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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IRANIAN EFL TEACHER'S AWARENESS OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

Although the concept of critical pedagogy (CP) has been around for some time in education, but there has not been so much research in ELT conducted on implementing the basic tenets of CP into teacher education. CP has defined a new role for teachers to step beyond the classroom. Despite the new role for teachers, there seems to be little attention in conceptualization of teacher's success. This study was an attempt to review the available literature of teacher success. In other words, the principles of CP have been incorporated into operational and theoretical aspects of teacher success. Moreover, it also sought to determine to what extent Iranian EFL teachers are familiar with the concept of CP, and to what extent they incorporate CP in their classroom, consciously or subconsciously. To this end, measures of the CP of 20 Iranian EFL teachers and their professional success were scrutinized using two questionnaires. The results indicated a statistically significant relationship between the two sets of measures. The findings also indicated that most of teachers (MA degree) are not familiar with the concept of CP; therefore, they indicated the lack of interest in socio-political issues in their classroom. Implications relate to the need to accommodate CP as an essential aspect of EFL teacher education. It can be argued that better CP perception turns out to be better EFL teacher.

Key Words: *Critical Pedagogy, Teacher's Professional Success, Social Practice, EFL Teachers, Classroom Setting*

INTRODUCTION

It was in the 20th century that language teaching was developed as a profession currently. Therefore, there have been considerable changes in education due to these new developments. The role of English in the world is growing rapidly and continuously; therefore, there is an increasing need for EFL teachers. Moreover, during the recent 30 years, linguistics, education, psychology and anthropology have had direct or indirect impacts on teaching and learning second/foreign languages. This implies more pressure on EFL teachers because they should know much more about learning and teaching processes than before (Chase, 1988; Richards, 1996; Brown, 2001).

As Kumaravadivelu, (2003) asserts, several people are involved in each educational system, namely, administrators, policy makers, curriculum planners, teacher educators, text book writers, and teachers. However, the most important one who shapes and reshapes the learning outcome is the teacher. Thus, a teacher should be equipped with a sense of plausibility and the recent investigations on foreign/second language teaching focus mainly on the teacher's autonomy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

With the advent of CP as the new development in language teaching in education, teachers and students have taken new identities. In the light of CP teachers are considered to be a facilitator and can negotiate the class procedures, structures, contents, grading criteria as well as their own role in the class with the students.

Critical pedagogy's ultimate aim is to enhance the well-being of students and increase their interconnectedness to show the good and human side of existence and not merely the negative aspects from the world (Schugurensky, 1998). Doing so allows pre-service teachers to expose students to their ability to foster change in themselves and others (Pierce, 1997; Penny, 1998). Having a higher cultural awareness that makes students more aware is a struggle for them as well as their teachers. This struggle can be eased

Research Article

by creating an environment that is welcoming of a critical analysis of the one's own ideas and be as well as those of others (Peterson, 2003). Teachers should be trained to go beyond the basic instruction of students and instead begin to see them as people who can grow to facilitate change in themselves and others (Schugurensky, 1998; Gabel, 2002).

Wardekker and Miedema (1997) argue that CP is basically concerned "with the question of social embeddedness of education and its inevitably political character in contemporary Western society". They maintain that the educational processes are "historical: and that the history of modern Western society has caused education to be problematical. Their main argument is that the structure of the Western society is such that it produces a kind of education whose outcome is "either a disharmonic and internally divided or an ideologically curtailed personality structure, depending on how one estimates the degree of dominance of hegemonial culture" (P. 49). They argue that through this kind of education whose aim is "transmission of knowledge" rather than "personality formation" people are taught in a way to ensure that they "fit into existing societal structures" (p. 51). This education will eventually lead to more suppression rather than enlightenment.

CP is a teaching approach which attempts to help students question and challenge this domination and suppression, and the beliefs and practices that dominate. In other words, it is a theory and practice of helping students achieve critical consciousness. CP takes as a central concern the issue of power in the teaching and learning context. It focuses on how and in whose interests knowledge is produced and 'passed on' and view the ideal aims of education as emancipatory. The central purpose of critical pedagogy is empowering students to challenge and change the oppressing conditions which prevent them from realizing their full potentials.

[Critical] pedagogy . . . signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities. . . . Pedagogy in the critical sense illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority, and power. (Giroux, 1994)

From all this, it seems obvious that unlike traditional teaching approaches, CP seeks to make both students and educators aware of these socio-political issues involved in language teaching. Moreover, CP considers both students and teachers as agents of social change, with the power to transform lives (Akbari, 2008). The term "Praxis" is usually used to refer to the power and know-how to take action against oppression while stressing the importance of liberating education. Characteristics of praxis include self-determination (as opposed to coercion), intentionality (as opposed to reaction), creativity (as opposed to homogeneity), and rationality (as opposed to chance).

The importance of having the principles of CP in teacher's success lies in the fact that teachers grow more conscious of sociopolitical role they have. In other words, the absence of the principles of CP diverts teacher's attention from sociopolitical role to a classroom bound teacher. Consequently, they fail to step beyond the classroom. The purpose of this study is to determine first, the degree to which Iranian EFL in service teachers are familiar with concept of CP and second how they judge its applicability to language teaching contexts in Iran. Third, the degree to which Iranian teachers believe that critical pedagogy may change current social practices and it leads to a better society. By and large this study aimed to probe the possible relationship between teacher's knowledge of CP and their professional success. The research questions posed at this study are as what follows:

Research Questions

Q1: What is the relationship between Iranian EFL teacher's critical pedagogy ability and their professional success?

Q2: To what extent is Iranian EFL in service language teachers familiar with the concept of critical pedagogies?

Q3: To what extent they incorporate critical pedagogy into their classroom setting, whether consciously or subconsciously (without being aware of the fact that these practices are what CP advocates)?

Research Article

Q4: To what extent do the teachers believe that CP may change current social practices and lead to a better society?

Background

Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire has been widely claimed as one of the first proponents of critical pedagogy. Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was born in 1921 in Recife, Pernambuco, in the northeast of Brazil. He had been struggling with poverty and social injustice for quite a long time when he eventually defended his doctoral dissertation in 1959, at the local university. There, he also worked as a professor of History and Philosophy of Education. His experience in his homeland, mainly his involvement in more popular forms of instruction (i.e. teaching illiterate adult workers in Recife), apart from other pedagogical engagements, has contributed to his love and passion for the teaching-learning process. His achievements were impressive: in 1963, within a period of 45 days, he managed to teach 300 adult learners to read and write. (Burbles and Burk, 1999)

However, following the military coup of April 1964 in Brazil, a time when people lived within a 'culture of silence' and were devoid of their right to speak, Freire was sent to jail for 75 days; his ideas were considered as a threat to the 'old order'. The following five years were spent in exile in Chile where he worked with UNESCO and the local Institute for Agrarian Reform. Immersed in the relationship between agronomists and peasants, he carried on to further develop his pedagogy for educating adults, as well as producing his world famous literary works *Pedagogy of Freedom* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. These writings were a major turning point in his life and career: he was invited to teach at Harvard University's School of Education, in the United States, for one year while working in several urban and rural educational projects.

After that, in 1974, he became a special consultant to the Office of Education at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, focusing on educational projects mainly directed at African countries which had undergone independence. Finally, in 1979, he returned to his homeland and developed projects aiming at a public school of quality for all. In the late 1980s, he was appointed Minister of Education to the State of Sao Paulo for a period of 4 years. He remained in the capital city, also working as a Professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo (PUC-SP), from 1981 until his death in 1997 (Cited, Burbles and Burk, 1999).

It is, therefore, important to say that, owing to Freire's vast experience not only in South America but also in Central and North America, Europe and Africa, in all his works we may also hear important voices such as those of L. S. Vygotsky, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, Georg Lukács, Louis Althusser, Erich Fromm, Antonio Gramsci and Jurgen Habermas, among others. In addition, since the time he spent at Harvard, and even now after his death, his pedagogy has fostered dialogues with several educators in the USA such as Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, Peter McLaren, Myles Horton, Donaldo Macedo, Joe L. Kincheloe, and Carlos Alberto Torres, just to name but a few. A recent publication by Kincheloe (2008) illustrates Freire's thinking within several theoretical, pedagogical and political dimensions. (Cited in Burbles and Burk, 1999)

As cited in Judd (1987); Aurebach (1991); Penny (1994); Canagarajah (2005), Freire's pedagogy aims at liberation from social injustice and oppression. One of the major consequences of domination is the 'culture of silence', in other words, individuals are deprived of their right to say their word. When people are dehumanized and are not allowed to speak, they are not able to transform their own realities. Liberation, then, lies in both self-awareness and awareness of reality, which by no means is static. Therefore, people need to have the opportunity to engage into a different model of thinking, powered by an emancipatory cognitive interest, as Heyman (2004) argued; in such a model, the construction of knowledge "attains congruence with the interest in autonomy and responsibility and "reason also means the will to reason. Finally, the process of being able to transcend oneself while perceiving and understanding reality, enables people to both act upon their reality, transform it while transforming themselves as well. This process is what Freire calls consciousness.

Research Article

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

In this study, the participants was selected from Iranian EFL language teachers who are teaching English for at least five years in different state schools in Mazandaran province in Tonekabon, Sari, and Amol district. They ranged in age from 32 to 48. 20 male English teachers approximately with the experiences of five to fifteen years in state school took part in the present study.

The participants hold MA (N=15) and ph.d (N=5) degree and all of them were teaching in state-school. Furthermore, to obtain measures of these teacher's professional success, 40 male and female English language learners, the students of the teacher-participants at the time, ranging in age from 23 to 35, learning English at the above-mentioned institutes participated in the study. The number of students who provided such measures for each teacher ranged from 5 to 12 from one class or two classes.

Procedures

The first phase of the present study was to review the literature on the studies of teacher's success and the corresponding subcategories. To this end all of the available studies of teacher's success including 25 articles along with some books and chapters were reviewed based on the checklist consisting of the principles CP which were complied by Crawford (1978) and Girux (1992). At the next stage, all the available English measures of teacher success were reviewed along with the checklist. The present study adopted May and Chee (2008) checklist.

They identify three groups of features (personal qualities, professional questions, and contextual features) on teacher success. Personal qualities compressed the following subcategories: caring for students, enthusiasm, self-reflection, attaching importance to moral education and having a positive influence on student's values and attitudes, and holding individual teaching beliefs, the professional qualities included: classroom management, and knowledge of the subject matter, and contextual features consisted of: personal context, school context, and context beyond school.

Next, CP questionnaire (CPQ) was distributed among the teachers to fill out in their free time. Each was shortly introduced to the purpose of the research and provided with some brief oral instruction on how to complete the appraisal form.

Moreover, their professional success was evaluated toward the end of the term as the participants will be assured that their identity will be kept confidential and they are free to select whether to write down their names or not, however, they will be asked to write their degrees. The participants had twenty minutes to complete the questionnaire.

After collecting the data, the passage on critical pedagogy was administered to the teachers the participants were allotted fifteen minutes to study the passage. Moreover, their professional success was evaluated toward the end of the term as their students filled out the Successful Iranian EFL Teacher (SIET) questionnaire in their regular class time.

Having collected the data, the researcher set off on data analysis to answer the research questions as to whether EFL teacher's knowledge of CP can be a predictor of their student-evaluated professional success. Finally to tap teacher's perceptions regarding CP the TOCPQ was distributed among teachers with BA degree.

The participants had fifteen minutes to complete the first questionnaire. After the questionnaires were collected the passage on critical pedagogy was given to the participants. The participants were given fifteen minutes to study the passage. The researcher was present to explain in case participants faced any problem understanding some parts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table of descriptive statistics (Table 1) indicates that all the 20 teacher-participants who filled out the CPQ and were evaluated through IESTQ were included in the data analysis procedure as active valid cases. The participant's scores ranged from 12 to 59 on CPQ and from 30 to 94 on SIETQ.

Research Article

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the two questionnaires

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	variance
CPQ	20	43.00	12.00	59.00	32	12.02	127
SIET	20	41.00	14.00	68.00	37	14.32	173
Valid N (Listwise)	20						

From a statistical perspective, the assumption behind the null hypothesis is that there is no significant correlation between Iranian EFL teacher's CP ability and their professional success. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product moment correlation was run. Table 2 depicts the coefficient of this correlation between total CPQ and SIET scores. The calculated correlation coefficient is 0.81 which is significant at 0.01 level of significance ($r = 0.81$, $p \leq 0.01$). This confirms that there is a significant meaningful relationship between the two variables namely, CPQ and ETS.

Table 2: Pearson correlation coefficient

	CPQ	ETS
CPQ Pearson correlation	1	.81(**)
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	20	20
SIET Pearson correlation	.81(**)	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	20	20

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results reject the first null hypothesis claiming that there is no relationship between EFL teacher's CP ability and their professional success. In other words the results confirmed that two variables are significantly positively correlated with each others.

Next, to tap teacher's perceptions regarding the CP the response to each item in TOCPQ Were coded 1 (I agree) and 2 (I don't agree). The frequency of the responses to each item was calculated. Figure 1 shows the frequency of the responses for each item. The responses to questions on the second questionnaire were also examined in terms of the presence or absence of some keywords or elements which express the attitudes of the participants towards critical pedagogy and their perception of the probable outcomes of incorporating it into the classroom. Several common themes emerged from this examination which will be discussed in the next section.

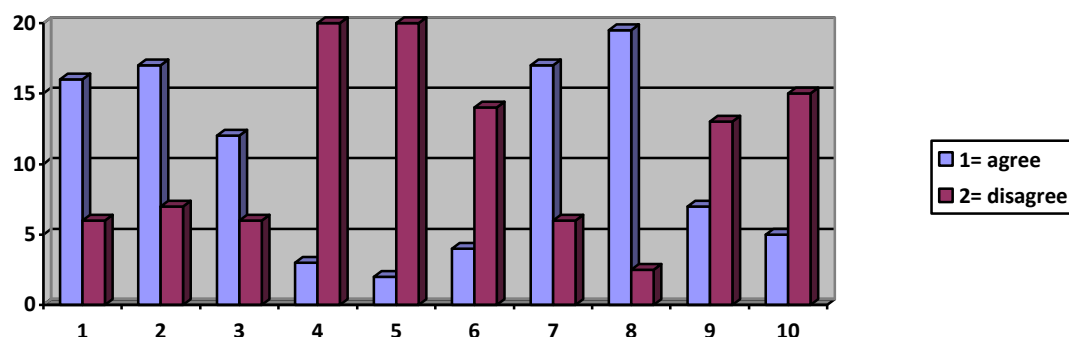


Figure 1: Teacher's perception about some classroom practices

Research Article

Finally in order to see to what extent EFL teachers believe that CP may change current social procedures, one sample test was conducted. The results are indicated in the following tables (3 &4).

Table 3: One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CP	20	.4650	.07452	.01666

Table 4: One-Sample Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
CP	-2.101	19	.049	-.03500	-.0699	-.0001

As indicated in table 3, the mean of the subject is .46 and the standard deviation is .74. The results in table 4 (sig. value<.05) reject the null hypothesis confirming that CP may change current social practice and lead to a better society.

This study was an attempt to seek the nexus between Iranian EFL teacher's CP ability and their pedagogical success. The results of statistical analysis revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between the two variables in question. The size of this correlation indicates that generally high levels of CP are related to high levels of teacher success as evaluated by EFL learners. This is hardly surprising since teacher's CP ability, as its various definitions denote, can be said to influence nearly all their pedagogical decisions regarding how to group learners, how best to enhance learner motivation and self-esteem, what additional materials and tasks to draw upon, and numerous other 'how's, 'what's and 'why's. Although the results indicated a positive relationship, the relationship is not cause and effect connection.

The second part of the study is devoted to discussing common theme emerged from teacher's response in their class, and the extent to which they believe that CP may change the current social practices and lead to a better society. As the figure 1 indicates, most Iranian teachers still strongly believe in traditional ways of teaching English in the classroom. The teacher responses showed that they do not have any knowledge of CP and that they even do not believe in what CP advocates. Almost all the teachers believed that it is impossible to separate language teaching from culture teaching. The teachers in this study believed that the best materials available for language teaching are those provided and designed by native speakers of English. Many of the teachers maintained that the use of mother tongue in the classroom is a mistake and affects student's learning in a negative manner. The majority of the respondents believed in the "one single best method" approach although a few of them regarded an "eclectic approach" a more useful one. Considering the statement which suggested the use of materials dealing with the lives of the oppressed in the classroom, almost all the teachers believed that it is not a good idea. The teachers also strongly believed that teaching native-like pronunciation is a priority and one of the aims of teaching English. There was a kind of disagreement between teachers regarding the statement which argued that native speakers are better teachers compared to non-natives, however most of the teachers believed that it is not true. Finally most of the participants did not show any enthusiasm for the idea that classroom should become a place for the development of student's critical and social consciousness.

Conclusion

This research sought to probe the extent to which EFL teachers implement principles of CP in their classroom and the probable relationship between EFL teacher's CP efficacy and their professional success. Although the findings indicated a high correlation between teacher's knowledge of CP and their success, most of EFL teachers report that they are not aware of the concept of CP. Therefore the finding

Research Article

supports a serious need to revisit the priorities in teacher education programs. It also highlighted the fact that beside their unfamiliarity with CP and its potentials the lack of interest in engaging in socio-political issues on the part of Iranian teachers might be a factor of their psychological, emotional and economical conditions or may be related to the inflexible demands of the policy makers and course designers. Hence the urgent need to take some steps to motivate teachers to put aside their indifference to issues which are far more important than skills or strategies for the future of both their students and their society.

Therefore material developers need to adapt the principles of CP. CP can be adapted well to a variety of cultural and academic contexts, if we are willing to accept a looser definition, like that of Pennycook (1999) or Canagarajah (2005), of what CP is. To them, CP is not meant to be a prescriptive method, and as it expects us to critique schooling, teaching methods, texts, and language use, we must also critique it and create our own locally and culturally appropriate pedagogy for our students. Though this kind of potential curricular reform and possible need for a shift in teaching practice may pose a significant challenge to teachers through CP teachers can think globally but act locally.

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Research Article

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Research Article

APPENDIX A

Principles of Critical Pedagogy Checklist (Crawford, 1978; Girux, 1992)

CP Appraisal comprises the following subsections which practically measure the five aspects of CP as defined by Crawford (1978) and Girux (1992).

Principles of Critical Pedagogy Checklist (Crawford, 1978; Girux, 1992)

Principles of CP

- **Problem posing and political education system**
 - **Use of authentic material**
 - **Learners empowerment**
 - **Development of critical consciousness**
 - **Avoidance of marginization**
-

Description of the checklist:

1. Education must be understood as producing not only knowledge but also political subjects.
2. Ethics must be seen as a central concern of critical pedagogy.
3. Critical pedagogy needs to focus on the issue of difference in an ethically challenging and politically transformative way.
4. Critical pedagogy needs a language that allows for competing solidarities and political vocabularies that do not reduce the issues of power, justice, struggle, and inequality to a single script, a master narrative that suppresses the contingent, historical and the everyday as a serious object of study. This suggests that curriculum knowledge not be treated as a sacred text but developed as part of an ongoing engagement with a variety of narratives and traditions that can be re-read and re-formulated in politically different terms.
5. Critical pedagogy needs to create new forms of knowledge through its emphasis on breaking down disciplinary boundaries and creating new spaces where knowledge can be produced.
6. The Enlightenment notion of reason needs to be reformulated within a critical pedagogy. . Reason implicates and is implicated in the intersection of power, knowledge, and politics.
7. Critical pedagogy needs to regain a sense of alternatives by combining a language of critique and possibility. Postmodern feminism exemplifies this in both its critique of patriarchy and its search to construct new forms of identity and social relations.
8. Critical pedagogy needs to develop a theory of teachers as transformative intellectuals who occupy specifiable political and social locations. . Critical pedagogy would represent itself as the active construction rather than transmission of particular ways of life.
9. Central to the notion of critical pedagogy is a politics of voice that combines a postmodern notion of difference with a feminist emphasis on the primacy of the political.