is a vast gap between Lg teaching & social, cultural, and political domains. Iran educational system tries to copy the foreign countries syllabus blindly. A good example of this is making some censorship without any adaptations in its cultural point. If we try to follow CP principles, education will be much more effective.
26	F	Despite the different cultural values among the Iranian EFL learners, they mostly share the same concern regarding free talks

(-)	Experienced 3 yrs	about political and religious issues/topics. Learners do not dare to talk about these sensitive topics due to the political restrictions.
27 (+)	M Experienced 3 yrs	In our society, students and teachers are not familiar with CP practice, and if a teacher practices CP, s/he will be opposed by the authorities. CP practice is hard in our country because of the short class time and the contextual restrictions, but I will do that in my own classes.
28 (+) Conservative	F Experienced 3 yrs	In my point of view applying this method is worthy, but some considerations are needed, such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students' cognitive level 2. The students' knowledge level 3. How much the student and teachers know each other 4. Topics 5. Judgment (judging others based on their viewpoints) Freedom in expressing the ideas requires that people express their own ideas without any fear. Before achieving this level and applying this method, some steps should be taken. Maybe one of the most important steps can be teaching how to think critically. However, we should not let the limitations limit us. Finally, I am not sure whether I had a good life before awareness of this way of thinking or I would have better life in future.

QSR-NVIVO coding & content analysis of the narratives

QSR stands for *Quality Systems Regulation*, and NVivo is the name of a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software package produced by QSR International. It is used for the analysis of rich text-based or multimedia information where deep levels of analysis and networking of the data are required. The narrative data of this study were imported to QSR-NVivo-11, and coding procedures were taken in two phases as follows:

Phase 1. The data were coded manually (Appendix 1- sample shot) on the transcripts imported into QSR NVivo, i.e., blocs of key concepts were categorized under 59 nodes (themes) with 28 references to the narratives. This coding indexed the participants' most direct response to the questions.

Phase 2. Autocoding of the data (Appendix 2- sample shot) was also used to add as many themes as possible, especially any significant themes and sub-themes that might have been left out during the manual coding. For example, "teachers" was the top rank theme with the sub-themes of *willing teachers*, *novice teachers*, *critical teaching*,

student teachers, and *good teachers*(Appendix 3- sample shot). As a result, 119 main nodes with 188 references to the narratives were obtained.

Results and discussion

The resulted categories on QSR NVivo on the one hand and close content analysis of the narratives on the other hand revealed the following:

1. “*Teachers*”, “*students*”, “*power*”, and “*rights*” were the top ranking themes followed by “*tradition*” and “*critical pedagogy*” ranking the second.
2. The participants discussed critical pedagogy and its challenges primarily from the *teacher’s* point of view with focus on the consequences to the teacher’s personal and professional life as the major concern. “*Students*” and the effects of critical pedagogy on students’ lives was the second concern.
3. At the beginning of the study (the first semester of the academic year), the participants theoretically agreed that critical pedagogy is a move forward to changing their personal lives. Ten out of the twenty-eight participants did not believe that the traditional teacher training programs were deskilling them by prescribing the how-to-dos of teaching methodology.
4. Toward the end of the second semester of the academic year, the initial responses of denial of deskilling in the traditional teacher training programs gave way to a strong decision by all the participants to change the oppressive social structures in their lives, and to advocate reskilling in their professional development. In their view, critical pedagogy could help them find a language of hope as an alternative to their personal alienation that deskilling or prescriptions for how to do (Kanpol, 1999) often brings about. However, in practice, when asked whether they would take the necessary steps toward critical pedagogy in their own classrooms (Question 1 above), two participants gave contradictory responses, four participants disagreed, eight participants were conservative, and fourteen participants still confirmed that they would do their best to implement critical pedagogy in their classroom. The participants who were employed in government sector showed the most reservation in their responses.
5. As to the challenges of doing critical pedagogy (Question 2 above), all the participants believed that it would jeopardize the teachers’ career. Fourteen participants confirmed that the least they would do would be develop the critical thinking skills in their students regardless of the consequences. One of the participants who strongly agreed with doing critical pedagogy but expressed their

reservations mentioned that they had received warnings from their school principle against raising social problems, which could have negative effects on the teenagers' mindset and behavior.

6. As to Question 3, answers were almost similar confirming the few number of instructors who believed in and practiced critical pedagogy. The participants reasoned that the instructors who avoided critical pedagogy either followed a traditional methodology or preferred not to jeopardize their career. The students appreciated the mindset and performance of the few critical pedagogues they took courses with during their undergraduate and graduate studies. However, eleven participants believed that the number of critical pedagogues is too few to affect the educational system and the students' mindset

The findings of this research were partly in line with the findings in Sahragard, Razmjoo, and Baharloo (2014), Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh (2015), and Atai and Moradi (2016) as far as the participants' awareness and support of critical pedagogy is concerned. However, this research revealed the other side of the issue when it came to practice. The findings showed that the teachers expressed their reservations to do critical pedagogy with regard to the social and professional consequences, a finding absent in the studies cited thus far. The participants did not simply agree to this perspective as a theory. They reflected on the pitfalls as well as the pay offs of critical pedagogy.

The empirical studies in the Iranian EFL context discussed above have looked at critical pedagogy from a theoretical point of view. The participants in these studies had taken part in interviews and/or responded to questionnaires with items *about* critical pedagogy, i.e., items that addressed the principles of this approach, whether the participants agreed or disagreed with the usefulness and/or possibility of doing critical pedagogy in the country. None of the studies researched whether the participants applied critical pedagogy in their classrooms as a lived experience. However, in an interesting study, Breuing (2011) interviewed 17 critical pedagogues (university professors) from Caucasian, Asian-American, Native-American, Chicana, and Latina background, who taught in universities in Canada and US. She asked them how they self-defined themselves as critical pedagogues, how they defined critical pedagogy, requested them to give one or two aims of critical pedagogy, and asked about the critical pedagogical theorists who had influenced them the most. Breuing then reports that many respondents only *taught about* the theory of critical pedagogy, but others claimed that they used dialogues and negotiations, and engaged their students in doing real research not just learning about it.

Breuing's focus of research (2011) described above is different from the focus of this study, but its queries targeted the similar concern of this research: critical pedagogy in practice. Even in her study with experienced university professors who self-identified themselves as critical pedagogues, she found disparity in the ways they self-identified, which she believes was due to their different perceptions of critical pedagogy. Breuing concludes that people should broaden their understanding of the central aims and purposes of critical pedagogy by first assessing their own view of the concept.

Along the same line, the results of the present study revealed that the participants were aware of the principles of critical pedagogy the way they personally understood the concept in addition to the knowledge they obtained from the materials they had covered in their graduate studies and the conferences and discussion-oriented classes they had participated in. It seems that their impression, especially that of those participants who were reluctant to follow the theory was the result of the self-assessment of their view of critical pedagogy and the aims and purposes of this approach as well as its effects in the outside world.

Conclusion

This study recorded the views of a group of Iranian student teachers of TEFL at graduate level with regard to critical pedagogy in practice, and investigated their willingness to do critical pedagogy in their own classrooms. Three key queries guided this qualitative research: whether the participants practiced critical pedagogy in their classes, what are the challenges of doing critical pedagogy, and if they knew of any instructor or colleague who practically follows critical pedagogy in their classrooms with any social and professional impacts/consequences if at all.

The analysis of the thick data showed that the participants were aware of the principles of this approach and supported it. However, not all of the participants were willing or ready to practice critical pedagogy in their classrooms. They expressed their reservations about the social and professional consequences of this approach, and stated that in spite of the necessity of advocating and promoting critical pedagogy in all educational contexts, job security concerns would make them give it a second thought.

There is no definite statistics on the number of teacher education centers or programs in Iran, which teach about the principles of pedagogy and practice it at the same time to involve teachers in critical pedagogical hands-on activities. As Safari and Pourhashemi's study (2012) revealed, there may be several reasons why teachers cannot or do not practice critical pedagogy in their classrooms despite their strong support of the theory. The findings of the present study confirmed one of the obstacles that Safari and Pourhashemi discussed: cultural

and political concerns. Of course, since the guiding queries of this study addressed certain information, the responses cannot be compared with Safari and Pourhashemi's study. Other studies done on the critical pedagogy in the Iranian context were more or less similar in scope and focus with almost similar variables involved.

Research on critical pedagogy is quite rich and only a few of them could be reviewed and discussed in a short paper as such. The results of this study are more thought-provoking than problem solving. The findings of this study, and some of the previous research, for that matter, might lead to the following questions:

1. Should critical pedagogy be introduced, advocated, instructed, and promoted in all teacher education programs and then be left at the discretion of teachers to practice or leave it?
2. Is critical pedagogy a context-bound approach, or a context-free one?
3. If critical pedagogy leads to students' awareness of their rights, social (in)justice, the status of the oppressor and the oppressed, and the link between the teaching materials to real life issues, to what extent should the teachers and authorities be open to students' questions of the status quo?
4. Are there any limits to critical pedagogy?

The list of questions exemplified above is not exhaustive. More issues can be addressed to this worthy preach and costly practice. That said, a necessary condition for teachers to do critical pedagogy is their self-identification as critical pedagogues (Breuing, 2011): to examine their own view of this theory and define its central aims and purposes before they hit the road.

REFERENCES

- Akbari, R. (2008). Transforming lives: introducing critical pedagogy into ELT classroom. *ELT Journal*, 62(3), 276-283. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccno25>.
- Atai, M.R. & Moradi, H. (2016). Critical pedagogy in the context of Iran: exploring English teachers' perceptions. *Applied Research on English Language*, 5(2), 121-144. <http://uijs.ui.ac.ir/are>
- Bakhtin, M. (1984). *The problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Battersby, M.E. (1989). Critical thinking as applied epistemology: relocating critical pedagogy in the philosophical landscape. *Informal Logic*, XI.2
- Breuing, M. (2011). Problematizing critical pedagogy. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 3(3), 2-23.
- Cox, M.I.P. & De Assis-Peterson, A.A. (1999). Critical pedagogy in ELT: Images of Brazilian teachers of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 433-452.
- Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Crookes, G. (2012). Critical pedagogy in language teaching. In L. Ortega (Ed.). *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics*. Wiley/Blackwell.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: Free Press.
- Elgin, S. (2000). *The language imperative*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *Politics, philosophy, culture: Interview and other writings, 1977–1984*. New York: Routledge.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.
- Freire, P. (1985). *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*. Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey.
- Hyytinen, H., Holma, K. Toom, A., Shavelson, R., & Lindblom-Ylänne, S. (2014). The complex relationship between students' critical thinking and epistemological beliefs in the

context of problem solving. *Frontline Learning Research*.

<http://dx.doi.org.10.14786/flr.v2i4.124>

Kanpol, B. (1999). *Critical Pedagogy: An introduction* (2nd ed.). London: Bergin & Garvey.

Kincheloe, J. L. (2008). *Knowledge and critical pedagogy: An introduction*. London: Bergin & Gavery.

Liyanage, I. (2012). Critical pedagogy in ESL/EFL teaching in South Asia: practices and challenges with examples from Sri Lanka. In K. Sung & R. Pederson (Eds.). *Critical ELT practice in Asia*, 137-151.

Monchinski, T. (2008). *Critical pedagogy and everyday classroom*. NY: Springer.

Kamali-Sarvestani, N. & Yamini, M. (2016). Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes toward critical pedagogy. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 6(1), 110-117.

Kohansal, B. & Akbari, R. (2013). An investigation of EFL learners' attitudes toward critical pedagogy and its impact on their academic writing achievement. *Journal of Social Issues and Humanities*, 1(7), 140-148.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities*. New York: Crown.

Ragan, T. J., & Osborn, T. A. (2002). *The foreign language educator in society: Toward a critical pedagogy*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Safari, P. & Pourhashemi, M.R. (2012). Toward an empowering pedagogy: Is there room for critical pedagogy in educational system of Iran? *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(12), 2548-2555. Doi: 104304/tpls.2.12.2548-2555

Sahragard, R., Razmjoo, S.A & Baharloo, A. (2014). The practicality of critical pedagogy from Iranian EFL instructors' viewpoints: a cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 5(2), 178-193.

Sarroub, L.K. & Quadros, S. (2015). Critical pedagogy in classroom discourse. *Faculty Publications: Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education*, 252-260.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/teachlearnfacpub>

Shin, H. & Crookes, G. (2005). Explaining the possibilities for EFL critical pedagogy in Korea- a two-part case study. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies: An International Journal*, 2(2), 113-138.

Shor, I. (1992). *Empowering education: Critical teaching for social change*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Yulianto, S.W. (2015). The use of critical pedagogy principles in teaching EFL reading. *English Review*, 4(1), 25-38.

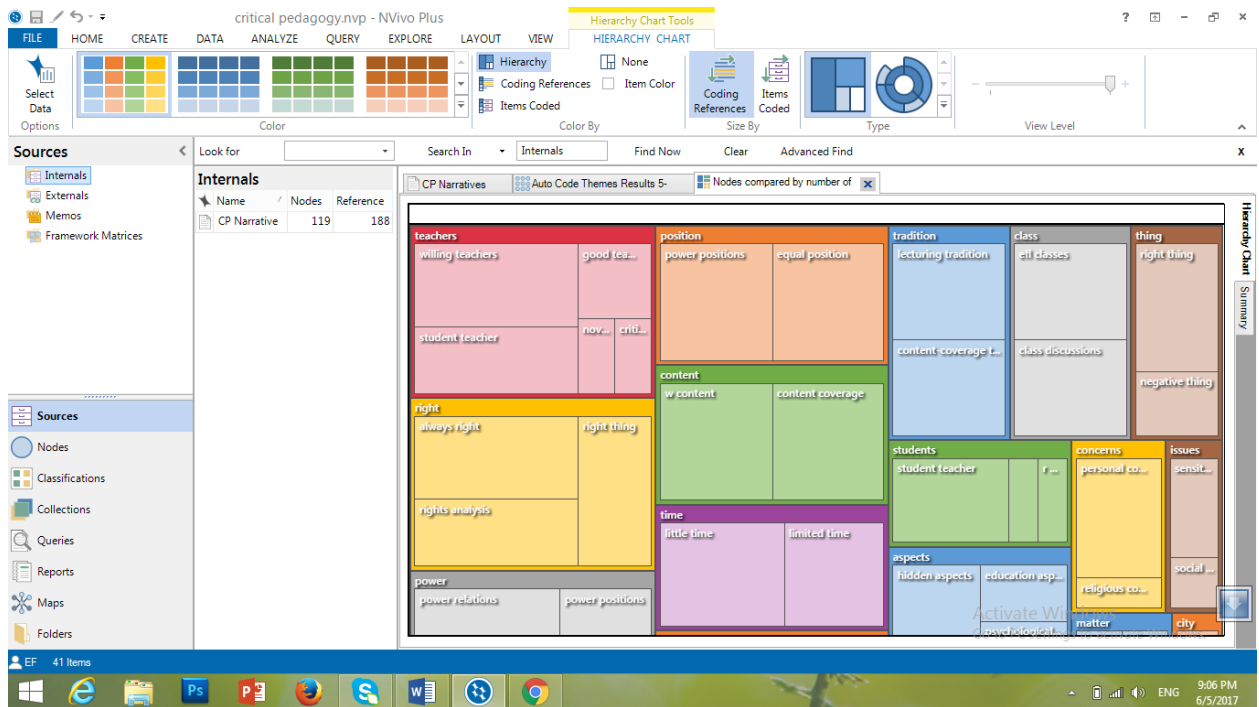
Appendix 1

Sample page of QSR NVivo : manual coding of the data

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for manual coding. The main window shows a text excerpt with a highlighted section: "Judgment (judging others based on their viewpoints)". The left sidebar shows a list of nodes, including "agree wit", "attention", "being cri", "better be", "bring soc", "care abo", "CP allow", "CP depe", "CP depe", "CP in line", "CP is a p", "CP is abo", "CP is aco", "CP is app", "CP is risk", "CP is the", and "CP isi go". The bottom status bar indicates "1 Item", "Nodes: 59", "References: 59", "Line: 130", "Column: 6", and "100%" zoom.

Appendix 2

Sample page of QSR NVivo: auto coding of the data



Appendix 3

Sample page of QSR NVivo-11 for key word frequency: Tree Map

