Critical Pedagogy in the Context of Iran: Exploring English Teachers' Perceptions

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Abstract: Three decades ago, the theory of education took a critical turn. From this perspective, classroom is no longer a public sphere of cultural assimilation but a site for identity struggle. The basic argument underlying such an approach is that education cannot be studied in isolation from an analysis of wider social and cultural influences. In such a context, this study investigated Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of the basic tenets of critical pedagogy. To this end, a mixed method approach was adopted and the data were gathered through in–depth interviews and questionnaires developed by the researchers. The participants of this study included 21 Iranian EFL teachers at the qualitative phase and 127 teachers at the quantitative phase. Qualitative data analysis included in-depth content analysis of oral data obtained from semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data analysis involved descriptive statistics and independent sample t-tests. The results indicated that Iranian EFL teachers were supportive of the basic tenets of critical pedagogy altogether. Also, mixed findings were obtained concerning their views according to their level of education and field of expertise. Based on the findings, several suggestions are made for classroom management, materials development, and teacher training programs.

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, the traditional philosophy of education has witnessed a sweeping change toward a more humanistic and justice-oriented approach the goals of which are not derived from the cosmopolitan assumptions about the neutrality of knowledge and learning in

general. Working within a constructivist paradigm, this new tradition places social theory in its immediate ecology with the overall objective of sensitizing the individual to covert oppressive practices to enable him to identify and counteract authoritarian trends (Bronner, 2001).

Within such a framework, the consensus oriented social theories all break down in favor of a conflict view of society as a site of struggle for dominance among competing ideologies. Therefore, an educational system, built under such circumstances, treats teaching and learning and the curriculum as intellectual commodities having nothing to do with individuals' emotions and identities.

Within the reformist tradition of critical theory, however, the primary goal of education is to train learners as social activists. In other words, political education displays how innocent minds are engineered at schools to live with systematic inequality and thus aims at arming the historically marginalized with analytic tools to identify the hidden meanings and assumptions that underlie institutional experience and to learn how this inequality is reproduced and naturalized through educational and linguistic practices (Bercaw & Stooksberry, 2004).

A Critical approach to education starts from a clearly articulated ideological point of view that charts the politics of teaching and learning beyond the civil politics of classroom (Freire, 2005). In applied linguistics, the implication is that language is an intricate ideological system and the use of language is thus value laden. Any time one makes a linguistic choice, she/he is in fact making a value judgment, in other words, an identity statement. Even the acts of teaching the objective system of grammar and communication are far from being neutral, but indeed they should be redefined in the context of ensuring the maintenance of the status quo and securing the interests of the ruling class. Pedagogic activity in such a context is argued to be mediated by asymmetrical power relations and thus becomes a hegemonic medium that promotes values, skills, and attitudes necessary to reproduce the very same power relations obviating the need for coercive intervention.

Critical pedagogy applies to a wide range of critical perspectives, inter alia, critical language awareness, critical literacy, feminism, critical race theory, and transformative education (Monchinski, 2008).

These perspectives find dissatisfaction with the current institutional practices of education, and subsequently, offer proposals to transform educational structures that sustain inequality and support the status quo (Freire, 2005; Kincheloe, 2008). The basic argument underlying such an approach is that education should not be studied in isolation from an

analysis of wider social and cultural influences. It is argued that theory should not be distanced from social intervention (Bohman, 2003).

Thus, a critical approach to pedagogy is normatively grounded as it links critique to action to create a more democratic and less alienated society (Brookfield, 2005). In principle, from a critical standpoint, the discreteness of learning experience accounted for by the insulated cognitive theories of education and sanitized practices restricted to the academic milieu is discredited and instead the historically sanctioned socio-political explanations are invited to the forestage of educational theory and practice. Consequently, in SLA literature, the artificial divide between the cognitive and the social is considered to be ideological (not epistemological) just derived from the two camps' morbid interest in mutual exclusion and the resultant research agendas defined in either camp are, therefore, viewed as trivial, myopic, and practically abortive.

2. Critical Pedagogy and Language Learning

Critical theory is a social analytical methodology taking root in the intellectual works of nonconformist theorists of Frankfort school before the World War II, who argued that social theories are best understood by the form of politics in which they are grounded and the way to a more democratic society is through addressing inequality through the means of education.

The prime objective of critical pedagogy according to Luke and Dooley (2011) is "to analyse, critique, represent, and alter inequitable knowledge structures and social relations of school and society" (p. 856). It assumes an explicit focus on critical analysis of the status quo and is directed at normative transformation of dominant ideologies and material conditions. In the field of education, the foundations of critical pedagogy were first laid down in Freire's seminal book, namely, *the pedagogy of the oppressed*. The underlying themes that form the essence of critical pedagogy include normative transformation, critical reflection, praxis, dialogism to combat alienation and reification, ethical imperative, aesthetic enjoyment, critical class consciousness, democratic teaching, the use of local materials, empowerment, emancipation, voice, and agency.

In EFL context, critical pedagogy steers clear of the orthodox functional views of language as a means of communication considering teaching and learning as political processes of constructing new ways of understanding one's identity, the socio-historical milieu of the classroom, and the potential for transformation (Norton & Toohey, 2004).

Luke and Dooley (2011) outlined the research trends in TESOL concerning critical pedagogy. Among other things, they referred to the research into linguistic imperialism and the negative consequences of the spread of English as an international language, the work on the language education, and the sociological analysis of educational inequalities. They view critical approaches to TESOL as reactions to language ideology conflict - acknowledging the right to access "dominant languages, texts and discourses, on the recognition of students' voices and identities, first and vernacular language rights, and on the development of a critical stance towards linguistic and cultural hegemony in all of its historically pernicious forms" (p. 588). By the same token, Pennycook (1990) revisited the important SLE questions along the critical pedagogy tradition problematizing the positivist view of culture and its relegation to a secondary position (the concept of high culture) as an array of events and works of art purported to supplement the language syllabus. From this standpoint, language curriculum pursues the overall aim of socializing learners into their community of practice in which knowledge is shaped by dominant discourses (Pennycook, 1990).

Recently, much more currency has been given to critical pedagogy by teachers working in a postmethod paradigm both in theory and in practice and a fresh round of research has been devoted to investigating its implications for and the capacity to bring about more favourable learning conditions. Bercaw and Stooksberry (2004), acknowledging that teacher education is grounded in a cultural value system, pointed to the ongoing conflict between a critical pedagogy approach aimed at social transformation and a teaching standards policy approach ensuring prospective teachers' entry into the community of practice.

Equally, a good number of studies were conducted to examine teachers' conception of the principles of critical pedagogy. Yilmaz (2009) researched the attitudes of elementary school teachers toward the principles of critical pedagogy to determine if they are ready to implement it in their everyday classroom practice. The findings of his study suggested that the teachers included in the study moderately agreed with the principles of critical pedagogy. He reported a significant difference between teachers' attitudes in terms of their educational background, professional experience and the place they teach and no significant difference according to their gender. Likewise, Derince (2011) showed that preparatory courses in English-medium universities in Turkey did not result in the development of critical thinking skills in Turkish students whereas a combination of critical pedagogy approach and students' linguistic resources and means of expression led to more meaningful learning experiences.

Similarly, a number of studies touched on the issue of redistribution of power in the classroom and how the paradigm shift in teacher- student role relationship can benefit the otherwise deficit students. Shor (1980, as cited in Keesing - Styles, 2003), acknowledging the potential challenges, argues that a redistribution of power among the classroom members allows for more flexibility and creativity on the part of both teachers and learners. This in turn leads to the ownership of learning as classroom decision making becomes a shared process of exploration and review open to negotiation among the members. Reynolds (1990) calls on teachers to re-conceptualize the concept of power in the classroom arguing that a then limited force of domination is expanded to a new force of construction. To realize such an outlook, the educators need to revise the traditional notion of teacher authority which treats learners as passive recipients of knowledge transmitted from the teacher and instead encourage the learners to reclaim their voice and agency along critical understandings of authority as shared responsibility and interdependent autonomy.

Akbari (2008b), Sadeghi (2008), along with Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012) documented research projects concerning the application of critical pedagogy in the context of Iran. Akbari (2008b) decries the theory-starved preoccupation with CP and calls for practice-informed studies. Sadeghi (ibid) adopted critical pedagogy to investigate how the problem- posing learning benefited EFL students in initiating and sustaining discussion and dialogue aimed at raising critical consciousness. In so doing, she concluded that critical consciousness is not likely to develop unless in the direction of gaining personal voice one also develops a sense of caring for "others' voices, world views, and contradictory ideas in a more complete and fair way" (p. 7). Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012) surveyed 200 Iranian school teachers' views concerning critical pedagogy at elementary, secondary, and high school levels based on their age, gender, and the level they teach. The findings indicated a significant difference between teachers in their views about critical pedagogy according to their gender and no significant difference based on age and the level they teach.

As seems, critical pedagogy has generated controversial discourse regarding its potential and limitations. Therefore, its capacity to bring about more favourable learning conditions in various educational contexts given teachers and practitioners' long history of experimenting with the standard curriculum throughout the past years remains to be further investigated. Along the current thread of argument, purely quantitative designs, although produce confirmatory evidence to the grand theories, lack local relevance as they strip critical pedagogy of its burgeoning context and assume it to be a monolithic construct. Thus, having

adopted a mixed method approach, the present study intended to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' conceptions of critical pedagogy. To this aim, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of the premises of critical pedagogy?

2. Are Iranian EFL teachers supportive of the basic tenets of critical pedagogy ?

3. Do Iranian EFL teachers differ in their views about the basic tenets of critical pedagogy according to their level of education and field of study?

3. Method

3.1. Design of the Study

As regards the design of the present study, a mixed method orientation was adopted and the data collection occurred in two distinct but interactive phases with qualitative data derived from one to one semi structured interviews being triangulated with quantitative data coming from survey research (Creswell & Clark, 2011). More specifically, an exploratory design best served the purpose of this study to make valid conclusions when little was known about the social construct under investigation (Heigham & Croker, 2009).

First, a thorough literature review was conducted to identify the various aspects of critical pedagogy which were used in the design of the interview protocol and the follow-up survey. This resulted in major categories framing the basic components of critical pedagogy from the perspectives of such leading figures as Freire (2005), Giroux (1983), Kincheloe (2008), Mclean (2006), and Pennycook (1990).

Next, during the qualitative phase of the study in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to 21 Iranian EFL teachers to probe into their notion of critical pedagogy through initially providing a forum so that they can voice their comments and concerns. Because of the dynamic and emergent nature of the interviews and given the number of questions, a flexible time span was considered to be more appropriate. Therefore, each interview took 15 minutes at least and 40 minutes at most. With an a priori agreement, the interviews were audio-recorded. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed partially and tape analysis was conducted through going over the oral data and marking the parts necessary for "elaborate subsequent analysis" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 249) in order to identify the major themes capturing EFL teachers' notion of critical pedagogy. Tape analysis allows for the data to be analyzed in the medium collected, thus obviating the need for intensive transcription (Hutchinson, 2005).

Using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the qualitative data were coded into reductionist themes and categories which constituted an informed basis to develop the survey

instrument later on. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the emergent themes and categories for a portion of the data were double-checked with an assistant professor of TEFL who had been teaching English for more than 15 years. This debriefing led to the use of abductive strategy along with inductive analysis (as the major analytic tool used throughout the analysis) to identify latent themes as well.

In the next stage, as is the case with survey type studies, a questionnaire was developed. Later on, a tentative version of the instrument was piloted to make quality improvements, obtain reliability estimates, and standardize completion procedures. Item analysis was conducted to identify faulty items and as a result a number of items were either revised or removed altogether. For example, the item "standard educational practices alienate learners from curriculum content" yielded poor item indexes, therefore, it was omitted from the final version. Following this step, the questionnaire was administered to 127 Iranian EFL teachers. The participants were introduced to the purpose and procedures of the study prior to the completion of the questionnaire and it was administered to them directly. The respondents were allowed to complete the questionnaire in 10 minutes.

After administrating the questionnaire, data analysis was embarked upon using SPSS software version 16. It served double purposes: to survey Iranian EFL teachers' overall familiarity and perception of the basic principles of critical pedagogy and to explore how they differed in terms of their attitudes based on their level of education and field of expertise. Descriptive statistics were obtained to make initial comparisons of the data collected. In the next stage, t-tests were run to further compare the means on the additional variables of the study. To code the nominal data of the questionnaire, numerical values were assigned to the scales of the questionnaire. This resulted in interval data ranging from 1 to 5. The values obtained this way for each respondent were added and averaged to compute their total score in general.

3.2. Participants

To address the research questions, purposive and availability sampling procedures were adopted for sample selection. Along the prescriptions of the empowering vision of critical pedagogy, census data were consulted to identify the potential impoverished communities in Iran. This limited the spectrum of the population to certain provinces. For example, in the qualitative phase, both for theoretical and practical reasons, the target population was limited to English teachers in Zanjan, northwest Iran. Nationwide demographic studies, place Zanjan among the less privileged provinces along such indexes as human development, industrial

development, etc. (Maleki & Sheikhi, 2010). To ward off cognitive and experiential limitations teachers below 25 years old and 5 years of experience were excluded from the sample.

The number of participants at the qualitative phase was decided upon in view of the basic principle of grounded theory, that is, data saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, 21 teachers were first interviewed to probe into their unstated beliefs about critical pedagogy. Among the teachers, 8 were female and 13 male. Four teachers were Ph.D. students of TEFL, seven held their master's degree in TEFL, while the rest had a bachelor's degree. Eleven teachers were teaching evening courses just at language centers, five were school teachers as well, whereas the rest would alternate between teaching**s** at university or language centers.

Concerning the selection of the participants for the quantitative phase, availability sampling was adopted thanks to the relatively large scale of the study at this phase. To meet the condition of magnitude, data collection made a crossover into the neighboring provinces. Therefore, in the survey study, 127 Iranian EFL teachers (51 females and 76 males) voluntarily completed a copy of critical pedagogy questionnaire developed by the researchers. Their age ranged from 25 to 47. Following this step, for the purpose of the study, the participants were categorized into two groups according to their level of education, namely, those holding or completing a masters' degree and above and those holding a bachelor's degree.

Among the participants, nine were Ph.D. students of TEFL, forty eight were either holding or doing their master's degree, while others held a bachelor's degree. A further categorization of the participants was carried out based on their field of study into two major groups of TEFL and Non-TEFL. Of the total participants, almost fifty one were majoring in TEFL. Thirty eight were studying translation, twenty six held a degree in literature, and the rest were students or graduates of linguistics. About twenty seven respondents were school teachers as well, eighteen also taught English at university, while the rest were teaching English at language centers only. Their years of teaching experience ranged from 5 to 21. Except for the Ph.D. student teachers and almost one fifth of the rest, the other participants declared no introduction to CP during their university education.

3.3. Instruments

To gain initial insights into the teachers' perception of critical pedagogy, first in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore Iranian EFL teachers' untapped beliefs about critical pedagogy. All the interviews were conducted in Persian. Overall, the questions were directed at the three important dimensions of critical pedagogy: context and interaction, classroom practice, and textbooks.

To make safe judgments, a questionnaire was developed after coding the interview data. To minimize the induced response bias, the questionnaire was kept rather short to safeguard against fatigue (Hinkin, 1995) and to militate against induced ambiguity it was translated into Persian (refer to appendix A. for the English version).

In general, it consisted of 33 items having three sub-scales of "empowering education" with 12 items altogether, "the role of teachers and learners" with 11 items, and "the function of textbooks" with 10 items. The items were constructed on a Likert-type scale eliciting teachers' attitudes based on five response anchors ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Given the nature of the questions, some of the items (e.g., items *No.1* and *No.11*) were in a reverse order. The items represent the key tenets of critical pedagogy discussed above. The beginning section of the questionnaire inquired about the teachers' demographic information, which yielded useful data needed to make fine-tuning distinctions among them.

Initially, three teachers were asked to evaluate the items for any unnecessary jargons and their reactions to the content and the overall make-up of the questionnaire were elicited. As a result, five items were either removed or revised as they appeared to be confusing for the teachers. In the next stage, an earlier version of the questionnaire was trialed with 27 teachers from two branches of one language center run by the same guidelines. This was informed by Creswell and Clark's (2011), Dörnyei and Taguchi's (2010) guidelines for the construction of the questionnaire. Based on the data obtained, some modifications were made. For example, items with too many missing responses were excluded from the final version and the variability of responses was ensured by excluding the items that were responded similarly. An estimate of the reliability of the instrument was obtained in terms of internal item consistency. A moderate mean internal consistency was obtained for the entire scale, with alpha coefficient of 0.71.

4. Results

4.1. The First Research Question

To examine the first research question, i.e., 'what are the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of CP?' qualitative analysis of interview data resulted in four major reductionist themes with their corresponding categories. These themes can be subsumed under two main categories of teachers' overall perception of CP with three sub-dimensions and its overall outlook in Iran. The following table presents the summary of the themes related to each dimension above. For the purpose of economy, the highlights of the Non-TEFL and undergrads have been subsumed under one column while those of the graduate and TEFL teachers have been

summed up under the other column. Except for some cases, no claim is made to the similarity of teachers' views under the same column as a result of the specific arrangement of the table.

Table1. Interview Results of the Iranian EFL Teachers' Perception of Critical Pedagogy

Main Categories	Undergraduate teachers'/ Non-TEFL	Graduate Teachers'/ TEFL
Teacher-student Role-Relationship	Parts of the system	Community members
	Meritocracy	Collective responsibility
	Teacher as authority	Autonomous interdependence
	Teachers as source of input	Teachers as coordinator/leader
	Organizational hierarchy	Synergic effect
The Role of Education	Indoctrination	Ethics
	cultural assimilation	Maximized social participation
	Discipline	Discipline
	Human capital	Empowerment
	behavioral change	Cognitive growth
	Social order	Social order
	Immediate application	Evolutionary reforms
	Interpersonal awareness	Changes from within
	Development of skills	Interpersonal awareness
	Facilitates Communication	Intrapersonal awareness
	Adaptation and integration	Development of knowledge & skills
	-	Facilitates negotiation
		Questioning and civil resistance
The Function of Textbooks	As a road map and destination	Teaching resource
	Source of acculturation	Policy statement (school books)
	Primacy of target culture	Intercultural awareness
	Better developed by natives	Critical thinking ignored
	Promote globalization	Minimal Intracultural awareness
	-	Need local adaptation
	-	Random social representation
	-	Fragmentation through individualism
Outlook	challenge to classroom management	Text-context incongruity
	Teachers as curriculum slaves	Inauthenticity of learning experience
	Rigidity of instructional routines	Classroom life-an abstraction of life outside the classroom
	Standardization of teaching methods	Superficiality of topics

As can be seen, teachers' views differ along some of the categories above. As for the teacher - student role relationship, undergrad and some of the Non - TEFL teachers in general took the view of school life as naturally encouraging the reproduction of power differentials within a hierarchal system in which personal achievement is the main source of motivation for the individuals. Quite on the contrary, their counterparts viewed school as a learning community and the mutual interdependence between teachers and learners as a necessary ingredient for effective classroom interaction. In their opinion, teachers and learners work toward the same goal and under such circumstances teachers are equally responsible if the students fail or fare.

Although there were a few commonalities between teachers in each group regarding their notion of education (e.g., as a source of discipline or a reflection of state-individual relation), different themes were observed in their views in general. These themes included indoctrination versus ethical development, development of human capital versus participatory education with some themes such as leveraging change, empowerment, and self-awareness totally missing in undergrad and Non-TEFL teacher's talks. Concerning the status quo and overall outlook of CP in Iran, the analysis of the relevant data yielded the following themes: difficulty of securing text-context correspondence, teachers as slaves of the curriculum, inauthenticity of learning experience, rigidity of institutional routines, among others. In general, after the coded interview data was crosschecked against the basic principles of CP the following patterns were observed.

Emancipatory education. Almost 70% of teachers with a bachelors' degree agreed that the major role of education is the creation of functional skills in individuals to serve the economic needs of the society. Some referred to the practical value of education and its role in fulfilling the immediate material needs of the individuals while others treated it more as training finding it instrumental to personal economic gains. They viewed people as cogs in the wheel that keep the economic system operating properly. Likewise, 60% of Non-TEFL teachers considered education as one of the key sources of socialization into the community of practice through unquestioned assimilation of dominant practices. They treated knowledge more as a commodity with economic value. However, a great majority of teachers holding a masters' degree and above (almost 80%) and those majoring in TEFL (60%) viewed awareness raising as the major role of education to create a participatory society. They had in common the view that education should empower individuals to draw upon their own cultural resources aimed at better human conditions.

Knowledge reproduction and resistance. Almost 60% of Non-TEFL teachers and 60% of teachers with a bachelors' degree found teacher input as the major source of knowledge for the students who hardly doubt or challenge the validity of its content. They argued that learners hardly trust the value of the information they receive from their peers and often assimilate the values derived explicitly or implicitly from school practices. They viewed the behavioral conditioning of students as a result of their schooling mutually beneficial. However, their counterparts held that teachers are mediators of large scale educational policies and therefore are trained to impart values that maintain the status quo (60% of TEFL holders and 70% of teachers with a masters' degree and above). They further argued that knowledge is socially constructed in such a way that wider social and cultural practices shape what is valued as knowledge.

*Transformative education***.** Most of teachers with a bachelors' degree viewed education as the primary means of keeping the status quo (social order, 70%) while others attached a neutral role to education in terms of its capacity in bringing about social change (30%). Their counterparts, on the other hand, held that education facilitates evolutionary rather than revolutionary social change (change from within, 60%), therefore, calling for reforms than revolting the established system (40%).

Linguistic imperialism and cultural dominance. Most of the teachers at either group rejected the notion that textbooks proliferate the values of western culture at the cost of the learners' own cultural values. Those with a masters' degree and above asserted the need for inter and intracultural awareness on the part of the learners (70%). Teachers with a bachelor's degree agreed that unless for immigration purposes, culture learning is instrumental to language learning and therefore is not an end in itself (50%). Some believed that teachers must be selective in deciding what cultural points should be taught (40%). They also rejected the idea that there is an intentional trend in textbooks in treating whiteness as an advantage, for example, or associated negative values with other races (80%). Others deemed the specification of culture learning goals separately for each lesson necessary (40% of teachers holding a masters' degree or above.

4.2. The Second and the Third Research Questions

To answer the second research question, that is, 'are Iranian EFL teachers supportive of the basic tenets of critical pedagogy?' the descriptive statistics was obtained. The results are summarized in table 2. As indicated in Table 2, teachers' responses to the total of the

questionnaire cluster around the scale "*I agree*" implying that they mainly agreed with the principles of critical pedagogy in general.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Views about the Principles of Critical Pedagogy

Sub-dimension	*n*	*Min*	*Max*	*Mean*	*SD*
Empowering education	127	3.07	4.75	3.96	0.27
The roles of teachers and learners	127	3.21	4.67	3.97	0.31
The role of textbooks	127	3.11	4.19	3.94	0.36
Total score	**127**	**3.12**	**4.51**	**4.02**	**0.31**

The grand mean score of the total questionnaire is 4.02 and given the total of 33 items the teachers' responses corresponds to the scale 4, that is, *I agree*.

Along the same lines, there was no significant difference between teachers' views on any component dimensions. The mean score corresponding to "empowering education" sub-dimension stood at 3.96 while the mean score for "the role of teachers and learners" sub-dimension was 3.97. Given the total of twelve and eleven items for the sub-dimensions of "empowering education" and "the role of teachers and learners", teachers' responses fall at around the scale 4 for these sub-dimensions respectively, again corresponding to the scale of "*I agree*". As can be inferred from the table, for "the role of textbooks" sub-dimension, the mean score was 3.94 and considering the total of 10 items, the tendency is toward the fourth scale as well.

As for the items in "empowering education" sub-dimension, what teachers mostly agreed with were the *items 19* and *22*, namely "developing learners' awareness should be the core of educational programs", and "the goal of education should be the creation of a democratic society". Item statistics revealed that the corresponding mean scores for these items were 4.53 and 4.42**,** respectively. Among the items measuring the "role of teachers and learners' sub-dimension, teachers highly rated the following items (coded in a reverse order): "learners are receivers of knowledge transmitted from teachers", *item 1* and "only teachers should determine what students learn and how they learn it", *item 11*. For these items, their mean sores were 4.35 and 4.29**,** respectively.

Among the items operationalizing "the role of textbooks" sub-dimension, the following items were commonly preferred by the teachers: "commercial textbooks almost hardly address learners' local needs" and "effective learning requires situating texts in their social contexts". These were the *items 23* and *16*. Therefore, the first null hypothesis regarding

Iranian EFL teachers' lack of familiarity with the principles of critical pedagogy is rejected. In other words, it can be concluded that Iranian school teachers are supportive of critical pedagogy principles.

The present study also investigated any possible differences between teachers' perceptions of critical pedagogy according to their level of education. To this end, independent sample *t*-test and descriptive statistics were employed. As presented in Table 3 below, no significant difference was observed in graduate and undergraduate teachers' views on all the sub-dimensions and total of critical pedagogy scale. As is clearly shown, the grand mean scores for graduate and undergraduate teachers were 4.10 and 3.95 respectively. Also, the mean values for the "empowering education" sub-dimension, for the two groups stood at 4.18 and 3.99 respectively. Likewise, for the "role of teachers and learners" sub-dimension, the mean values were 4.11 and 3.96 for the two groups respectively. Finally, for the "role of textbooks" sub-dimension, the associated mean values stood at 4.13 and 3.97 for the graduate and undergraduate teachers, respectively.

Table3. The Results of t-test for Teachers' Views on the Principles of Critical Pedagogy According to Level of Education

Sub-dimension	Level of Education	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*Sig* (2-tailed)
Empowering education	Undergrad Grad	3.99 4.18	0.33 0.26	2.07	.068
The roles of teachers and learners	Undergrad Grad	3.96 4.11	0.39 0.32	1.73	.056
The role of textbooks	Undergrad Grad	3.97 4.13	0.41 0.30	1.92	.061
Total	**Undergrad Grad**	**3.95 4.10**	**0.36 0.31**	**2.27**	**.068**

As can be seen, the observed *t* value ($t = 2.27$) is not significant at $p < .068$. Therefore, there are not enough grounds to reject the related null hypothesis and to conclude that there is a significant difference between teachers' attitudes about the principles of critical pedagogy in relation to their level of education. Following this step, the significance of the observed "*t*" values in each sub-dimension was also examined. The obtained *t* value ($t = 2.07$) in "empowering education" sub-dimension did not appear significant at $p < .068$. This suggests

that there is not a significant difference among graduate and undergraduate teachers' views on this sub-dimension. Similarly, the observed t value ($t = 1.73$) in "the role of teachers and learners" sub-dimension was not significant ($p < .056$), indicating that the graduate and undergraduate teachers did not differ significantly in their views on this sub-dimension. As is observed in the table above, the t value ($t = 1.92$) for the sub-dimension "the role of textbooks" is not also significant ($p < .061$).

There was another dimension to the third research question of the study, that is, the possible differences between teachers' views on the principles of critical pedagogy according to their field of study. To answer this question, t-test was used as the participants of the study were categorized into two groups of TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) and Non-TEFL (including literature, linguistics, translation, and others) according to their majors. The results are presented in Table 4 below. It can be seen that there are not significant differences between their views on the principles of critical pedagogy in general and on its component dimensions in particular.

Table 4. The Results of t-test for TEFL and Non-TEFL Teachers' Views on the Principles of Critical Pedagogy

Sub-dimension	Field of Study	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*Sig* (2-tailed)
Empowering education	TEFL Non- TEFL	4.06 3.93	0.31 0.29	2.37	.073
The roles of teachers and learners	TEFL Non- TEFL	4.09 3.87	0.37 0.32	2.43	.057
The role of textbooks	TEFL Non- TEFL	4.03 3.91	0.36 0.33	1.90	.066
Total	**TEFL Non- TEFL**	**4.10 3.95**	**0.35 0.34**	**2.21**	**.070**

As Table 4 illustrates, the observed t value $t = 2.21$ at p $< .070$ is not significant implying that the related null hypothesis that "there is a significant difference between teachers' attitudes about the principles of critical pedagogy based on their level of education" is not rejected. The significance of the "t" values observed in each sub-dimension was also

examined. The obtained t value ($t = 2.37$) in "empowering education" sub-dimension is not equally significant at $p < .073$. Similarly, the observed t values ($t = 2.43$, $t = 1.90$) for "the role of teachers and learners" and "the role of textbooks" sub-dimensions were not significant ($p < .057$ and $p < .066$ respectively) indicating that the graduate and undergraduate teachers did not significantly differ in their views on these sub-dimensions as well.

5. Discussion

The first two research questions addressed in the present study concerned Iranian EFL teachers' notion of critical pedagogy in general and their degree of familiarity with its basic principles. Overall, the incongruity between the qualitative data derived from interviews and the quantitative data coming from the questionnaires was the least expected.

A possible justification might be the (un)systematic variance regarding the participants' characteristics at two phases of the study. There might have been unpredictable differences between the participants at two phases in their demographic nuances, for example, in such factors associated with their socio-economic status and type of language center, school location, etc. It is quite likely as a good portion of the data for the quantitative phase was gathered from teachers at neighboring provinces. Or, experience-related factors might have bridged the gap in undergrad or non-TEFL teachers' academic deficiency. This is also an option as the teachers' age and teaching experience ranged substantially.

A second possible explanation might originate from the nature of the instruments at either phase. The similarity of questionnaire response patterns can be associated with respondents' intention to avoid extreme responses, thus increasing the chances of central tendency bias. Or, equally, the availability of the researcher and the dynamics of each interview can be possible sources of fine-tuned distinctions between teachers' views at the qualitative phase or the clarity of the questionnaire items might have elicited more valid responses during the quantitative phase. On the other hand, the availability of the researcher might be considered a source of bias. However, this possibility is ruled out as the data collection procedures were standardized before the interviews started.

Considered independently, the quantitative findings of the study provided enough evidence to reject the related null hypothesis that Iranian EFL teachers are not familiar with the basic tenets of critical pedagogy. Overall, teachers' responses indicated that they are in agreement with critical pedagogy principles.

As most of the participants in the present study declared little, if any, introduction to CP during their education, this finding provides further evidence to the highly fuzzy and less clinical nature of teacher cognition. EFL teachers are likely to join forces from a wide range of sources outside the mom field of teacher education.

This also shows that, in social sciences, the world of practice is one step ahead of theory and that is why most of the theories remain to be descriptive. At times, theories are just naming systems that systematically put into words constructs already in practice. Iranian EFL teacher practitioners are no exception as they theorize their practice well beyond the prescriptions of their academic education as teacher students. This justifies the inconsistency of the qualitative and quantitative findings in the context of teachers' declarative and procedural knowledge types. As regards the fine-grained interview results, the interviewed Non-TEFL and undergrad teachers are likely to lack in their mental lexicons enough armistice to express their notion of criticality effectively.

Another testimony to the advantaged performance of the TEFL and graduate groups is the lack of CP in university curricula for language education in Iran, even in teacher training courses until at higher levels of education, that is, at master's level or above.

To illuminate the current situation, it is best to put the findings in the context of Huxley's (1975) notion of conditioning. Iranian EFL teachers find themselves mercenaries of a version of classical humanistic approach to education dictated top-down. It emphasizes the importance of subject matter and discipline in producing formal knowledge at the expense of benefiting from teachers and learners' direct experience of the world around.

Such an ideology promotes traditional academic standards. In an educational system as such, innovation and adaptability are sacrificed leaving virtually no room for individual development and almost ignoring the needs and interests of learners (Atai & Mazlum, 2012; Bartlett & Burton, 2007). By the same token, Dahmardeh (2006) argues that the excessive emphasis on obtaining achievement standards and the pressure on teachers to prepare their pupils to take language exams as fast as possible leads to what Lissovy (2008, as cited in Derince, 2011) calls 'reductionist obsession with scores' thus homogenizing the students in tandem with the dominant educational philosophy alienating and isolating curriculum in which higher order analytical thinking and the possibility of a justice oriented education go out of the window.

As for the quantitative results, the fact that teachers mostly agreed with the item on "empowering sub-dimension" that educational programs should aim at developing learners'

awareness indicates that through years of experience with traditional educational programs, they came to realize that critical thinking and reflection are totally lacking in such programs. Becoming fully developed grownups, however, as Noddings (1998) argues, "involves conscious awareness of our human condition- of our freedom and responsibility for the kind of person we become" (p. 44). This implies that teachers have faith in the role of education in improving student conditions in such a way that they all live with greater awareness. It is through awareness that some philosophers argue teaching brings about learning.

Equally important, most of the teachers declared support for the item on the same sub-dimension that proposed orienting educational programs toward creating a more justice-oriented democratic society. This is rooted in the ideology that standard education leaves a great majority of students disadvantaged as it simply paves their ways toward their future as industrious and obedient workforce. Traditional system of education does nothing more than socializing working class children into accepting their subordinate status to the upper classes.

The finding that teachers didn't agree with learners' roles as receivers of knowledge transmitted from teachers is also warranted. Indeed, the current educational philosophy, taking advantage of the experiential knowledge of the students, rejects the notion of education as the reproduction of knowledge in which the process of schooling conditions students mentally and behaviourally to serve the interests of dominant societal institutions (Canagarjah, 1999).

Along the same lines, teachers who participated in this study negatively rated the item that authorized teachers as the ones who determine what students learn. This is congruent with the reinterpretation of the concept of authority according to the principles of critical pedagogy. Authority, from the vantage point of critical pedagogy, is open to negotiation in the classroom where power is equally distributed among teacher and the students. "Critical pedagogy requires a classroom environment that is democratic, where students' viewpoints are highlighted through discussion and debate and there is shared power and dialogue among teachers and students" (Aliakbari & Allahmoradi, 2012, p. 156).

It was also no surprise to find that most of the teachers expressed doubts over the value of commercial textbooks as a catalyst to transformative education. Commercial teaching materials fail to address learners' local needs as they take a view of learning as rather universally determined and not locally-situated. Atai and Mazlum (2012) cast serious doubt on such a centralized approach to materials development arguing that it leaves teachers with their intuitive assumptions as to what learners' needs are in the first place. In such materials

"the learner is uncritically exposed to ideas imposed from above, from the dominant culture" (Sadeghi, 2008, p. 278). The conception of curriculum on which such commercial stuff draw is that curriculum is treated as if it existed as an object in a world located outside our emotions or feelings. The observation that teachers found effective learning as a function of situating texts in their sociocultural contexts is also justified in the light of the fact that effective instruction links subject matter with local sociocultural and political problems.

6. Conclusion

The present study intended to shed light on the Iranian EFL teachers' conception of critical pedagogy. The findings of the study provided evidence that Iranian EFL teachers are supportive of the basic tenets of critical pedagogy altogether. Regarding the possible differences between the TEFL and Non-TEFL as well as the graduate and undergraduate teachers' views concerning the details of their familiarity with critical pedagogy principles, the findings are mixed. Surprisingly enough, triangulation of the qualitative findings with quantitative data produced inconsistent results in teachers' attitudes toward CP according to their level of education and field of study. Although the survey study presented statistical generalizations about EFL teachers' degree of familiarity with CP principles, the qualitative study revealed the myths they held about the pedagogic activity. It follows that before jumping to hasty conclusions as a result of unidimensional measures, one should get a sense of the complexity of the real situation using informed triangulated designs.

The findings of the present study also complemented those of Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012) conducted in the context of Iran. However, the present study was an improvement in that it explored other dimensions of critical pedagogy not examined in the previous studies. That is, the instrument developed in this study estimated teachers' attitudes toward the role of current commercial stuff in empowering learners in general and in their extent of catering to the learners' local needs. Another dimension of the instrument concerned the role of teachers as agents of change and those of learners in a brave new world to become the authors of their own worlds. Following this line of argument, most EFL teachers rejected the empowering capacity of the current textbooks and found the current educational practices in Iran far from being emancipatory. Gray (2001, as cited in Akbari, 2008a) captures this latter point as depoliticization of commercial materials to further their market prospect.

7. Implications

This study has some implications for classroom management, materials development, and teacher training. A critical understanding of authority implies essential changes in the role of the teacher. In a democratic classroom, the teacher is no longer the sole decision maker regarding the learning content and methodology. Therefore, there is a dire need to recognize the agency of the students for their learning decisions and subjecting the instructional practices to constant negotiation and consensus among curriculum participants.

As regards ELT textbooks, the centralized approach to ELT materials development in which the native speakers, as gate keepers, provide the growing EFL community with linguistic resources does not receive support from a critical perspective. Critical applied linguists hold that such an acquired monopoly in textbook development might subject ELT materials to abuse as a hegemonic tool and thus reduce their humanizing capacity.

As for the teacher training course development, the findings indicated the importance of introducing critical pedagogy in undergraduate programs of teacher education in Iran which is treated randomly along with many other hot topics. This seems to have been the missing link as the centralized teacher education program lacks an overall consensus among the stakeholders as to its content (Atai, Babaii, & Mazlum, 2012).

Although no one can deny the value of a life-long learning from one's own practice as a teacher, a fair and square educational system should not leave things to teachers' intuitive wisdom alone. During their training, teachers should be helped to develop a balanced view of discipline-oriented and justice-centered approaches to education. This, for sure, ascertains that the instructional content they receive does service to the creation of informed decision makers in a democratic society who can help resolve the historical dilemma of teaching standards and emancipator education. However, as was mentioned above, it seems that teachers mostly rely on their intuition in managing their work and do not bother to wait for the curriculum policies or theoretical mandates that prescribe the details of pedagogic activity.

To clarify, throughout this article, the impression might have been given that critical pedagogy aims to revolt the established system or it encourages a chaotic and anarchic situation where no social order exists. However, implied in the basic tenets of critical pedagogy is the admittance that society operates on a hierarchical structure. Therefore, the rights and interests of the less powerful groups might go unnoticed if their awareness is not raised. It should also be mentioned that critical pedagogy does not offer a wholesale substitute for language methodologies. In the context of principled teaching, it can ensure that

the three telos of Postmethod pedagogy are well taken care of. In the meanwhile, something must be said about the context in which critical pedagogy is implemented since educational innovations need to be congruent with local culture and value system.

Finally, future studies can look into the potential misconceptions of teachers regarding pedagogic innovations including critical pedagogy. The existing body of research on critical pedagogy documents studies that have mostly adopted confirmatory designs that furnished evidence in support of its principles and thus have ignored the myths teachers might have about it. Also, given the sensitive nature of critical pedagogy, educational policies lack a critical dimension. Therefore, to expedite the historical transition from the standard curriculum to a critical one, it is necessary to investigate the policy maker's notion of critical pedagogy in the first place.

8. Limitations

This study was limited to the investigation of teachers' beliefs derived from their academic experience throughout their formative years. Therefore, no attempt was made to distinguish between teachers in terms of their teaching experience, maturity, and their area of service (e.g., school, university, or language center) as this would digress the focus of the study. Note that EFL teachers in Iran come from a variety of academic backgrounds besides TEFL such as English literature, linguistics, translation, etc. It was hypothesized that TEFL and Non-TEFL teachers of English are likely to have different attitudes toward their profession because of their academic background on the grounds that exposure to various teaching methods and theories of language learning is an essential ingredient of teacher training programs**;** so Non-TEFL teachers, no matter their teaching experience, do not start from an equal footing. The effect of degree was also considered important as the niceties of TEFL such as introduction to general theories of education is kept until graduate programs, which implies that graduate and undergraduate teachers are less likely to have the same views concerning what constitutes their job.

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Appendix A. Critical pedagogy questionnaire

Age: ……..   **Gender:** Male ☐   Female ☐   **Teaching experience:** ……… years

Degree: B.A. ☐ M.A. ☐ Ph. D.☐   **Major**: ………………………

Please check the box that best represents your response

No	Question	Strongly disagree	disagree	fairly agree	agree	Strongly agree
1	Learners are receivers of knowledge transmitted from teachers.					
2	Curriculum should be based on a social analysis of life.					
3	Teachers must share their responsibilities in the classroom with students.					
4	Education should aim at empowering students from working class families.					
5	Learners can challenge and resist the content of what they are taught.					
6	Without consulting with learners, teacher cannot fully understand their needs.					
7	Teachers and learners should have an equal status in the classroom.					
8	Textbooks should promote learners' own cultural values as well.					
9	Power should be equally distributed among the teacher & students.					
10	Learners can create learning opportunities for themselves.					
11	Only teachers should determine what students learn and how they learn it.					
12	Dialogues should be based on learners' real experiences.					
13	Standard educational procedures benefit students from middle class families.					
14	Justice and equality should be at the heart of educational programs.					
15	Students should learn to develop multiple perspectives.					
16	Effective learning requires situating texts in their social contexts.					
17	Educational goals should be open to negotiation and therefore modification.					
18	Commercial textbooks foster the process of cultural dominance.					
19	Developing learners' awareness should be the core of educational programs.					
20	Education should ensure social control and conformity.					
21	Learning requires active participation of both learners and teachers.					
22	The goal of education should be the creation of a democratic society.					
23	Commercial textbooks almost hardly address learners' local needs.					
24	Education is an important source of inequality.					
25	The main focus in textbooks should be on others' experiences.					
26	Power relations in society influence educational activity.					
27	Teaching materials should be based on learners' real-life experiences.					
28	Competitive grade system is the best source of motivation for schoolwork.					
29	Education should promote multiple values of different groups in the society.					
30	The global spread of English in textbooks has negative consequences.					
31	Local issues of interest should be at the heart of what students are taught.					
32	Textbooks are biased in treating the issues of race and culture.					
33	How to teach is determined by the educational and institutional context.					