

Iranian EFL Teachers' Attitudes towards Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract

Critical pedagogy (CP) is a new educational approach that aims to remove social and political injustice and tries to help learners question and challenge oppression. This approach that derives its interest from critical theory has entered the field of research in recent years. In line with this trend, the present study aimed at investigating Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the application of critical pedagogy, taking into account teachers' teaching experience and academic background. To this end, a Likert scale questionnaire developed by Tabatabaei (2013) was administered to 99 Iranian EFL teachers teaching at different institutes in Shiraz. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were recalculated. As far as the validity of the scale was concerned, it was established through factor analysis and the reliability of the questionnaire was checked through Cronbach's alpha. Statistical procedures, namely, descriptive statistics, independent samples *t*-test, and two-way ANOVA were applied. The findings of the study revealed that the EFL teachers mostly agree with the application of critical pedagogy. No significant difference was found between novice and experienced teachers' attitudes towards the principles of critical pedagogy. Furthermore, the results indicated that there was no significant relationship between teacher's academic experience and their views regarding critical pedagogy. However, as their teaching experience increased, they developed positive attitudes towards CP.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, teachers' attitudes, novice teachers, experienced teachers

1. Introduction

In education, critical pedagogy can increase social awareness in teachers and learners, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Critical pedagogy also has some positive impacts on administration in that it can help policy makers to decide properly.

McLaren (2003) defines critical pedagogy as "a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state" (p. 75). McLaren (2003) also explains that critical pedagogy is an approach adopted by progressive teachers attempting to eliminate inequalities on the basis of social class, and that it has also sparked a wide array of anti-sexist, anti-racist, and anti-homophobic classroom-based curricula and policy initiatives. According to Rashidi & Safari (2011), trying to define CP in a practice-oriented stance, CP is introduced not as a set of ideas, but a way of doing learning and teaching.

CP as an educational approach aims to remove social and political injustice and tries to empower learners to critically question, reflect on and act against an undemocratic and inequitable society. According to McArthur (2010), "critical pedagogy with its strong agenda for change is grounded on the belief that education and society are intrinsically inter-related; and because of that, the aim of education is for the improvement of social justice for all" (p. 493). Based on the studies done by Alibakhshi & Rezaei Mezajin (2013), CP "requires a democratic classroom environment, where students' viewpoints are highlighted through discussion and there is shared power and dialogue among teachers and students". It creates conditions for the empowerment of learners and prevents their marginalization (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Every student in critical pedagogy classrooms must be an independent and creative learner. Learning is not confined to classrooms, but it extends beyond the classroom environment (Benites, 2012).

Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011) believe that increasing the awareness of social injustice is the most

important aim of critical pedagogy in the curriculum; thus, CP is trying to create a more egalitarian society. According to Sahragard, Razmjoo, & Baharloo (2014) the major aim of critical pedagogy is to prepare students who can find a solution for both their own difficulties and the ones concerned with the society. It attempts to raise consciousness and develop cooperative learning among students.

According to McLaren (2000), Paulo Freire is generally considered to be “the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy” (p. 1). Along with Freire, many other scholars (e.g., Apple, 2009, 2010; Giroux, 1981, 1983, 1988a, 1988b, 1992; Kincheloe, 2004, 2008; McLaren, 1995; Shor, 1992) have also a crucial role in the promotion of CP in traditional education systems. Critical pedagogy had its ups and downs in educational circles, but today it has reached a stable position.

Most educators (Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 1999, 2002; Morgan, 1998; Norton, 1997; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 1999, 2001; Ramanathan, 2002) believe that critical pedagogy is an essential element in teaching English. Critical theory is the origin of critical pedagogy so they have the same philosophies and approaches.

Critical pedagogy roots itself in the belief that every citizen deserves an education. Education involves passion for one's subject matter, the ability to get student to think critically, being creative about subject matter content, creating a classroom of an active community revolving around the learning of material, and the strong desire to teach and to learn (Rahimi, 2011, p. 180).

According to Schugurensky (1998), critical pedagogues attempt to raise students' consciousness, by utilizing the principles of CP in instruction and curriculum to help students take control of their own education. “In the language of critical pedagogy, the critical person is one who is empowered to seek justice, to seek emancipation” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, as cited in keesing styles, 2003, p. 3).

The teacher in the traditional classes is the only source of information in class who transfers his/her knowledge to students and the students just consume that knowledge. But in critical pedagogy classrooms, the teacher is the authority of change and provides the best condition for the exchange of ideas; as a result, both teachers and students learn together, they all teach each other. Kincheloe (2004) states that in CP, teachers no longer have the traditional role of “informative deliverer”. Ansel (2002) mentions that in critical pedagogy classrooms, students are no more passive consumers of knowledge; rather they are engaged in the process of knowledge transformation. They act as active members who participate in the process of choosing materials, learning, making decisions, and also evaluation.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Critical pedagogy is somehow a new issue in the Iranian context. It is an important trend in education in which both teachers and students are active in the learning process. There have been few researches on the Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the application of critical pedagogy. Davari, Iranmehr, & Erfani (2012) talked about Iranian ELT community's attitudes towards CP. Aliakbari & Allahmoradi (2012) investigated the Iranian school teachers' perceptions of the principles of CP. But nobody investigated the differences between novice and experienced teachers' attitudes towards the application of critical pedagogy nor did they consider the effect of teachers' academic experience on CP.

Crooks (2010) strongly argues that more reports of the actual implementation of EFL critical pedagogy are needed. The present researcher's purpose is to investigate the Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the application of critical pedagogy through the use of a validated questionnaire which is developed by Tabatabaei (2013).

1.2 Definition of Key Terms

1.2.1 Teachers' Attitudes

In the educational environment, teachers' and students' attitudes play a significant role in the achievement of educational objectives. According to Hogg & Vaughan (2005), an attitude is defined as “a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols” (p. 150).

1.2.2 Novice Teacher

In this study, novice teacher refers to a teacher who has less than 3 years of teaching experience. Novice teachers are less prepared to accommodate students' difficulties and ideas. Novice teachers cannot easily anticipate problems that students may have in class. They may have difficulty in handling emergency situations and do not even know how to get help in those cases. Kim & Roth (2011) indicate that “novice teachers, beginning teachers, neophytes, and pre-service teachers are depicted in many studies that focus on teachers who have difficulties

dealing with their tasks at work” (p. 4).

1.2.3 Experienced Teacher

In this study, the teachers who had more than five years of teaching experience were considered as expert teachers. Expert teachers look at learning from the students' perspective and think about each learning task properly. Usually they adapt their teaching methods to the needs of their students. Many researchers believe that classroom management is an area that causes different problems for novice teachers (Daloğlu, 2002; Freiberg, 2002; Martin & Baldwin, 1996; Mastrilli & Sardo-Brown, 2002). In this regard, Daloğlu (2002) mentions that “the more experienced teachers were, the less difficulty they had in dealing with classroom management problems” (p. 52).

1.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the main objectives of the study, the following research questions and the subsequent hypotheses are formed:

- a. What are the Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the application of critical pedagogy in an Iranian educational context?
- b. Are there any differences between novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the principles of critical pedagogy?
- c. Is there a relationship between teachers' academic experience and their views regarding critical pedagogy?

Based on the research questions, the following Hypotheses are formed.

- (1) It seems that EFL teachers have neither positive nor negative attitudes towards the principles of critical pedagogy.
- (2) It seems that there is no difference between novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the principles of critical pedagogy.
- (3) It seems that there is no relationship between teacher's academic experience and their views regarding critical pedagogy.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 99 EFL teachers who were teaching in different private language institutes in Shiraz, Iran. The respondents were teachers holding BA or MA degrees in different English majors, i.e. Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL), English Literature, Translation and General Linguistics; including 38 bachelors and 61 masters. The participants' age ranged from 25 to 35 years. Twenty nine of them were male and the rest were female. All the participants shared the same mother tongue (Persian), but had different teaching experiences.

2.2 Instruments

The required data for the study were collected through an instrument which was divided into two sections: 1. Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire (CPQ) and 2. the demographic information.

2.2.1 The Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire

The Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire was used to elicit EFL teachers' attitudes towards the application of critical pedagogy in the Iranian educational context. It was prepared by Tabatabaei (2013) and contained a total of 34 items using a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.

2.2.2 Demographic Information

The second section of the questionnaire was designed to collect the participants' demographic information, including their genders, their teaching experience, major, degree, and age.

2.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedure

One hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed by the researcher through face-to-face contact in the institutes or via email. Some of the teachers filled them out in the institute and some others completed them at home. Finally, 99 forms were returned. Before filling out the questionnaire, the teachers were informed that their participation was on a voluntary basis, and that their identity would never be disclosed. The data were collected in spring 2014.

In order to answer the first research question, the descriptive statistics was applied. The mean of the Critical

Pedagogy Questionnaire was calculated in order to answer the research question that investigates the significant difference of mean scores. Therefore, descriptive statistics (means, and standard deviations) were calculated covering the questionnaire's items. The scale suggested by Mohammadi (2004) was used (Figure 1). If the calculated mean were between 1 and 2.3, it was taken as instructors' agreement. If it were between 2.3 and 3.6, it was considered as instructors' neutrality. Finally, if the calculated mean were between 3.6 and 5, it was regarded as instructors' disagreement.

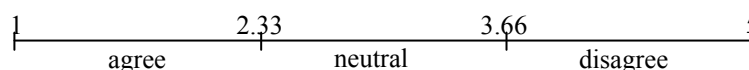


Figure 1. Scale based on Mohammadi (1383, 2004)

In order to answer the second research question, an independent samples *t-test* was run to show the difference between EFL novice and experienced teachers' attitudes towards the principles of critical pedagogy. Finally, in order to answer the last research question, ANOVA was applied to show the relationship between teacher's academic and teaching experience and their view regarding critical pedagogy. To analyze the data, a factor analysis was conducted and 6 factors were identified. They were all labeled to be recognized from each other as follows:

- 1) Student's viewpoints
- 2) Equality between male and female students
- 3) Using different strategies and techniques
- 4) Learning English
- 5) Talking about social and political problems in class
- 6) Choosing learning materials according to students' needs

All the statistical procedures were calculated by SPSS software version 22. The data were fed into the computer and analyzed.

3. Results

This section includes the results of the study. It starts with the descriptive statistics as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on all factors of the questionnaire

	<i>N</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Decision
Factor1	99	1.00	3.50	2.112	.541	Agree
Factor2	99	1.00	3.40	1.780	.529	Agree
Factor3	99	1.00	3.75	2.071	.636	Agree
Factor4	99	1.40	3.40	2.218	.432	Agree
Factor5	99	1.00	5.00	2.581	.874	Neutral
Factor6	99	1.00	4.00	2.158	.664	Agree
Overall	99	1.22	2.93	2.104	.356	Agree

As Table 1 shows, all of the factors except factor number 5 (talking about social and political problems in class) refer to agreement. In terms of Factor 5, the instructors reveal a neutral attitude. So it can be concluded that the Iranian EFL teachers mostly agree with the application of critical pedagogy.

ANOVA results are presented in Table 2. The statistics demonstrate that the sig. for teaching experience is .048, so the difference is statistically significant. This means that the attitudes of the teachers change as their experience changes. On the contrary, for education, the sig. is .876. Since it is above our significance level (.05), there is no statistically significant difference between the teachers' attitudes based on their education. There is no meaningful interaction between teaching experience and education, either.

Table 2. Tests of between-subjects effects on the whole questionnaire

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	675.660a	5	135.132	1.498	.198	.075
Intercept	100233.515	1	100233.515	1111.356	.000	.923
TE	566.887	2	283.443	3.143	.048	.063
Ed	2.223	1	2.223	.025	.876	.000
TE * ed	62.930	2	31.465	.349	.706	.007
Error	8387.694	93	90.190			
Total	328552.000	99				
Corrected Total	9063.354	98				

TE = Teaching Experience ed = Education

Table 3. T-test related to novice and experienced teachers

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
factor1	Equal variances assumed	9.702	.003	-1.320	63	.192
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.268	44.18	.212
factor2	Equal variances assumed	.108	.743	.532	63	.597
	Equal variances not assumed			.531	61.34	.597
factor3	Equal variances assumed	.775	.382	.398	63	.692
	Equal variances not assumed			.399	61.83	.691
factor4	Equal variances assumed	2.051	.157	-.997	63	.322
	Equal variances not assumed			-.975	52.95	.334
factor5	Equal variances assumed	3.178	.079	-1.718	63	.091
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.682	53.68	.098
factor6	Equal variances assumed	3.627	.061	-2.037	63	.046
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.013	57.57	.049
total	Equal variances assumed	7.047	.010	-1.271	63	.208
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.231	48.01	.224

Results in Table 3 reveal that there is no significant difference between novice and experienced teachers in all but one factor. With regard to factor number 6, which is concerned with the issue of choosing learning materials according to students' needs, the 2-tailed Sig. is .046. Since it is below our significance level (.05); it shows that there is a statistically significant difference between novice and experienced teachers. This significant difference can be seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics related to novice and experienced teacher in Factor 6

	TE2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
factor6	Novice	35	5.8286	1.65362	.27951
	Experienced	30	6.7333	1.92861	.35211

As can be seen, the mean score of experienced teachers is higher than that of novice teachers. This means that the experienced teachers are more inclined to disagree with the application of Factor 6.

4. Discussion

The research questions along with their hypotheses will be elaborated on individually.

RQ 1: What are the Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the application of critical pedagogy in an Iranian educational context?

Null Hypothesis 1: It seems that EFL teachers have neither positive nor negative attitudes towards the principles of critical pedagogy.

By referring to Table 1, it will become obvious that since all of the factors except factor number 5 refer to agreement, the Iranian EFL teachers mostly agree with the application of critical pedagogy. In terms of factor number 5, the instructors reveal a neutral attitude.

Thus, according to what was mentioned above and the statistics given in related tables, the null hypothesis regarding the first research question is rejected for all factors except Factor 5.

RQ 2: Are there any differences between novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the principles of critical pedagogy?

Null Hypothesis 2: It seems that there is no difference between Iranian EFL novice and experienced teachers' attitudes towards the principles of critical pedagogy.

Regarding the second research question, the contents of Tables 3 and 4 should be taken into account. In all factors except factor number 6 there is not a significant difference between novice and experienced teachers. In terms of factor number 6, the 2-tailed Sig. is .046 which is below our significance level (.05). So it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between novice and experienced teachers only in Factor 6. According to Table 4, the mean score of experienced teachers is bigger than that of novice teachers. This means that the experienced teachers are more inclined to disagree with the application of Factor 6.

Thus, based on the contents of related tables the second null hypothesis in this study was retained for all factors except Factor 6.

RQ 3: Is there a relationship between teachers' academic experience and their views regarding critical pedagogy?

Null Hypothesis 3: It seems that there is no relationship between teacher's academic experience and their views regarding critical pedagogy.

With reference to Table 2, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between BA and MA teachers. The sig. for education is .876, which indicates that there is not a statistically significant difference between the teachers' attitudes towards CP based on their education. Thus, the third null hypothesis was retained.

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