On the implementation of critical pedagogy in english language institutes in Iran

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the status quo of critical pedagogy in Iran. It focused on examining language teachers' stances on implementing the principles of critical pedagogy in their classrooms. Also, of particular interest was the study of gender difference in practicing critical pedagogy in language institutes in Iran. At first, the Critical Pedagogy Implementation Inventory, developed by Mozaffari (2011), was administered to 116 instructors teaching at language institutes to collect the required quantitative data. In the second phase of the study, forty-six of the participants were interviewed to gather some complementary qualitative data. The researchers utilized descriptive statistics, factor analysis, Cronbach's Alpha, chi-square, and independent samples T-test for the quantitative phase of the study, and techniques based on grounded theory in the qualitative phase. Data analysis revealed that the majority of language teachers were in favor of practicing critical pedagogy in their classrooms. However, it was found that critical pedagogy is not efficiently practiced in Iranian educational contexts and even the teachers who advocated the principles of critical pedagogy had an almost average score on the Critical Pedagogy Implementation Inventory. In fact, the teachers claimed that there were some barriers to practicing critical pedagogy in Iran. The top-down educational system, prescriptive approaches to supervision, class size, learners' expectations, conventional teacher-student relationships, and their traditionally-defined roles were among the main hurdles that impeded an appropriate implementation of

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critical pedagogy in classrooms. Further investigation also revealed that there was a significant difference between male and female teachers' stances on practicing critical pedagogy. It was revealed that female instructors tended to be more positively immersed in such implementation.

Keywords: critical pedagogy (CP), educational contexts, foreign language teachers, prescriptive supervision

1. Introduction

The field of language teaching is an intricate profession that has undergone major changes due to the emergence of different schools of thought and educational philosophies. In addition, these philosophies have been seriously shaped and colored by a variety of factors such as political systems, educational goals, people's culture, and the needs and requirements of societies in each period. It is crystal clear that the language teaching profession and its stakeholders have experienced major changes, since different schools of thought give rise to educational systems which hold different views about teachers' roles and authority, supervisors' functions and responsibilities, the flexibility of syllabi and classroom decisions, instructional methodologies, as well as assessment and evaluation. In other words, significant decisions about such crucial factors are mainly determined by the educational philosophy followed by an institution. Therefore, the policies belonging to each school of thought provide different definitions and functions for teachers and learners. Consequently, different roles and relationships will be expected.

In the past, traditional educational systems were inspired by behaviourism and other prescriptive schools of thought. They were more in favor of an authoritarian society in which teachers are viewed as the only source of knowledge and class authority, who are also acting out the principles and policies dictated to them from the upper levels of the system. Moreover, the traditional approach requires the supervisors to follow the same policies strictly. Consequently, the traditional approach has authorized the supervisor's role "to prescribe the best way to teach and to model teaching; to direct or guide the teacher's teaching; and to evaluate progress" (Gebhard, 1990).

However, current approaches to language teaching are more in line with humanistic and social constructivist schools of thought in which learners and teachers are viewed as whole human beings who can learn from one another; in other words, they can be supported and trained to upgrade themselves and reach their full potential (Abrell, 1974). Critical pedagogy (CP) is the offspring of such trends of thought in which concepts such as competition, imitation, conformity, memorization and summative types of evaluations are not pursued.

2. Literature Review

In the early 1970s, behaviourism declined and it was gradually replaced with constructivism and process-oriented ideologies which led education to "a shift from transmission, product-oriented theories to constructivist, process-oriented theories of learning, teaching, and teacher learning" (Crandall, 2000). Hence, concepts such as critical thinking, reflection, and self-observation were introduced and reinforced thereafter. In other words, these concepts are actually the offshoots of process-oriented theories which aim at involving individuals in the process of their self-growth and awareness-raising.

Critical pedagogy initially originated from the ideologies and beliefs proposed by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, who was concerned with the inequalities existing in educational systems. He also paid special attention to issues such as culture, ethnicity, literacy and human development (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003). Freire's pedagogy was against the traditional banking education in which knowledge is transmitted from teachers to learners without changing or processing it (Freire, 1970). He claimed that education can prepare people for a better life in the society; in other words, reading the word can eventually result in reading the world. In addition, many other scholars have contributed

to spread the foundations of critical pedagogy (e.g. Giroux, 1981, 1983, 1988a, 1988b; Kincheloe, 2004, 2008; Shor, 1992).

Although Henry Giroux was the first person to introduce the term critical pedagogy in his book entitled "Theory and Resistance in Education" in 1983, the concept of critical pedagogy was later reinforced with the publication of Freire's book "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (Darder et al., 2003). Giroux (1988b) believes that

> At its best, critical pedagogy is developed as a cultural practice that enables teachers and others to view education as a political, social, and cultural enterprise. That is, as a form of engaged practice, critical pedagogy calls into question forms of subordination that create inequalities among different groups as they live out their lives (p.165).

The idea of employing the principles and ideologies of critical pedagogy in education was initially proposed and developed by several key figures such as Freire (1970), Giroux (1981, 1983), Luke (1988), McLaren (1989), and Simon (1992). Critical pedagogy aims at training individuals who can solve both their own problems and those attributed to society. It intends to develop consciousness-raising and cooperation among learners. McLaren (2003) describes 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. 35). As a matter of fact, the underlying theories that form the social foundation of critical pedagogy have much in common with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which introduces mediation as a tool that helps people internalize their thoughts and behaviour so that they can control and transform the world (Vygotsky, 1987; Lantolf & Appel, 1994). According to Vygotsky, mediation and consciousness-raising activities enable people to monitor their mental and physical behaviour. In the same vein, Jamali and Gheisari (2014) believe that "adopting sociocultural theory offers researchers theoretical perspectives with which to examine language learning as a social practice, consider students as active participants in constructing learning processes, and investigate the interaction between different factors involved" (p. 72).

According to Alastair Pennycook (2004), "critical pedagogy seeks to understand and critique the historical and sociopolitical context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society" (cited in Norton & Toohey, 2004). Pennycook (2004) thinks that teachers need to be supported "to develop a notion of critical heteropraxy within a reconceptualized teacher praxicum" (p. 335). Pennycook believes that teachers can reach consciousness by reflecting on critical moments in which the possibilities of developing praxis may arise. Freire (1973) considers praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51).

In fact, critical pedagogy is in favour of giving voice to the society members and letting them express their ideas to make the society a better place to live. Therefore, a class is the first place that prepares the students for their future responsibilities. Critical pedagogy aims at establishing problem-posing education which develops individuals' awareness of existing problems. The proponents of such pedagogy believe that education must prepare active citizens who are concerned about social problems and strive for seeking solutions. They believe that language classrooms have the potentiality to train learners to transform the society. In fact, problem-posing education aims at training teachers and learners who are critical thinkers and skilled problem-solvers. Giroux coined the term "transformative intellectuals" to refer to the redefined role of teachers in critical pedagogy since he believes that such professionals are skillful enough to train learners who can criticize the world and transform the structural injustice and inequalities (Sadeghi, 2009). Practitioners are supposed to cultivate the major concepts and values of critical pedagogy such as conscientization, humanization, counterhegemony, praxis, demystification, and personalized instruction (Freire, 1970; Heaney, 1995; Kanpol, 1999; Pennycook, 2004; Mozaffri, 2011). In fact, critical pedagogy encourages individuality and critical thinking through unfolding and analyzing issues that are usually overlooked by material developers, practitioners and teachers. As Rahimi, Kushki, Ansaripour, and Maki (2015) state, "the

analysis of immediate environment and need of learners are of paramount importance within the framework of Critical Pedagogy" (p. 27).

It is obvious that the principles of critical pedagogy aim to help people reach enlightenment, conscientization, praxis, and liberation. On the whole, it seeks ways to bring about social transformation, equality, justice, negotiation, and collaborative cooperation among society members as active agents of the community who are capable of achieving great accomplishments for the benefit of themselves and others. According to Rahimi and Asadi Sajed (2014), dynamism is a prerequisite for transformation, because they believe that passivity which brings about stagnation prevents the members of society from learning and growing. They also consider that "language teaching has an integral role in fostering criticality and denouncing passivity since language deals with words and words trigger reflection and action" (p. 41). In addition, Akbari (2008) highlights the importance of making a link between the micro-level of the classroom and the macro-level of the society in order to make a transformation. Therefore, education plays a significant role in changing the society for the better.

Although several pieces of research have been devoted to study critical pedagogy in relation to the language teaching profession, research in this area still suffers from scarcity due to the importance of the topic and the delicate multifaceted nature of the issues deriving from the tenets, concepts, and systems that originate from the philosophy and application of critical pedagogy. However, some of the most relevant pieces of research are reviewed here.

Regarding the alluring tenets of critical pedagogy, Rahimi et al. (2015) investigated the implementation of critical pedagogy by relating it to learners' needs and learning environments. As a matter of fact, they aimed at making students aware of the infrastructures of the society by trying to make a link between the classroom and the society. In order to achieve this goal, they focused on critical pedagogy in relation to materials development. They decided to allocate 40 minutes of each language class to the discussion of local contentious issues. In fact, drawing upon Freire's (1970) notion of problem-posing education, Rahimi et al. put concepts such as generative themes as well as concentric and cultural circles into practice. As a result, their study proposed Immediacy and Comparison as tools that can be employed to approach critical pedagogy with regard to the selection and gradation of the content of critical materials. The researchers believed that the selection and grading of materials can play important roles in making links between the micro-level of the classroom and the macro-level of society, provided that material developers and practitioners select and grade classroom content based on careful analysis of learners' needs and scrutiny of social problems. In fact, Rahimi et al. believe that education must bring about transformation and this is possible by giving voice to learners who are potentially active agents of the society. However, it should be noted that such kind of critical pedagogy implementation requires teachers to be aware of the importance of CP principles. In addition, their study signals that critical pedagogy encourages teachers and learners to seek solutions for social problems through engaging in activities that implement concepts such as generative themes or dialogic methods. Therefore, such studies emancipate and motivate teachers to be more careful about their classroom content. In other words, it is suggested that teachers do their best to have a voice in what they teach and how they teach it, so that they can develop an active role in making their learners more responsible and conscious social agents.

Investigating Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of critical pedagogy and its principles, Sahragard, Razmjoo and Baharloo (2014) conducted a study which aimed to look for instructors' attitudes toward the practicality of the principles of critical pedagogy. They interviewed 20 Iranian EFL instructors teaching at language institutes, high schools, and university. The findings of their study revealed that the majority of Iranian EFL instructors are aware of the principles of critical pedagogy and its premises. In addition, they seemed to hold positive attitudes toward the application of such principles in their classrooms. However, in spite of the teachers' awareness of CP premises, it was revealed that they rarely employ such principles in their actual teaching contexts due to several barriers. It was later discovered that the top-down educational system, teachers' insufficient information about the

learners' background and learning styles, and teacher burn-out were considered as the major barriers that limit the practicality of the principles of critical pedagogy in Iranian teaching contexts.

In a similar study, Rashid Shah (2014) carried out a piece of research based on the framework of critical pedagogy to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions of their empowerment in Saudi Arabia. Employing a qualitative research design, he interviewed five EFL teachers. He used purposive sampling to include experienced and qualified teachers as his participants and his research instrument was semi-structured interviews. The analysis of in-depth interviews revealed five major themes: the absence of interpersonal trust, lack of celebration and appreciation, oppressive policies, ineffective leadership styles, and the nature of teachers' empowerment affected by leadership styles. In fact, the teachers believed that the hierarchical structure of institutions limits their power and deprives them of any freedom of thought or action. Regarding the results of his study, Rashid Shah suggests that "distributed leadership will allow EFL teachers to have a sense of responsibility, ownership, colleagueship and fulfillment by involving [them] in the decision-making processes and building collaborative relationship between supervisors, teachers and other stakeholders in the organization" (p. 9).

Furthermore, Sarlak and Vafaeimehr (2014) carried out a piece of research to investigate the impact of teacher training programs on the enhancement of in-service teachers' critical thinking and reflectivity. They studied 61 EFL instructors in Tehran province. All the participants were asked to fill in a modified Likert-scale questionnaire referring to the efficiency of the teacher education programs held in Iran during the last five years. Later, ten percent of the participants were randomly interviewed on the themes of the questionnaire. The participants were asked to discuss problems, express their ideas, and share their experiences among themselves. The findings of their study indicated that teachers consider the pedagogic side of teacher training programs to be weak and not effective enough to help them think critically and develop reflectivity. In addition, they suggested that more hours of training be allocated to the practical side of teaching. Therefore, it is inferred that the principles of critical pedagogy are not implemented in the teacher training programs evaluated by Sarlak and Vafaeimehr.

In addition, Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012) conducted a survey to discover the Iranian school teachers' perception of the principles of critical pedagogy. Employing Yilmaz's (2009) scale of the principles of critical pedagogy, they studied 200 Iranian teachers' views. The results of their study implied that despite teachers' approval of the principles of critical pedagogy, this pedagogy and its principles are actually absent in the Iranian educational system. In fact, Aliakbari and Allahmoradi claim that critical pedagogy has originated from the assumption that injustices are imposed on social relations. So, intellectuals have to recognize power relations and find solutions to treat people equally regardless of their ethnic, social, religious and educational backgrounds. They also believe that the principles of critical pedagogy can improve human education and lay the ground for a more oppression-free and democratic society.

Similarly, Mozafarri (2011) also conducted a study to investigate traces of CP in the context of Iranian EFL higher education. She observed twelve MA EFL classes and thirteen BA EFL classes. She also administered a Likert-scale questionnaire on critical pedagogy to 218 university professors working at Azad or state universities. The findings of her study indicated that the practice of CP is ineffectual in Iranian higher education. In addition, she mentioned some hurdles that impede the implementation of critical pedagogy in such a setting. Moreover, Yilmaz (2009) conducted a piece of research to examine elementary school teachers' views about critical pedagogy in Turkey. It was found out that almost all the teachers agreed with the tenets of critical pedagogy, and advocated the application of the principles of such pedagogy. However, the teachers' views differed depending on their educational background, professional seniority, experience, and the context of the school in which they work.

Reviewing the related literature encourages researchers to carry out more investigation regarding critical pedagogy and its implementation in various teaching contexts in order to reach better insights

into the status quo of language teaching, teachers' awareness, and educational goals. In addition, further investigations help researchers and practitioners to obtain more comprehensive portraits of barriers that hinder the application of such pedagogy. Moreover, devoting more research to the investigation of the implementation of critical pedagogy with regard to teachers' gender may result in fruitful findings that can be of great value for future teacher education programs. Hence, the present study aimed to investigate EFL male and female teachers' attitudes toward the implementation of the principles of critical pedagogy in an Iranian teaching context. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What stances do Iranian EFL teachers hold on the implementation of the principles of critical pedagogy?

2. Is there a significant difference between the viewpoints of Iranian EFL male and female instructors about the application of critical pedagogy?

3. What are the major barriers to the implementation of the principles of critical pedagogy from Iranian language teachers' points of view?

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method design which provided a more reliable and comprehensive picture for interpretations and decision-making through the combination of qualitative and quantitative data.

4. Participants

A total of 116 EFL teachers participated in the study. The participants consisted of 46 male and 70 female instructors teaching English at language institutes in Shiraz. Since this study benefits from a mixed-method design, two types of data were required to accomplish this endeavor. Thus, the quantitative data and the qualitative data were collected in two phases. To collect the necessary data, two different sampling procedures were used. In the first phase, in which the quantitative data was gathered, 116 EFL teachers were selected through convenient sampling. Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010) define convenient sampling as one kind of nonprobability sampling which involves collecting data from available cases in a study. These cases may be the students in a classroom, colleagues, or individuals who are conveniently in touch for cooperation. In addition, Ary et al. state that, "it is very difficult, if not impossible, to list all the members of a target population and select the sample from among them" (p. 154). Therefore, in some cases it would be more convenient and practical for researchers to study subjects to whom they can easily have access.

The second phase of the study, in which the qualitative data was collected, required the researcher to use purposive sampling. In this phase, 46 teachers were purposefully selected from the total number of 116 teachers who participated in the first phase of data collection. Purposive sampling is another kind of nonprobability sampling also known as judgment sampling in which "sample elements judged to be typical, or representative, are chosen from the population. The assumption is that errors of judgment in the selection will counterbalance one another" (Ary et al., 2010). Therefore, based on the data collected in the first phase regarding teachers' awareness about critical pedagogy, their teaching experience, and their knowledge, expertise, and willingness to cooperate, 46 teachers were selected to participate in the second phase. However, it should also be noted that the criterion for the amount of data collection and hence the number of participants to be included in the latter phase, derived from data saturation since this phase involved qualitative data collection. In fact, data saturation conveys that researchers must interview more participants on the topic or generally include them in the study "until no new information is forthcoming" (Ary et al., 2010).

5. Instruments

Two instruments were employed in the current study. The first instrument was the Critical Pedagogy Implementation Inventory, developed by Mozaffari (2011). It measures the extent to which the teachers adhere to the principles of critical pedagogy and implement them in their profession. This questionnaire includes 44 items and has a 5-point Likert-type format. The choices range from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In order to assess the construct validity of this inventory, Mozaffari ran exploratory factor analysis. Utilizing direct oblimin, she observed seven factors for factor rotation. Then, she categorized the items based on their loadings. As all the observed factors were in line with the principles and definitions of critical pedagogy reviewed in the literature, this measure was claimed to be valid. Moreover, utilizing Cronbach's Alpha, Mozaffari reported a reliability index of 0.918.

However, issues of validity and reliability of this scale were investigated in the present study as well. In the first step, three university professors who were thoroughly familiar with the concepts of critical pedagogy examined the items of the questionnaire and confirmed its content validity for the intended purpose. In addition, employing SPSS 18, the researcher ran factor analysis to ensure the construct validity of the inventory. However, one should check the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and the Barlett's Test of Sphericity to investigate the appropriateness of using factor analysis. Leech et al. (2005) state that the KMO test indicates "whether or not enough items are predicted by each factor". In this study, the KMO value obtained was .723 which was acceptable since it must be .6 or above to be suitable (Yamini & Rahimi, 2007). In addition, the Barlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (p=.000). Therefore, the researcher could utilize factor analysis and used Varimax rotation to run factor analysis, in which the number of factors to be extracted was set as seven, to establish an index for the loadings of the items. The results of running factor analysis revealed that 60% of the items are loaded on seven factors. In fact, such exploratory factor analysis had some kind of confirmatory function. Thus, the results obtained from this factor analysis supported the construct validity reported by Mozaffari (2011). Moreover, the reliability of the questionnaire was further investigated using Cronbach's Alpha measure of homogeneity. As a result, the researcher obtained a reliability index of .913 which implies that this instrument is sufficiently reliable.

The second instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview consisting of eight questions regarding the principles of critical pedagogy. This aimed to elicit information from the participants about their attitudes toward the implementation of such principles and the barriers that impede the application of such pedagogy. It should be noted that internal validity regarding qualitative research is referred to as credibility which addresses the truth value of the study, and transferability, which refers to external validity, in such studies concerned with the generalizability of findings. In other words, "credibility in qualitative research concerns the truthfulness of the inquiry findings" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 498). Therefore, in order to ensure the internal validity of the findings that were going to be obtained from the qualitative data collected from interview sessions, three university professors examined the questions prior to data collection, and confirmed the content validity of the interview. In addition, a colleague also reviewed the qualitative data collected through interviews. This latter method of ensuring validity is known as peer debriefing or peer review. It provides evidence based on consensus and is defined as "agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics are correct" (Eisner, 1998, cited in Ary et al., 2010, p. 499). In addition to inter-rater comparisons, intra-rater strategy was also utilized as a method of applying a coding agreement to maximize the reliability of the outcomes.

6. Data collection procedure

The data for this study was collected during the summer and autumn of 2014. The participants were informed about the intended purpose of the study and their consent was obtained. In addition, the researcher promised to keep the participants' responses and their private information as

confidential. Thus, the required quantitative data was elicited through the Critical Pedagogy Implementation Inventory, which was administered to the language teachers who participated in this research. The participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire as carefully as possible. In the second phase of data collection, which involved the qualitative aspect of the research, forty-six of the teachers were asked to participate in face-to-face in-depth interviews. In order to interview the participants, the researcher asked them to arrange a certain time in advance. The interview sessions aimed to gather more comprehensive and qualitative information in order to support the quantitative data collected. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research and their consent was obtained. During the interview, the participants were asked the questions that were already prepared based on the objectives of the study. The semi-structured nature of the interview and the open-endedness of the questions provided the opportunity for the participants to elaborate on the issues as they thought necessary. In addition, the amount of data to be collected through interviews was based on data saturation. As already mentioned, after interviewing forty-six teachers, the researcher felt that data saturation had been reached and no new pieces of information could be obtained.

7. Data analysis

Since this study consists of both quantitative and qualitative data, different techniques were used to extract a meaningful interpretation from the collected data. First, the quantitative data obtained from the administration of the questionnaire were examined. In order to analyze the data, the researcher coded the items based on the direction of their compatibility with the principles of critical pedagogy. Since all items of this scale were positively in line with the principles of critical pedagogy and their implementation, they were coded as follows: 1-always, 2-usually, 3-sometimes, 4-rarely, and 5-never. As stated earlier, checking the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and the Barlett's Test of Sphericity, the researcher ran exploratory factor analysis to assess the construct validity of the questionnaire. Since the number of factors had already been explored and reported to be seven by the original developer of the questionnaire, the researcher ran a factor analysis in which the number of factors to be extracted was set at seven. Utilizing Varimax rotation revealed that 60% of the items were loaded on those seven factors. In fact, the latter exploratory factor analysis played a confirmatory role. Therefore, the Critical Pedagogy Implementation Inventory appeared to be a valid instrument. In addition, Cronbach's Alpha was utilized to estimate the reliability coefficient of this instrument. After ensuring the validity and reliability issues of the questionnaire, descriptive statistics were run to represent the mean, minimum, and maximum scores as well as the standard deviation for the scores assigned to the items and the whole scale of the Critical Pedagogy Implementation Inventory. Then, a chi-square test was used to examine if CP was actually implemented by EFL teachers in language institutes. This technique was used to compare the observed frequencies of critical pedagogy implementation with the expected ones. In the next step, an independent samples T-test was run to check whether the mean difference of male and female teachers' responses to the questionnaire was significant or not.

The second type of data gathered required the researcher to use the qualitative techniques of grounded theory. In other words, the data collected through interviews were carefully analyzed for further investigation. After reflecting on the qualitative data carefully, the researcher looked for recurrent patterns to categorize and classify the data so that certain themes could be generated. Here again, issues of validity and reliability were addressed through using relevant techniques such as gathering evidence based on consensus by means of peer debriefing to maximize internal validity, collecting rich and comprehensive data to ensure descriptive adequacy which enhances the external validity or transferability of the results, and using code-recode agreement to enhance the reliability of the results obtained from the qualitative data.

Mehrpour, S., & Baharloo, A. (2015). On the implementation of critical pedagogy in english language institutes in Iran. *World Journal on Educational Technology. 7*(3), 172-185.

8. Results and Discussion

The data obtained through the two research instruments were analyzed in order to answer the research questions posed at the outset of the study. Thus, the results of data analysis are presented and discussed here. The analysis of the quantitative data collected through the questionnaire was investigated to answer the first two research questions, and the analysis of the qualitative data mainly addressed the third question. At first, descriptive statistics were run to produce a general portrait reflecting some pieces of information in regard to the participants' scores on the Critical Pedagogy Implementation Inventory.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for participants' viewpoints about the implementation of critical pedagogy

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Critical Pedagogy	116	78.00	181.00	140.2155	20.42284
Valid N (listwise)	116				

Table 1. shows that the mean score of the 116 teachers' responses to the CP questionnaire is 140.2155. The CP implementation questionnaire includes 44 items that are arranged in a 5-point Likert format, and as previously discussed all items are positively in line with the principles of critical pedagogy. Therefore, a perfect score on this scale is assumed to be 220. It is obvious that a score of 140 out of 220 almost represents a mediocre value. In order to produce more meaningful interpretations, a chi-square test was run to further examine if the principles of critical pedagogy were implemented in the educational context of language institutes in Iran. In fact, a chi-square test was utilized because it is a statistical technique which compares the expected frequencies with the observed ones.

Table 2. Chi-square test for the participants' frequencies of the implementation of critical pedagogy

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.083E6	7015	.000
Likelihood Ratio	920707.652	7015	.000
N of Valid Cases	116		

As table 2 shows, the reported significant level is .000 which is less than .05 (p<.05). Therefore, the principles of critical pedagogy are assumed to be implemented in Iranian language institutes. Figure 1. illustrates a more vivid picture of language teachers' stances on the status quo of CP application in Iran.
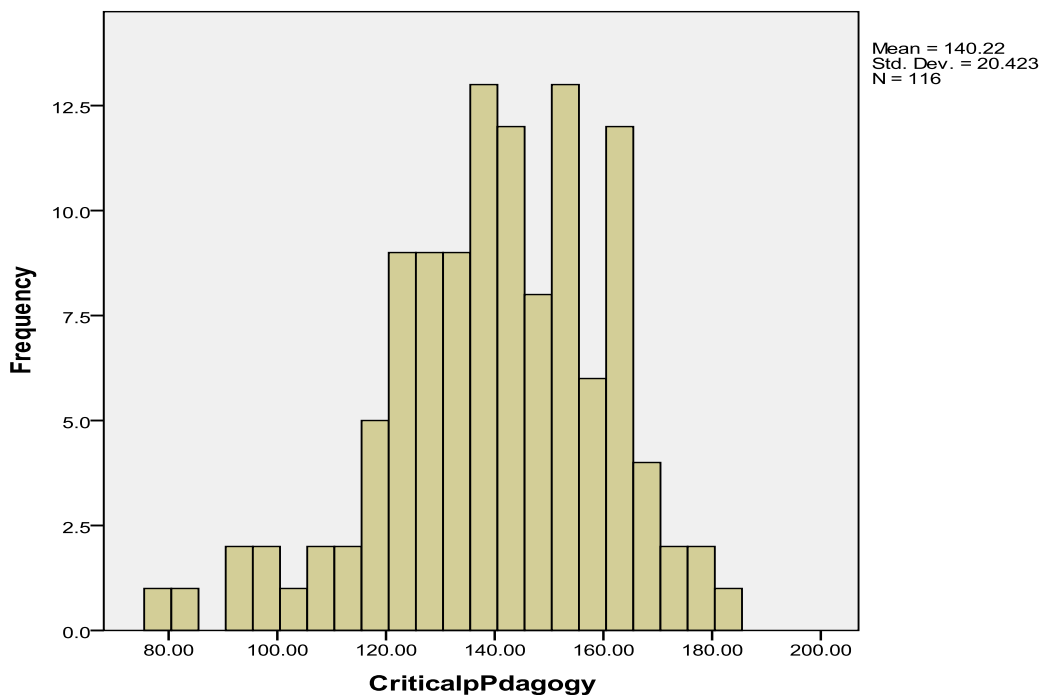
Figure 1. The distribution of the participants' scores on the Critical Pedagogy Implementation Inventory

Figure 1. shows the distribution of language teachers' scores on the CP inventory. This figure indicates almost an above average implementation of the principles of critical pedagogy in Iranian educational contexts of language institutes. The frequency and distribution of teachers' scores reveal that the majority of language teachers hold an average stance on the implementation of critical pedagogy. In other words, it is implied that critical pedagogy is practiced in Iranian language institutes; however, it is not fully implemented by all teachers and to a great extent. In order to obtain a more comprehensive portrait of the status quo of critical pedagogy implementation and to answer the first research question, the themes derived as the result of qualitative data analysis were also reviewed and considered. The results implied that the majority of language teachers advocated the implementation of the principles of critical pedagogy in their classrooms; however, this was application not sufficiently satisfactory. Most of the teachers emphasized the importance of developing criticality among learners. They believed that classroom materials should be related to learners' real-life activities and experience. In fact, this idea reinforces what Akbari (2008) states about classroom contexts. He thinks that classroom practices should eventually lead to social transformation. Therefore, educational contexts should prepare learners to take on more influentially active roles in the wider context of the society.

The findings of this study are in line with those of Sahragard et al. (2014) who tried to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of critical pedagogy and their viewpoints regarding the practicality of the principles of CP. They found out that most teachers were aware of the CP tenets and concepts. In addition, they appeared to be in favour of practicing CP in their classrooms; however, they could rarely implement the principles of such pedagogy in practice. Moreover, this finding is supported by Rashid Shah's (2014) study in which he investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of their empowerment in Saudi Arabia. He eventually noticed that in spite of teachers' positive attitudes toward practicing critical pedagogy, they could hardly adhere to the principles of such pedagogy in their classroom contexts due to the hierarchical structure of institutions. In addition, the study conducted by Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012) also reported similar results. They became aware that although teachers tended to approve of the principles of critical pedagogy, this pedagogy was almost absent in the

Iranian educational system. Further support of the findings of this study comes from the research conducted by Mozaffari (2011) who aimed to investigate CP in the context of Iranian EFL higher education. She concluded that the practice of CP was ineffectual in such educational contexts. Furthermore, the outcomes of this study are similar to that of Maki's (2011) research in which he concluded that although the majority of Iranian language teachers appeared to advocate the tenets and components of critical pedagogy, they did not fully practice such pedagogy in their classrooms.

In order to answer the second research question regarding the probable difference that may exist between male and female teachers with respect to their implementation of the principles of critical pedagogy, an independent samples T-test was run. Table 3. shows the results of the T-test.

Table 3. Independent samples T-test of the participants' scores on Critical Pedagogy Implementation Inventory

1. Groups	No. of Participants	Mean	Std. Deviation	d.f.	t-obs.	2-tail sig
Male	46	133.8043	22.79437			
Female	70			114	-2.823	.006
		144.4286	17.63196			

Table 3. represents the results of running an independent samples T-test to find out if male and female teachers' stance on the implementation of the principles of critical pedagogy differ significantly. As shown, the reported value in the sig. column is .006, which is less than the cut-off value of .05 (p<.05). Therefore, there is a significant difference between male and female language teachers regarding their implementation of the principles of critical pedagogy. In addition, the information provided in the table signals that female teachers (mean=144.42) hold more positive attitudes toward the implementation of critical pedagogy than male teachers (mean=133.80).

Finally, answering the third research question required the researcher to reflect upon the results obtained from the analysis of the qualitative data. The researcher found that critical pedagogy is not fully practiced in language institutes in Iran. In other words, the analysis of the data gathered through the interviews revealed that CP tenets are mainly overlooked. The majority of the participants stated that they cannot actually implement the principles of critical pedagogy in their classrooms. They believed that there are some barriers that hinder the appropriate application of critical pedagogy. The top-down educational system, the number of classes held by a single teacher, limited class time, learners' expectations, traditionally-defined roles of teachers and students, class size, and prescriptive approaches to supervision are among the major hurdles that impede the implementation of critical pedagogy.

All in all, the findings of this research are in line with those of Sahragard et al.'s (2014) study. The teachers who participated in their study believed that the centralized educational system, limited class time, the preplanned decisions, and the teaching procedures dictated to the instructors by supervisors deprived them of their creativity, critical thinking, and freedom of action. These outcomes are also supported by Rashid Shah's (2014) report. He found that the hierarchical structure of institutes in Saudi Arabia deskilled teachers and limited their freedom of thought and action. These findings are also in line with those of Maki's (2011) study. He found that despite high school teachers' great approval of the principles of critical pedagogy, they were unable to implement such tenets in their classroom contexts due to several barriers such as the centralized top-down educational management, teacher burn-out, crowded classes, and limited class time. Similar obstacles were also reported as the result of the research conducted by Mozaffari (2011).

In fact, the findings regarding the barriers to the implementation of CP are consistent with the idea proposed by Pishghadam and Mirzaee (2008). They claim that the top-down educational system, which requires teachers to follow the procedures dictated to them by the authorities in charge of

educational decisions, restrict teachers' creativity and prevent them from practicing critical pedagogy in their classroom contexts. Therefore, it is implied that such centralized educational systems deskill teachers and diminish their motivation for professional development to a great extent.

9. Conclusions and Implications

This research was an endeavor to investigate EFL teachers' implementation of the principles of critical pedagogy in language institutes in Iran. The results of the research revealed that the majority of language teachers are fond of practicing CP in their classrooms. In addition, most of them hold almost average scores for their stances on the implementation of such pedagogy. However, despite their positive attitudes toward the basic tenets and concepts of critical pedagogy, they were unable to implement it to a great extent in their teaching practices. They enumerated some hurdles that prevented them from adhering to CP principles at a satisfactory level. The centralized educational system, prescriptive approaches to teacher supervision, conventional teacher-student relationships, their traditionally-defined roles, learners' expectations, class size, and limited teaching time were among the major barriers. In addition, further investigation of the collected data revealed that there was a significant difference between male and female teachers' stances on the implementation of the principles of CP. It was revealed that female teachers were much fonder of practicing CP in their classrooms than male teachers. It is implied that female teachers are more interested in preparing learners for their roles in the society. In fact, it seems that they like to step beyond the traditional roles defined for them by the hierarchical educational system.

Teacher educators and institutes can benefit from the results of such studies prior to planning teacher education programs. Since this study indicates that the majority of teachers advocate the implementation of the principles of critical pedagogy, it is expected that they will approve of training programs that provide them with more information on the implementation of such pedagogy. In addition, it is suggested that institute managers, who are going to run their classes within the framework of critical pedagogy, carry out similar research regarding their teachers before holding any teacher training courses to produce helpful results regarding their own context. This study indicated that female teachers have a more positive attitude toward practicing CP than their male counterparts. Therefore, it is assumed that female teachers may approve of such developmental programs much more than male teachers may do. However, research in this area should be replicated in different contexts to yield more reliable results. Consequently, based on the results obtained from the research, education can provide individuals with means and opportunities to become conscious and active social agents who are skilled at solving social problems as well as their own personal troubles.

It is noteworthy to restate that critical pedagogy aims to train individuals for social transformation. It intends to develop the sense of criticality among learners who are actually active citizens as well. In fact, teacher education programs should help teachers who are transformative intellectuals to become familiar with activities such as reflection, self-evaluation, and rational judgment because they nurture individuals' sense of criticality, consciousness, and decision-making ability. As Rahimi and Asadi Sajed (2014) state, "critical pedagogues seek social justice and change through education. They argue against the dominance of a certain group of people in decision making and policy setting" (p. 42). Therefore, teachers must be trained to have critical insights and autonomy so that they can influence learners as active agents of society. In addition, the educational systems must plan to overcome the barriers that stop teachers from practicing CP as much as possible. For example, they can give more voice to teachers and benefit from their creativity and idiosyncratic teaching techniques through applying more humanistic approaches to supervision. Thus, institutes should provide teachers with opportunities to adhere to their developed critical insights so that they can implement the principles of critical pedagogy for the future of their society.

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