

The Practicality of Critical Pedagogy from Iranian EFL Instructors' Viewpoints: A Cross Sectional Study

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Abstract

This study was an endeavor to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of critical pedagogy and its principles. It also intended to look for their viewpoints about the practicality of implementing critical pedagogy in our classrooms. In addition, the study made attempts to seek the barriers that hinder the application of critical pedagogy in Iranian teaching contexts. In order to achieve the goals of this study, 20 Iranian EFL instructors teaching at university, high schools, and language institutes were interviewed. Since the study employs a mixed-method design, the researcher benefited from both a critical pedagogy questionnaire, developed by Maki (2011), and in-depth interviews. Approaches based on grounded theory were utilized in order to analyze the qualitative data; in addition, statistical procedures such as descriptive statistics and factor analysis were used to analyze the quantitative data. The results indicated that the majority of Iranian EFL instructors are aware of the principles of critical pedagogy and support the helpfulness of such pedagogy and its premises. The study revealed that in spite of language teachers' awareness of critical pedagogy and their agreement with the positively effective CP principles, they rarely apply this methodology in their teaching. Further investigations revealed that the top-down educational system, class size, issues related to teachers' burn-out, limited class time and teachers' insufficient information about the learners' background and learning styles are the main barriers which prevent Iranian language teachers from applying the principles of critical pedagogy in their teaching.

Keywords: critical pedagogy (CP), Iranian language teachers, EFL context

The most basic goals of education are to enhance students' academic success and prepare them to improve their society; these goals are achieved only if learners are trained to become critical thinkers and responsible for their own learning. However, most traditional approaches to education provide teachers with a set of pre-packaged tools and materials and expect them to transmit knowledge to learners. Freire (1972) called these traditional approaches to language teaching "banking models". In banking models of education, teachers transmit knowledge to their students without involving them actively in the process of learning.

Since the traditional approaches did not pay sufficient attention to the important role that learners can play in learning, they failed to connect education to different dimensions of society and students' lives meaningfully. This niche in the literature, therefore, urged scholars to make remarkable contributions to the development of a transformative pedagogy, frequently referred to as "critical pedagogy" (Abednia, 2009).

One should note that critical pedagogy is not a theory, according to Canagaraja (2005), it is rather "a way of 'doing' learning and teaching" (p. 932). Kumaravadivelu (2003) believes that critical pedagogy relates teaching and learning activities to teachers' and students' real lives in order to ensure the social relevance of classroom practices and stretch classroom boundaries.

Recent approaches to teaching languages have mainly been influenced by constructivism and critical pedagogy. Here learners are seen as individuals with different belief systems, background knowledge, and learning styles. In these pedagogical schools of thought following post-method principles, the ultimate goal of educational systems is to train learners to become independent individuals who can think critically. This goal requires curriculum developers and practitioners to plan, instruct, and practice efficiently. According to Brown (2000), critical pedagogy emphasizes that learners be free to be themselves; to think for themselves; to behave intellectually without coercion from the powerful elite; and to develop their beliefs, traditions, and cultures.

Bercaw and Stooksberry (2004) believe that critical pedagogy follows three main principles: a) reflection upon the individual's culture or lived experience, b) development of voice through a critical look at one's world and society, and c) reducing social oppression and transforming the society toward equality for all citizens. Therefore, there is a great need for its users and learners to be critical in their learning and using of the language.

The idea of associating critical pedagogy with education has mainly been developed by some key figures such as Freire (1970), Giroux (1992), Luke (1988), McLaren (1989), and Simon (1992). Critical pedagogy aims at preparing learners who can solve both their own problems and the ones related to the society. It

tries to develop cooperative learning and consciousness-raising among learners. According to McLaren (2003), critical pedagogy is “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 Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012) also mention, critical pedagogy raises students’ consciousness of the injustices and inequalities surrounding them.

Critical pedagogy intends to enhance students and teachers’ self-esteem to question the power relations in society (McLaren, 2003; Peterson, 2003). This pedagogy encourages individuals to cooperate with one another to solve problems and develop the sense of trust among people. As Kanpol (1998) states critical pedagogy is after creating a classroom environment which is democratic and highlights students’ viewpoints through discussion.

Shannon (1992) believes that decisions about language learning and teaching roles as well as materials and classroom activities “are actually negotiations over whose values, interests, and beliefs will be validated at school” (p. 2). Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) believe that this pedagogy shows a shift in the assumed roles for teachers and students and gives voice to the learners and avoids their marginalization.

Freire (1970) believes that in critical pedagogy the teacher both teaches and learns; therefore, the teacher is the one who is taught in dialogue with the students. Followers of critical pedagogy tend to help marginalized groups gain their voices. Their ultimate goal is to create a society which encourages stake holders and individuals to work together for social justice.

Shor (1980) states that problem posing education provides a kind of learning which “aids people in knowing what holds them back and imagining a social order which supports their full humanity” (p.48). Using authentic materials is favored in educational systems following critical pedagogy. Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012) think that the use of authentic materials can help students relate their knowledge to the problems existing in society and as a result provides them with efficient tools to take necessary actions for their improvement.

Though critical pedagogy has gained much attention in recent years, few pieces of research have been conducted in this field. Going over the studies regarding this pedagogy, one can easily notice the scarcity of such research especially in the Iranian context. In addition, reviewing the related literature indicates that most of the studies done following the principles of critical thinking and pedagogy are intended to implement this approach to either the teaching of a single language skill or only one aspect of language learning. In addition, much of the available related research has employed some sort of case study in which a single group is studied with regard to the instruction that the participants have received, and their performance has been studied. Very few studies have intended to study

critical pedagogy on the part of instructors and consider their attitudes toward this approach, let alone investigating the viewpoints of instructors from cross sectional groups about this pedagogy and implementing as well as developing its principles in their classrooms.

Therefore, in order to fill the gap in the body of research, the present study aims at studying the practicality of critical pedagogy from Iranian EFL instructors' viewpoints in the form of a cross sectional study. Thus, practically speaking, the results of this study will be useful to all stakeholders of ELT in Iran including administrators, curriculum designers, text developers, teachers, test developers, and learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the principles of critical pedagogy have been appealing to many scholars, several researchers have focused on the investigation and evaluation of this pedagogy. Milner (2003), who studied the importance of critical pedagogy in achieving racial awareness, found out that critical pedagogy is significant to pre-service teachers because it encourages them to view students as complete persons who possess knowledge and histories that existed before and outside of the classroom.

In order to examine the views of elementary school teachers concerning critical pedagogy in Turkey, Yilmaz (2009) conducted a study and found out that teachers almost agreed with the principles of critical pedagogy; however, their views significantly differed depending on their professional seniority, educational background, and the environment of the school where they worked.

It is believed that incorporating critical thinking and pedagogy in classroom instructions can promote reasoning skills among students. Several studies have been conducted to investigate the application of critical pedagogy in different language learning contexts. In a study conducted by Zhang (2009) on teaching critical reading pedagogy to a group of in-service EFL teachers in Singapore, it was revealed that teaching critical reading to both Asian EFL students and practitioners alike was very important in promoting their critical thinking ability as well as their teaching.

Carrilo and McCain (2004) did a survey study with students from an education college in the southern region of the U.S to know if critical pedagogy is taught and assimilated by the students to confront the new realities of the crisis of capitalism, or is an academic therapy to reproduce and hold to the traditional educative mode. Findings of their study indicated that most educators were not prepared to teach critical pedagogy as a component to their educational program. Moreover, most participants in the study, indicated through surveys, had not received formal education courses in teaching critical pedagogy. In addition, several

participants in this study did not have a clearly defined philosophy of critical pedagogy in educational process.

Sadeghi (2008) carried out a study to investigate some complexities of EFL teaching in an urban area in southern Iran by focusing on the relationship between critical pedagogy and an indigenous way of thinking in which both teacher and learners are aware of their traditions, beliefs, and priorities and collaboratively work to create a richer pedagogical context.

The purpose of this study was to discover whether in a one-semester course designed to familiarize students with issues of social justice, students would experience a change in their definition and recognition of social justice in their organizations, as well as their sense of responsibility for contributing to change the distribution of justice.

In order to reach the intended objectives, 22 EFL learners from different educational backgrounds were selected. Different topics such as cultural invasion, gender discrimination, internet filtering, religion, job opportunity, people's views on Azad University, and army service were discussed during the semester. At the end of this kind of critical education, the students were supposed to engage in examining social issues that raised critical consciousness. They began doubting what is taken for granted in their own lives. Some became more critical and reflective about themselves and others became critical about the society. In fact, the class got engaged in discussing issues that were derived from their own experience; therefore, as Kanpol (1999) believes, there is a sense that critical pedagogy is to be found at different moments, during the school day and over different parts of a country.

Accordingly, the present study mainly intends to shed light on the status of critical pedagogy in ELT in different Iranian educational settings and to explore the main barriers to practicing critical pedagogy at Iranian contexts. Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

- Are Iranian language instructors familiar with critical pedagogy and its components?
- How do the viewpoints of Iranian EFL instructors chosen from different educational contexts differ from each other?
- What are the main barriers to applying critical pedagogy principles from Iranian language teachers points of view?

METHOD

This study follows a mixed-method design in which the researcher benefits from both qualitative as well as quantitative data.

A total number of 20 Iranian EFL Instructors participated in this study. The participants were selected from different academic and educational contexts. Four

Shiraz university instructors, four Ph.D. student teachers instructing both at university and language institutes, four MA student teachers teaching at language institutes, four English institute instructors who were MA holders, and four high school teachers holding BA degrees in ELT took part in the current study.

The study benefited from a kind of purposive sampling since the researcher aimed to collect data from people who had special characteristics, knowledge, and academic status to provide her with relevant and required information. It would be worth mentioning that the initial intention was to interview more participants, but since the data was saturated after interviewing the current participants, the collected data was considered as being sufficiently informative, because according to Ary et al. (2010) one should terminate sampling when no new information is forthcoming from new participants. In addition, gender was not a significant factor in this study.

Two kinds of instruments were employed in the current study. The first instrument was a critical pedagogy questionnaire developed and validated by Maki (2011); the reliability of the questionnaire estimated through Cronbach alpha coefficient has been reported as 0.82 which could be considered as reliable and satisfactory. This questionnaire includes 30 items on a Likert-scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree; therefore, the items were typically coded from one to five; some of the scale items were reversely coded to balance the scores. Using Cronbach alpha, the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated, resulting in 0.88, which is reasonably high.

In order to confirm the underlying constructs of the questionnaire, a factor analysis was run on the data. The results of factor analysis revealed that the questionnaire appeared to have eight components. One last component was discarded because only four items with small loading were related to it. Maki (2011) has also reported seven components for this questionnaire; therefore, the result of this study supports his claim. Since the majority of the items were loaded on the first component, and given the fact that all other components were directly tapping some issues in critical pedagogy, the instrument could be judged as being valid and measuring mainly the intended variable, which was language instructors' perception of critical pedagogy and its components.

Based on the loadings of the factors on questionnaire items, the extracted components were called different terms. The first factor termed "attention to social and cultural issues is represented through items 1 to 9 of the questionnaire. The second factor, "language and ideology» is loaded on items 10 to 13. The third factor, "ethical issues and educational justice includes items 14 to 17. The fourth factor, "attention to needs and differences of the students, is manifested through items 18 to 21. The fifth factor, "use of students comment in language teaching includes items 22 to 24. The sixth factor, "attention to first language," entails

items 25 to 27, and the seventh factor, “creative thinking,” is revealed through items 28 to 30 of the questionnaire.

In addition, a semi-structured interview was used. It consists of 15 questions, which invited the participants to express their attitudes toward critical pedagogy, the barriers to application of this pedagogy, and the educational implications. In semi-structured interviews, the questions are typically open-ended and are designed to reveal what is important to understand about the phenomenon under study (Ary et al., 2010).

The data for this study was collected during the 2011-2012 academic year. The required quantitative data was elicited through the critical pedagogy questionnaire, which was given to the participants to fill in. In order to back up the gathered quantitative data with some qualitative data, the teachers were asked to participate in face-to-face in-depth interviews. Therefore, all of the interviews in the current study were conducted synchronously.

In order to interview the participants, the researcher asked them to arrange certain time in advance. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research and their consent was obtained. In addition, the researcher asked for the participants' permission to audiotape each interview for the purposes of qualitative analysis. During the interview, the participants were asked the questions that were already prepared based on the objectives of the study. Since the interviews were semi-structured and the questions were open-ended, the participants were free 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. In each group of language teachers, after interviewing three or four participants, the data was saturated and no new information could be achieved.

Using qualitative techniques of grounded theory, the data collected through interviews were transcribed and analyzed. After reviewing the qualitative data and reflecting on them, the researchers looked for recurrent patterns to classify the data and generate certain themes. Moreover, in order to analyze the quantitative data obtained through questionnaires, the researchers coded the items based on the direction of their compatibility with the principles of critical pedagogy. This was done based on a Likert scale as follows: 1. strongly disagree, 2. disagree, 3. no comments, 4. agree, 5. strongly agree.

In order to estimate the reliability index of the CP questionnaire, Cronbach alpha formula was utilized. The result of the analysis revealed that the reliability index of the questionnaire appeared to be 0.88, which indicates that this instrument can be considered as sufficiently reliable. In order to ensure the validity of the questionnaire, factor analysis was used. In addition, descriptive statistics representing the mean, minimum, and maximum scores as well as the standard deviation for each component of critical pedagogy were estimated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to answer the research questions posed in this study, the results of data analysis are presented and discussed here. The quantitative data obtained through the CP questionnaire helped in answering the first research question regarding Iranian language instructors' awareness of critical pedagogy and its principles. The second type of data, which was qualitative in nature, offered insights into the issues regarding the practicality of critical pedagogy in the Iranian EFL teaching contexts from the viewpoints of language instructors teaching at different educational levels. Thus, the latter data was useful in providing appropriate information required for answering the second and third research questions dealing with language instructors' viewpoints as well as the first question regarding language teachers' awareness of the principles of critical pedagogy.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that since all the three research questions in this study are derived from the issues regarding critical pedagogy and its components, they are highly related to one another; thus, providing answers to each of these questions may shed light on certain aspects of the other questions as well. Therefore, all of the three answers complement each other and offer better insights into the issues concerned in the study.

As mentioned above, the data obtained through the questionnaire was mainly used in order to answer the first research question: Are Iranian language instructors familiar with critical pedagogy and its components?

Based on the seven components discussed earlier, descriptive statistics were run to gain insights into the participants' perceptions of each component of critical pedagogy. The results are shown in Figure 1.

Since in this Likert-scale questionnaire, items are coded from one to five based on their compatibility with the tenets of critical pedagogy, three is considered as the average score for each item and CP components. As Figure 1. shows, the mean scores for all of the seven components appeared to be above three; suggesting that the majority of the teachers participating in this study seem to be aware of the principles of critical pedagogy. The following figure provides a better portrait of the teachers' perception of each component.

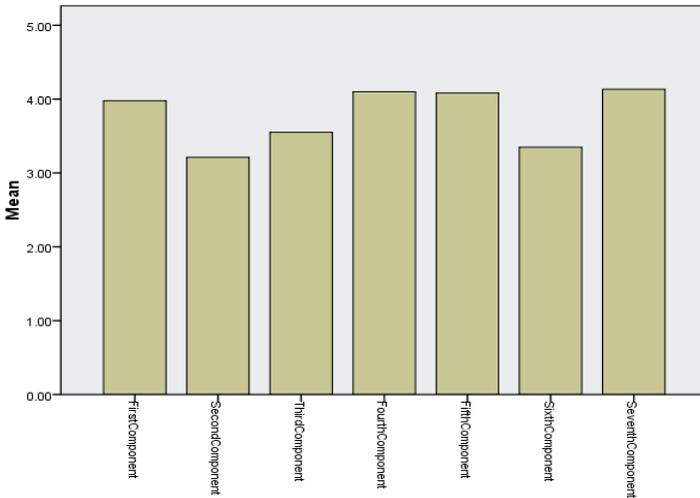


Figure 1. Distribution of scores on CP components

Figure 1. shows that, in general, the participants are mostly aware of the seventh component, “creative thinking” (mean= 4.13), the fourth one, “attention to needs and differences of the students,” (mean= 4.1), and the fifth component, “use of students’ comments in language teaching,” (mean= 4.08) respectively. However, the order of their awareness of the other four components was as follows: “attention to social and cultural issues” (mean=3.97), “ethical issues and educational justice” (mean= 3.55), “attention to students’ first language” (mean= 3.35), and “language and ideology” (mean= 3.21). Therefore, teachers appear to be mostly aware of the positive consequences of benefiting from “creative thinking” in their teaching; however, they do not seem to be aware of the relationship between “language and ideology” and the way attention to this component can promote language learning.

Teachers’ attention to social and cultural issues supports the idea mentioned by Akbari (2008) who claims that classroom context should be appropriately related to the wider social context. He thinks that whatever happens in the classroom must lead to bringing about a difference in the wider social community.

It should be noted that in answering the first question, all the participants selected from different educational levels were considered as a single group representing Iranian EFL language instructors as a whole. In order to distinguish the teachers’ awareness and viewpoints about critical pedagogy, its principles, and application more specifically depending on their education and teaching level, the analysis of the obtained qualitative data was sought. The latter data revealed

that the higher the educational level of the teachers, the more their awareness and knowledge of the principles of critical pedagogy would be. This finding can be justified by the fact that most teaching theories and principles such as those of critical pedagogy are mainly taught and observed at post-graduate levels.

It is also worth mentioning that the researchers found Ph.D. students more aware of CP principles than MA students. Another quite interesting result was that though all teachers believed that their teaching is based on their knowledge of theories and principles learned at university courses as well as their experience, most student teachers (Ph.D. and especially MA students) appeared to rely their teaching basically on the theories they have learned; however, in-service teachers, especially those teaching at high school, seemed to base their teaching mainly on experience. Therefore, teachers with postgraduate degrees appeared to be more aware of the principles of critical pedagogy.

The findings of this study are similar to that of Maki (2011) who investigated to see the extent to which Iranian high school teachers are aware of critical pedagogy. His study revealed that most of Iranian language teachers appeared to be aware of the principles and components of critical pedagogy. In addition, the results of this study are consistent with that of Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012). They carried out a survey among Iranian school teachers to investigate their perceptions of the principles of critical pedagogy. They came to know that Iranian teachers are either directly or indirectly aware of those principles and their facilitative effects, thus they generally appeared to be in favor of this pedagogy and its components.

Since teachers' awareness of critical pedagogy and their viewpoints about this methodology and its principles are highly related to each other, the issues that have just been discussed are extended and clarified through answering the second research question: How do the viewpoints of Iranian EFL instructors chosen from different educational contexts differ from each other?

In order to answer the second and third questions posed at the outset, the qualitative data was analyzed. It was revealed that among all participants, university language teachers in MA and especially Ph.D. courses were much fonder of this pedagogy. This may be due to their explicit knowledge of the principles of critical pedagogy and their awareness of the positive effects of each CP principle in facilitating the language learning and teaching process. It may also be due to the fact that they were provided with teaching contexts which are more appropriate for applying critical pedagogy with regard to their freedom in choosing more appealing and authentic materials which would be suitable for each specific teaching context and learners. In addition, they are provided with classes, including smaller number of students, which helps the instructor apply the components of critical pedagogy in a more logical manner.

It should also be noted that though the interviewed teachers generally favored critical pedagogy and its components, their views differed regarding certain aspects and principles of this pedagogy depending on their teaching contexts. For example, employing negotiated syllabus was mainly supported by Ph.D. student teachers and the university language instructors teaching at graduate courses; however, high school and institute teachers very rarely supported the use of negotiated syllabus. Most of these teachers claimed that students are not experienced or knowledgeable enough to realize their real needs, and even their expectations are sometimes affected by their interests which may not be suitable for other students and the teaching context.

In addition, the teachers' attitudes toward the application of negotiated syllabus and learners' involvement in educational decision-making may also be affected by the way they had been treated during their school time; therefore, they may think that involving learners in such matters would endanger the teacher's authority. Moreover, though some components of critical pedagogy such as learners' cooperation and group work were favored by almost all the participants, they believed that the application of these principles depends on the level of the students and the teaching context.

The findings of this study are in line with that of Lim (2011) who carried out research to compare the ideas and teaching of undergraduate and graduate student teachers among Korean instructors. The results of his study revealed that the majority of undergraduate student teachers were more concerned about general teacher qualities and only a few number of them were concerned about teachers' knowledge of language teaching theories and tenets; whereas, graduate student teachers appeared to have less concern for teacher's general qualities and much emphasis on knowledge and skills for teaching and classroom management.

Hollstein (2006) carried out a similar study to evaluate the extent to which pre-service teachers, during their undergraduate courses at Ohio University, understood, assimilated, and applied critical pedagogy. The results indicated that the participants lacked an understanding of this pedagogy; in fact, they were unaware of CP principles. In addition, they were not able to apply the principles of critical pedagogy in a lesson plan either.

Furthermore, Yilmaz (2009), who carried out a piece of research studying elementary school teachers' viewpoints about critical pedagogy in Turkey, found out that the instructors moderately agreed with the principles of critical pedagogy; however, their attitudes toward this pedagogy were significantly different based on their educational background, professional seniority, and the environment of the school where they worked.

Therefore, it can be inferred that teachers' awareness of the principles and components of critical pedagogy, their educational level and background as well as the way they have been treated as students affect their teaching and attitudes to-

ward any teaching principles in general and critical pedagogy in particular. Thus, providing teachers with some pre-service as well as in-service teacher training courses and familiarizing them with new and appropriate teaching principles and pedagogies can affect their views about teaching and as a result help them equip themselves with the most appropriate teaching tools. Finally, one should note that the practicality of any pedagogy and the ease of its application can also affect the instructors' viewpoints to a great extent; therefore, the issue of practicality, which is going to be discussed in answering the third research question, would be highly related to the instructors' attitudes toward critical pedagogy.

The last research question aimed at finding the main barriers to applying critical pedagogy principles from Iranian language teachers points of view. Analyzing and reflecting on the qualitative data obtained through the interviews, the researcher noticed several factors which could be considered as the main obstacles that can hinder language teachers in applying CP principles in their classes. The main barriers recurrently mentioned by the participants were class size, the top-down educational system, teaching burn-out, limited class time and teachers' insufficient information about the learners' background and learning style.

As most principles of critical pedagogy require a small number of learners studying in each class, almost all of the participants complained about having to deal with crowded classes which make it difficult to encourage efficient group work and cooperation among learners; negotiate with many students with different learning styles, knowledge and interest about the course syllabus; and consider their educational as well as personal goals when planning a course. Among all participants, mostly high school teachers and university instructors teaching at BA courses dealing with many students in a single class complained about this problem as one of the main barriers which prevents them from applying critical pedagogy in their teaching contexts.

Another major obstacle mentioned almost by all of the participants teaching in different Iranian contexts was the centralized educational system. The teachers argued that since everything had already been preplanned by the ministry of education or the institutional authority and dictated to them, there would be no room for the teachers to decide about the material, assessment, and length of the course. Though almost all of the participants complained about not having any voice in educational decisions, high school language teachers and university instructors teaching general English courses highlighted the issue more than the other participants did; however, university instructors considered specialized and graduate courses as providing more convenient contexts for applying the principles of critical pedagogy.

Furthermore, one of the basic tenets of critical pedagogy deals with having reflection on one's teaching and experience and thus following a dynamic sort of teaching; however, most of the participants and especially high school teach-

ers expressed that they cannot regularly reflect on their work and promote their teaching due to their work load and expectations. Therefore, teacher burn-out can be considered as one of the debilitating factors that affect the practicality of critical pedagogy.

In addition to the aforementioned themes, limited class time, and preplanned decisions about courses and the teaching procedures dictated to the instructors by the institutions deprive the teachers of their creativity. Moreover, critical pedagogy requires teachers to develop voice among learners, but how can it be practical when teachers themselves would not have voice in determining what to teach and how to teach?

This outcome is supported by the idea proposed by Pishghadam and Mirzaee (2008) who claimed that postmodernism cannot be observed in practice at any levels of education in Iran due to the centralized educational system in which all decisions are taken by the authorities in charge of education, and teachers have to be limited by institutional demands. Following the same line of ideas, Akbari (2009) argued that conservative forces keep critical ideas far from schools and classrooms since course books and teaching methods are planned and dictated to teachers. In addition, carrying out a similar piece of research, Maki (2011) also came out with results consistent with those of this one; the results of his study revealed that in spite of high school teachers' awareness of the principles of critical pedagogy, they are unable to apply them in practice.

Moreover, the results of this study are in line with the findings reported by Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012). They found out that teachers tend to approve of critical pedagogy and its principles; however, the results revealed the absence of this pedagogy in the Iranian educational system. In order to justify this situation they attributed it to the centralized top-down educational management.

Therefore, the findings of this study and some other research revealed that though Iranian language teachers seem to have positive attitudes toward critical pedagogy and its principles, they rarely benefit from this methodology in their teaching due to certain barriers which hinder the practicality of critical pedagogy in Iranian contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Iranian language instructors are generally aware of the principles of critical pedagogy. In addition, the majority of them agree on the positive consequences of applying the premises of such pedagogy; however, the degree of their agreement differed depending on their education and background, the educational level and institution in which they teach, the learners, and the way they themselves have been treated as students.

The study also uncovered the fact that though language teachers seem to be aware of critical pedagogy and favor the beneficial consequences of its principles and premises, they rarely apply such pedagogy in their teaching. Analyzing and reflecting on the in-depth interviews done with the teachers, the researchers noticed some obstacles which prevent teachers from applying the principles of critical pedagogy. The main barriers were the top-down educational system, class size, teacher burn-out, limited class time, and teachers' insufficient information about the learners' background and learning styles.

Almost all of the participants complained about the centralized educational system in which decisions are made in a top-down manner. They argued that the preplanned decisions about courses, materials, and the teaching procedures which are dictated to them by the institutions would reduce their creativity. Most of them admitted that they do not have enough time or motivation to reflect on their teaching. They believed that the large number of students having to study in a single class does not allow group work and cooperation among learners, and thus does not encourage the formation of a friendly and supportive learning atmosphere in which learners could develop mutual trust and understanding of one another.

At language institutes, though the learning context is more cooperative and friendly than in schools or universities, the teachers are again deprived of their creativity by institutional rules and regulations. They state that they must teach the materials already determined by institutes and follow the teaching procedures, techniques, and even steps dictated to them.

Therefore, one can conclude that critical pedagogy is not fully observed in practice in Iranian teaching contexts. Though postmodernism suggests that material developers and language classes should be sensitive to learners' needs, their learning styles, and creativity as well as the local knowledge in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, quite different classes are managed similarly following the same procedures. Therefore, one comes to know that most of Iranian teaching contexts are still following the principles of the method era; and, as Kumaravadivelu (1994) claims, method ignores teachers' creativity and learners' interests as well as the local knowledge. It prescribes a single approach for teaching English to all learners with different needs and goals. Therefore, as Maki (2011) also argues, there exists an imperative need to decolonize the methodological aspects of ELT and move toward the concept of post-method by being sensitive to each learning context and consider it as a unique experience.

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