

On Application of Critical Pedagogy Principles by ELT Instructors and Subject Teachers: A Case of Iranian Universities

Abdullah Sarani¹, Goudarz Alibakhshi², & Habebeh Molazehi³

¹Corresponding author, University of Sistan and Baluchestan

²Allameh Tabataba'i University

³Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch of Sistan and Baluchestan

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Abstract

Language educators are required to reflect upon content delivered to the students. Teaching strategies should be adapted to keep students loyal to cultural identity as well as foster resistance to oppressive policies dictated within English language curricula. Despite the significance of applying critical principles by teachers, it is not known whether Iranian ELT instructors and subject teachers practice the principles of critical pedagogy (CP) or not. This study investigated whether Iranian EFL teachers at universities are aware of the CP principles or not, and whether there is a difference between Iranian ELT instructors and subject teachers in terms of applying the CP principles. Fifty-five ELT instructors and subject teachers at different universities were selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected through the questionnaire of CP attitudes (Pishvaei & Kasaian, 2013). Results showed that the ELT instructors supported all the CP principles, but the subject teachers supported and applied only a few of the CP principles. That is, ELT instructors and subject teachers differ in terms of attitudes towards CP.

Keywords: Critical Pedagogy (CP); EFL Teachers; ELT Instructors; Subject Teachers

1. Introduction

Critical pedagogy (CP) questions the power relationships between teachers, students, institutions, and society, clarifies how ideologies arising from power, politics, history, and culture constantly shape education (Kuang, 2007), aims to illuminate the relationship between authority and power, and pays noteworthy consideration to the relationship between knowledge and power (Crooks, 2010). Kuang (2007) indicates that CP dictates the fact of how and why some realities are legitimated, whereas others are silenced or made invisible. Wink (2005) sums up CP as the concern which challenges unequal power relations in interactions between individuals and institutions. Furthermore, Wink (2005) draws attention to the cultural, political, social, and historical influences on schools and brings to light the issues of power and its relationship to classroom practices of teaching and learning.

Wink continues that CP is concerned with how methodology can be decisive, that is, how the method of delivery influences the process and content of knowledge construction.

The review of literature on critical applied linguistics and CP indicates that several recent studies (e.g., Akbari, 2008; Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011; Canagarajah, 1999, 2002, 2005; Chege, 2009; Kramersch, 2002; Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, 2003b, 2006a, 2006b; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pishvaei & Kasaian, 2013) skeptically criticize mainstream second language acquisition (SLA) research. They believe that almost all SLA studies are not able to capture the processes of language learning, the complexity of language, the language learner, and the learner's multiple identities (Norton & Toohey, 2004), sociocultural perspectives of language learning (Lantolf, 2000; Ohta, 2000), the learner's contributions (Breen, 2001), and language socialization (Kramersch, 2002). Hall (1995) argues that language learning theories need to give attention to the larger sociohistorical and political forces residing in both the meanings of the linguistic resources and the social identities of those who aim to use them. In line with Hall (1995), Canagarajah (1999) believes that SLA researchers view classrooms as separated from larger historical and social conditions. He also believes that targets and stages of learning are also made narrower and clearer to provide a convenient means of measuring pedagogical progress

However, the researchers interested in political, sociohistorical, and complex dimensions of language learning and teaching recommend that CP, as an alternative approach, be an important part of language teaching (Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 2002a, 2002b; Norton, 1997; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 1999, 2001; Ramanathan, 2002). CP, as an educational theory, aims at making students conscious of the many institutions that exist to facilitate and perpetuate systematic forms of oppression both within and outside the classroom (Pennycook, 1999, 2001).

As Norton and Toohey (2004) believe, CP in English as a second language (ESL) or as lingua franca reminds language teachers and learners that both language teaching and language learning are political processes. They also believe that CP views language as not simply a means of communication but as a practice that is constructed by the ways ESL learners understand themselves, their histories, their possibilities for the future, and their social surroundings (Norton & Toohey, 2004).

Moreover, the necessity of learning English as lingua franca (ELF) has rapidly grown due to our interconnected global environment. This linguistic demand requires that teachers of EFL not only apply a culturally sensitive framework in the classroom but also understand a variety of methodologies for instruction. Therefore, teacher education is required so that it can provide supports for critical reflection and

pedagogy. Therefore, language educators are required to reflect upon content delivered to the students. Teaching strategies should be adapted to keep students loyal to cultural identity as well as foster resistance to oppressive policies dictated within English language curricula (Giroux, 1995). In line with the above researchers interested in CP, it could, therefore, be argued that EFL teachers should start with a clear understanding of CP and apply its main principles in the English language classroom to avoid implementing ethnocentric dominance on English language learners (Hauqe, 2007).

Despite the significance of applying CP principles by teachers, it is not known whether Iranian ELT instructors and subject teachers who are teaching ESP to Iranian students at tertiary levels use the CP principles or not. It is not either known whether the major of ESP teachers (ELT vs. subject) influences their application of the CP principles in their ESP classes or not.

The present study aimed at investigating whether Iranian EFL teachers are aware of the CP principles or not. The second objective was to determine the similarities or differences between ELT instructors and subject teachers in terms of applying the CP principles. More specifically, the following research questions were raised:

1. To what extent do Iranian university teachers of English support the CP principles?
2. Does the major (ELT vs. subject) of teachers influence their application of CP in ESP classes?

2. Method

2.1 Context of the Study

The present study was conducted in all state and Azad universities in Sistan and Baluchestan province, Iran. The study was carried out in 2013. The criteria for selecting these universities were the accessibility of the universities as well as time limitation for collecting the data.

2.2 Research Design

Due to the nature of the study, a survey research design was used. The dependent variables were the attitudes towards CP with five levels and the independent variable was the teachers' major with two levels: ELT vs. subject. The data were collected through an ordinal scale, and the p value was set at 0.05 level.

2.3 Participants

The participants consisted of two groups. The first group consisted of 22 English language teachers holding ELT majors (12 Ph.D. and 10 M.A.). They were teaching English courses to the students of English language (i.e., translation, teaching English, and English literature) at the aforementioned universities. The criterion for selecting these teachers was a two-year experience in teaching ESP courses to students of different majors.

The second group consisted of 15 non-ELT majors who were teaching English (usually ESP) at the universities mentioned above. The criterion for including the participants was a two-year experience in teaching ESP courses to their students. Both groups of participants were selected through convenience sampling. They were all met in their own working hours at the universities. Only those who accepted to participate were selected. They were all aware of the purpose of the study and were assured that the data would be kept confidential.

2.4 Instrumentation

The data were collected through the Critical Pedagogy Attitude Questionnaire developed by Pishvaei and Kasaian (2013). This scale is openly accessible at: <http://www.european-science.com>. It consists of 24 items which are measured on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 (*Strongly Disagree*), 2 (*Disagree*), 3 (*Neutral*), 4 (*Agree*), and 5 (*Strongly Agree*). The scale consisted of five dimensions known as:

1. Disbelieving the neutrality of the native speaker-run ELT (2, 4, 6, 10, 14, 16, 19)
2. Countering ELT hidden agendas by favoring local materials (11, 15, 18, 22, 23)
3. Legitimizing sensitivity to the ideology of ELT materials (8, 12, 21, 24)
4. Countering pre-EIL misconceptions (1, 3, 5, 7, 20)
5. Prioritizing EIL principles (9, 13, 17)

The internal consistency of the instrument was estimated through running Cranach's alpha, and it turned out to be 0.79 for the total instrument which was acceptable

2.5 Data Collection

In the last month of the spring of 2013, the questionnaire was adapted and translated into Persian. We distributed the Persian translation of the questionnaire among the teachers whose major was not English. The English version of the instrument was administered among the teachers with TEFL major. In addition to the hard copy, a copy in Word 2003 format was sent to the participants through e-

mail. Some participants returned the questionnaire through e-mail, whereas some others delivered it to the third researcher directly. The questionnaires collected from the ELT instructors were coded “ELT,” and the subject teachers were coded “subject.” Then, each completely answered questionnaire was given a numerical code. Finally, they were entered into SPSS (version 16) and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics.

2.6 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics such as estimating frequencies, mean, and standard deviation for all the items of the scale separately. Then, the data were computed, and the 24 items were reduced to five variables. The teachers’ means on all the variables and the mean ranks were calculated. Also, for answering the second research question, independent samples *t* tests for each item and each variable were run. Nonparametric test of K-related samples (Friedman test) was also run to compare the participants’ means on all the components of the CP instrument.

3. Results

3.1 Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the research scale was investigated in terms of the total scale as well as the five subparts of the scale separately. The results are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. *Reliability Coefficient of the CP Scale*

1. Disbelieving the neutrality of the native speaker-run ELT	0.8
2. Countering ELT hidden agendas by favoring local materials	0.78
3. Legitimizing sensitivity to the ideology of ELT materials	0.82
4. Countering pre-EIL misconceptions	0.79
5. Prioritizing EIL principles	0.75
Total	.82

The reliability coefficient of the factors, which forms part of the CP scale, appeared to vary between 0.75 and 0.86 that could be regarded as acceptable internal consistency (Kline, 1999).

3.2 Research Question 1

Table 2. *Teacher's Perceptions About Disbelieving the Neutrality of the Native-Speaker-Run ELT*

Items	D & SD%		N%		A & SA%	
	T	NT	T	NT	T	NT
International ELT books reinforce particular world views.	5	30	10	35	85	35
ELT books tend to show that Western culture is more appreciable.	10	40	10	40	80	20
ELT industry has traces of promoting Western culture.	10	30	20	45	70	25
ELT materials can be used as tools to promote Western ideologies.	15	40	15	35	70	25
ELT industry seems to be pursuing hidden goals.	15	40	20	25	65	35
English teachers should look critically at ELT industry.	10	35	25	30	65	35
English-speaking countries try to promote Western culture through their ELT books.	15	30	15	40	70	30

^aD = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree, N = Neutral

As seen in Table 2, about 65% of the ELT instructors agreed with the seven themes of the first variable “the neutrality of the native speaker-run ELT.” In contrast, about 65% of the subject teachers either disagreed with the themes or were neutral. Simply speaking, 65% of the ELT instructors agreed that the ELT industry, in general, and the ELT books, in particular, reinforce particular worldviews, tend to show that the Western culture is more appreciable, promote the Western culture, and pursue hidden goals. They also believed that English teachers should look critically at the LT industry because English-speaking countries try to promote the Western culture through their ELT books. However, the subject teachers did not have the same idea.

Table 3. *Teachers' Perceptions About Countering ELT Hidden Agendas by Favoring Local Materials*

Items	D & SD%		N%		A & SA%	
	T	NT	T	NT	T	NT
For political and ideological reasons, third world countries should design their own ELT materials.	10	10	10	35	80	55
If nonnative speakers design their own ELT materials, they will lose authenticity.	60	40	20	30	20	30
ELT books designed by third world countries will fail to teach good English.	50	30	35	50	15	20
Designing local ELT materials is a waste of time.	60	40	30	35	10	30
Due to our cultural differences with the West, we should design our own ELT books.	10	30	25	40	65	30

^TD = Disagree, ^{SD}SD = Strongly Disagree, ^AA = Agree, ^{SA}SA = Strongly Agree, ^NN = Neutral

Eighty percent of the ELT instructors and 55% of the subject teachers agreed with the first theme, “for political and ideological reasons, countries should design their own ELT materials,” but about 35% of the subject teachers and 10% of the ELT instructors were neutral. Also, about 60% of the ELT instructors and 40% of the subject teachers disagreed that if nonnative speakers design their own ELT materials, they will lose authenticity. Whereas 50% of the ELT instructors disagreed that the ELT books designed by the third-world countries fail to teach good English, only 30% of the subject teachers had the same idea. In terms of “designing local ELT materials is a waste of time,” about 60% the ELT instructors and 40% of the subject teachers disagreed, 30% of the ELT instructors and 35% of the subject teachers were neutral and the rest agreed.

Table 4. *Teachers' Perceptions About Legitimizing Sensitivity to the Ideology of ELT Materials*

Items	D & SD%		N%		A & SA%	
	T	NT	T	NT	T	NT
ELT books should not be considered as ideological.	55	10	20	30	25	60
It is not strange that some English teachers mistrust internationally-marketed ELT books.	55	15	15	35	30	65
ELT books shouldn't be mistaken for Western policies.	60	20	25	20	15	60
Instead of accusing ELT books, English teachers should focus on language teaching.	55	10	10	30	35	60

^aD = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree, N = Neutral

About 50% of the ELT instructors disagreed with the above themes, and the rest were either neutral or disagreed. However, the number of those who disagreed with the themes exceeds the number of those who were neutral or agreed. However, about 60% of the subject teachers agreed with the themes of the items.

Table 5. *Teachers' Perceptions About Countering Pre-EIL Misconceptions*

Items	D & SD%		N%		A & SA%	
	T	NT	T	NT	T	NT
In today's world, learning English is necessary for everybody.	30	35	20	15	50	50
An English teacher should be able to speak like a native speaker.	65	60	20	25	30	15
English should only be taught through English.	60	55	20	35	20	15
To learn authentic English, one should trust ELT materials designed by native speakers.	65	55	10	15	20	25
ELT materials designed by native speakers are more dependable than the ones designed by nonnative speakers.	70	60	20	25	10	15

^aD = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree, N = Neutral

Fifty percent of both groups of teachers agreed that, in today's world, learning English is necessary for everybody. About 30% of the ELT instructors and 35% of the subject teachers disagreed. Also, 65% of the ELT instructors and 60% of

the subject teachers disagreed that an English teacher should be able to speak like a native speaker. The results also show that 60% of the ELT instructors and 55% of the subject teachers disagreed that English should only be taught through English; about 20% of the ELT instructors and 55% of the subject teachers were neutral.

Moreover, the results show that 65% of the ELT instructors and 55% of the subject teachers disagreed that, to learn authentic English, one should trust the ELT materials designed by native speakers; 70% of the ELT instructors and 60% of the subject teachers disagreed that the ELT materials designed by native speakers are more dependable than the ones designed by nonnative speakers.

Table 6. *Teacher's Perceptions About Prioritizing EIL Principles*

Item	D & SD%		N%		A & SA%	
	T	NT	T	NT	T	NT
Nonnative English teachers can be perfect teachers.	10	15	15	20	75	65
Students should not be expected to pronounce English words like a native speaker.	15	20	10	15	75	65
Nonnative speakers can communicate internationally with no need to speak like native speakers.	15	10	10	20	75	70

^aD = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree, N = Neutral

As can be seen in Table 6, about 75% of the ELT instructors and 65% of the subject teachers agreed with all the themes. Therefore, it could be said that more than two-thirds of the teachers believed that nonnative English teachers can be perfect teachers, students should not be expected to pronounce English words like a native speaker, and nonnative speakers can communicate internationally with no need to speak like native speakers.

3.3 Research Question 2

The second question addressed the impact of the teachers' majors on the application of the CP principles. The data for the two groups were compared through running independent samples *t* test for each and all the items of each variable. The results are shown in Table 7:

Table 7: *t* Test for Comparing Participants' Views on Different Components of CP

	Teachers	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Disbelieving the neutrality of the native speaker-run ELT	ELT	4.0	5.0	0.001
	Subject	2.57		
Countering ELT hidden agendas by favoring local materials	ELT	2.8	.26	.45
	Subject	2.9		
Legitimizing sensitivity to the ideology of ELT materials	ELT	3.43	-2.9	0.005
	Subject	2		
Countering pre-EIL misconceptions	ELT	2.34	-0.4	0.6
	Subject	2.48		
Prioritizing EIL principles	ELT	3.4	-0.6	0.5
	Subject	3.59		

As seen in Table 7, there is a significant difference between the mean scores of TEFL and non-TEFL majors on the first variable of the CP scale: “disbelieving the neutrality of the native speaker-run ELT” ($t = 5, p = 0.001 < 0.05$). However, the results show that the difference between the participants on “countering ELT hidden agendas by favoring local materials” is not statistically significant ($t = 0.26, p = 0.45 > 0.05$). The results also show that, in general, there is no significant difference between the groups' means on the principle of “countering ELT hidden agendas by favoring local materials” ($t = 0.26, p = 0.45 > 0.05$). Also, the difference between the groups' means on the variable of “legitimizing sensitivity to the ideology of ELT materials” is significant ($t = -2.9, p = 0.005 < 0.05$), favoring the ELT instructors.

Moreover, the two groups' means on each item and the total variable “countering pre-EIL misconceptions” are less than 2.5 that fall below the cutoff point (2.5). That is, both groups strongly disagreed with the items of the abovementioned variables. That is, they did not believe that:

- English is necessary for everybody.
- An English teacher should be able to speak like a native speaker.
- English should only be taught through English.
- To learn authentic English, one should trust the ELT materials designed by native speakers.
- To learn authentic English, one should trust the ELT materials designed by native speakers.

Furthermore, the means of both groups is above 3 that fall above the cutoff point (2.5). That is, the ELT instructors and the subject teachers agreed with the themes of the variables. The results also show that the difference between the two

groups is not statistically significant (p for all the items is greater than 0.05). Therefore, it could be strongly argued that:

- Nonnative English teachers can be perfect teachers.
- Students should not be expected to pronounce English words like a native speaker.
- Nonnative speakers can communicate internationally with no need to speak like native speakers.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed at investigating whether Iranian EFL teachers at the universities of Iran support the CP principles and whether the major of the teachers influences their degree of support or not. A valid instrument with highly acceptable reliability was administered to a group of ELT instructors and subject teachers. The results indicated that a majority of the ELT instructors agreed that the ELT industry is not neutral. More specifically, they argued that the ELT industry, in general, and the ELT books, in particular, reinforce particular worldviews, tend to show that the Western culture is more appreciable, promote the Western culture, and pursue hidden goals. They also believed that English teachers should look critically at the ELT industry, and English-speaking countries try to promote Western culture through their ELT books. The results of the descriptive statistics, however, showed that the subject teachers had different views about the neutrality of the ELT industry. The results also showed that the difference between these two groups of teachers was statistically significant.

Therefore, it could be strongly argued the ELT instructors strongly supported the first principle of CP, but the subject teachers did not support this principle. Such a difference might be deeply rooted in the nature of their majors. Those who hold TEFL degree might have passed some courses on critical applied linguistics. That is why they believe that the ELT industry is not neutral. This finding is consistent with the findings of Aliakbari and Faraji (2011), Yilmaz (2009), and Abelrahim (2007).

The second finding was that some components of the second variable of the study—countering ELT hidden agendas by favoring local materials—were supported by both groups of teachers. More specifically, both groups agreed that, for political and ideological reasons, third-world countries should design their own ELT materials. Also, both groups disagreed that if nonnative speakers design their own ELT materials, they will lose authenticity. The results also showed that the difference between both groups was not significant. Moreover, both groups agreed that the ELT books designed by third-world countries fail to teach good English.

Another finding was that although the teachers with TEFL degree argued that, due to our cultural differences with the West, we should design our own ELT books, the subject teachers did not believe in this statement. The difference between the participants' means on this item was statistically significant. Therefore, it could be argued that the ELT instructors supported the second variable, whereas the subject teachers supported four components and did not support the principle that Iranian EFL teachers should design the ELT books. One reason for such a difference is that subject teachers might not know that the ELT materials might convey hidden goals and, through this, the ELT industry aggresses the culture of EFL learners.

The third finding was that ELT instructors strongly supported the third variable, that is, "legitimizing sensitivity to the ideology of ELT materials," but the subject teachers did not. Therefore, it could be strongly argued the EFL teachers with TEFL degree were familiar with the ideological and cultural consequences of the ELT industry.

Another important finding was that both groups of teachers supported the last two CP principles and their subcomponents, and there was no significant difference between the two groups. More specifically, they countered pre-EIL misconceptions. They did not believe that English should only be taught through English. Neither did they believe that the materials should be provided by only native speakers.

The last finding was that both groups of teachers believed that nonnative English teachers can be perfect teachers, students should not be expected to pronounce English words like a native speaker, and nonnative speakers can communicate internationally with no need to speak like native speakers. In sum, it could be argued that the EFL teachers with TEFL degree supported all the CP principles, but the subject teachers supported only two of the principles that are related to localization and prioritizing local issues.

5. Conclusion

In line with the findings of the present study, it could be concluded that CP is one of those approaches with an egalitarian view towards education and society. ELT has been particularly influenced by power structures in the world. On the one hand, English, despite its international status, and ELT are controlled exclusively by an industry governed by English-speaking countries. On the other, the products of the ELT industry, while skillfully ignoring the implications of what has come to be known as world Englishes and EIL, are depicting a safe and promising portrait of the Western culture and offering it as an indispensable part of English language learning. What aggravate the situation are the prevalent educational misconceptions held by many ELT experts and professionals around the world who contribute to

their own self-marginalization (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a). As Kumaravadivelu points out, “by their uncritical acceptance of the native speaker dominance, nonnative professionals legitimize their own marginalization” (p. 22). It takes a CP to relinquish this standpoint and join the critical.

We should conclude that a critical standpoint in ELT with roots in CP is what suits the Iranian context in the sense that it has the potential to counter the much-despised linguistic and cultural imperialism. Furthermore, CP, due to its ethical nature, and anti-imperialistic and justice-seeking claims, conforms to the humane and religious values held by people in Iran. In view of the appropriateness and essentiality of applying the CP principles to ELT in the context of anti-imperialistic Iran, one does not need to justify the importance of the role EFL teachers, in general, and English institute teachers who teach the internationally marketed ELT products in Iran, in particular, should play in this regard.

Whereas the teachers had positive views toward the implementation of CP, the findings indicate an absence of CP in some Iranian universities. The results can, therefore, make educational policymakers review their educational policies and teacher training programs for the training that includes the CP principles can direct teacher training toward this purpose. Being familiar with the main issues in CP, policymakers should consider the requirement for implementing CP in education.

Providing and presenting critical lessons in educational curriculum, teachers can help students develop essential skills and prepare them to critically examine the power structure that exists in society in order to create an equitable and fair education and world. Other implications of the study can be a call for modifying the educational procedures to problem-posing procedures to make learners duly involved in the learning process.

Inspired by the findings, we put forward a number of recommendations which may be beneficial for further studies. It is suggested that this study be replicated on a national scale and it include a large number of participants to elevate the generalizability of the findings. Researchers are also suggested to conduct the same study with more variables added to see whether variables other than gender may lead to differences among teachers’ views on the CP principles. The instrument of this study was limited to a questionnaire; further studies can adopt other instruments such as interviewing teachers and students in order to understand their awareness of CP and its principles. Perhaps, observing classes, interviewing students and teachers, and checking the materials used in classes or in evaluations can provide a deeper understanding of practices that purport to be influenced by CP.

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