Critical Pedagogy: Concepts and Principles

Farid Ghaemi[1]

Assistant Professor in TEFL,
Department of English,
Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran

Parisa Sadeghi[2]

PhD Candidate in TEFL,
Islamic Azad University, Qeshm Branch, Qeshm Island, Iran

Abstract: *It is almost a half-century that a movement has begun to challenge the scholars and teachers of the world to rethink about the education systems and the role of power and politics in it. However, this movement, which has been called critical pedagogy (CP), is still unfamiliar for some Iranian teachers. Therefore, our duty as researchers is to make the ELT community more familiar with this issue. This study has provided an overview about the concept of CP, submitted the similar terms by different scholars, and tried to manifest CP's roots by a reference to the critical thinking, in order to reconstruct the pedagogy with a critical point of view in Iran.*

Keywords: *Critical pedagogy, Critical thinking, English Language Teaching, Post method principles*

1. Introduction

It is not a long time that scholars try to relate the knowledge production to the social and political issues, and provoke the educators to rethink about the inequality and injustice existing in the society, with a reference to critical thinking, which roots in *critical pedagogy*. The aim of this stud is to provide enough information for the teachers' community to reconsider the education system and make them more familiar with the crucial concept of CP. The necessity of this study is that the traditional English Language Teaching (ELT) seems to be very welcomed in the education system of Iran, and no one thinks about an alternation. It is hoped that the present study would familiarize teachers' community with the concept of critical pedagogy, and provoke them to reconstruct the pedagogy based on the principles of critical pedagogy.

2. Critical pedagogy and ELT

Based on Shabani and Khorsandi (2014), Marxism was the first foundation of critical pedagogy, which addressed the "socioeconomic inequality" as the main social problem. It is believed that the first person who talked about critical pedagogy was Paulo Freire (1970), a Brazilian educator, who is well-known for

his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* He states that the knowledge is not neutral, which is both affected and affects the political and social relationships in the society. In his book, Freire put the two models of education in contrast, using the expressions of "banking model of education" to refer to the traditional ELT, and "problem-posing education" as the critical pedagogy, which in the latter students "learn for freedom" not a mechanical "learning to earn". Freire has three main principles for pedagogy: "1) there is no teaching without learning, 2) teaching is not just transferring knowledge, 3) teaching is a human act". Freire's critical pedagogy is built based on love with the aim of producing a just society, in which the teachers and students create their own knowledge and reality. (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008: 27)

According to Davari, Iranmehr and Erfani (2012: 102), though Philipson's *Linguistic imperialism* was not the first publication discussing CP, it was the most effective one, which challenged the traditional ELT and tried to alter it by introducing critical pedagogy. As cited by Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008: 29), Shor (1992) called CP, *empowering education*, which is defined as "a critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change. It is a student-centered program for multicultural democracy in school and society". Shor called the traditional education "zero paradigm" which "silences critical thinking about society and ignores the culturally diverse languages and experiences of students". Shor believes that the critical teachers should "research what students know, speak, experience and feel". In fact the teachers' attitudes about the English language, culture and materials play a crucial role in transferring the language instruction.

As Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008: 33) report, Hooks (1994) called CP "an engaged pedagogy". She focuses on the class differences in education, which has explained it as something more than money that "shapes values, attitudes, social relations, and the biases" of the people; therefore, there is a need for critical pedagogy to confronts class and other forms of inequality. Based on Aliakbari and Faraji (2011), Vandrick (1994) claims that the main objective of CP is to educate all people regardless of their race, gender, or class. Giroux (2001) defines CP as a representative of "both an ideal and a strategy in the service of struggling for social and economic democracy". He recommends the teachers to research the cultural norms of the community in their classrooms, resist standardized curriculum, practice a radical pedagogy and provide their students the needed skills to become social agents. (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008: 33)

Dardar (2002) emphasizes the centrality of love for critical pedagogy. She believes that teachers in critical pedagogy do not need a one-size-fits-all curriculum, but should "move beyond the prescribed educational practice" to discover their students' needs and meet them, by helping them to understand their own personal power and potential, and "the sprit of hope". (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell 2008: 30) Based on Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012:157), McLaren (2003) explains CP as "a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state".

Kunaravadivelu (2003) argues that CP links the classroom activities to the teachers and students' real lives to push away classroom boundaries. (Sahragard, Razmjoo & Baharloo, 2014) Gor (2005) believes that the major concern of CP is with raising awareness and rejecting discrimination against people. (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011) According to Canagarajaj (2005) CP is not a theory, but "a way of doing

learning and teaching". (Pishvaei & Kasaian, 2013) For Kincheloe (2008) CP is to consider the political nature of education and the sources of power, to attempt to practice justice and equality in education, to have intellectual growth, and to alter the relationship between the learners and the teacher.

Aliakbari and Faraji (2011: 77) reported some principles for CP: problem posing education (supporting humanity), political education system, use of authentic materials (linking students' knowledge to the existing problems in society), paradigm shift in the assumed roles for teachers and students, learners' empowerment, avoidance of marginalization, and development of critical consciousness. According to them, the main goal of CP is to criticize "the schooling in capitalist societies". Drawing on Shannon (1992) the decisions about the objectives of the lessons, materials, and the relationship of students and teachers should be negotiated at schools based on the stakeholders' values and beliefs. (Aliakbari & Allahmoradi, 2012: 155) According to Riasati and Mollaei (2012: 224), three tenets about the CP are identified by theorists like Giroux, McLaren, Delpit, Ladson-Billings, Dillard, Hooks, and others:

> a) reflection upon the individual's culture or lived experience; b) development of voice through a critical look at one's world and society, which takes place in dialogue with others;

> c) transforming the society toward equality for all citizens through active participation in democratic imperatives;

Critical pedagogy does not ignore the teaching methods; rather it adds critical quality to the textbooks and the classroom instructions. It is a teaching approach that attempts to response to the local needs and cause a critical consciousness. (Riasati & Mollaei, 2012)

3. Critical pedagogy and critical thinking

As Rafi (2009) cited Lipman (2003), the main responsibility of the teachers is not to push the learners to the next level of education, but is to develop their critical thinking. In the same vein, Rafi cited Brown (2004) that the goal of an ideal academic English program is something beyond the linguistic factors, which is critical thinking. As Pishvaei and Kasaian (2013) cited Kasaian and Subbakrishna (2011), many scholars believe that ELT is not neutral and just a way of communication, rather, it transfers the hidden goals of Western thoughts and ideologies, which has been called hidden curriculum. According to Shabani and Khorsandi (2014), CP is an educational theory which aware the students about the hidden curriculum, and tries to encourage them to stands against the oppression through thinking critically. According to Canagarajah (1999), teachers have the responsibility to address this hidden curriculum, identify the hidden ideologies, and also teach the students to think critically about their leanings. Indeed, a critical curriculum should meet learners' needs; therefore, it must be localized. (As cited in Pishvaei & Kasaian, 2013)

As Rafi (2009) reports, Siddiqui (2008) and Paual et al (1993) pointed out that the most countries have an examination driven system of education; even in the US in a research it concluded that only 9% of the teachers of K-12 use critical thinking in their teaching. The main reasons for not supporting the critical pedagogy in the classrooms are suggested by Astleitner (2002) and Petri (2002) in Rafi as: 1) the lack of

educated teachers in critical thinking, 2) the lack of available textbooks on critical thinking, 3) limited time to utilize critical thinking in daily instructions.

Through this point of view, ELT textbooks are also criticized for not considering the students' real lives, and avoiding the controversial topics, representing an appropriate portrait of Inner-Circle countries. (As Pishvaei & Kasaian, 2013 cited Hurst, 2008 and Banegas, 2010)

In fact the major purpose of critical pedagogy is to equip both the teachers and learners with critical thinking, and to cause a critical consciousness, with the aim of reconstructing the society under the realm of justice, love and equality.

4. Critical pedagogy and learners

In contrast to the traditional ELT, which considers students as just the receivers of knowledge, who are not permitted to link their real-lives' problems to their knowledge, and have a passive role in the society, critical pedagogy looks at the learners as the independent and active human beings. According to Freire (1970) and Joldersma (1999), CP or problem posing education allows the learners to ask questions, and to develop the knowledge for themselves, by focusing on the problematic issues in their own lives in order to study what they really need. They are considered as the "subjects", not "objects". (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011) Based on Nixon-Ponder (1995), there are five steps of problem posing for learners: "1) describing the content of discussion, defining the problem, personalizing the problem, discussing the problem, and discussing the alternatives of the problem". (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011)

Brown (2000) believes that the students in critical pedagogy are free; they can think for themselves, and develop their own beliefs, traditions and cultures (Sahragard et al, 2014). As Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) report, Degener (2001), Guthrie (2003), and Dheram (2007) believe that in critical pedagogy, the learners participate in curricular decisions, and choosing materials; in fact they are co-agents of the teachers, and together with the teachers, they are the "agents of change", who will improve their own lives, and consequently change the structure of their society. Based on Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012:157), McLaren (2003) mentions that learners should practice critical pedagogy to "act for social justice" in their lives and society. According to Aliakbari and Faraji (2011: 77), critical pedagogy tries to "humanize and empower learners". As Sahragard et al (2014: 179) discuss, the learners in critical pedagogy are considered as the individuals with "different belief systems, background knowledge, and learning styles".

In the similar vein with the post-method principles, critical pedagogy looks at the students as the independent active individuals, who can discuss about their needs and problems, and put forward their own ideas about the curriculum and materials to be used in the classroom, and make a teacher-student rapport.

5. Empirical works on CP

Some empirical studies have been done on critical pedagogy in recent years. Carrilo and Mccaln (2004) designed a survey study on the college students of a southern region in the U.S to see whether CP is taught and assimilated there (Sahragard et al, 2014). Azimi (2008) developed a questionnaire on the application of CP in the classroom (Pishvaei & Kasaian, 2013). According to Sahragard et al (2014),

Sadeghi (2008) conducted a study to discover the relationship between the CP and beliefs of the teachers and learners in southern Iran. Zhang (2009) carried out a study about teaching critical reading pedagogy on the in-service EFL teachers in Singapore. (Sahragard et al, 2014) As Pishvaei and Kasaian (2013) report, Yilmaz (2009) in Turkey, Davari and Ghaffar Samar (2011), and Davari et al (2012) in Iran have done studies to maintain the attitudes of ELT community towards the CP principles or its practicality. Izadinia (2011) developed a questionnaire on the practicality of CP as well as the teachers' attitude towards CP in New Zealand. Pishvaei and Kasaian (2013) designed a valid questionnaire on critical pedagogy attitudes, which has been factor analyzed. Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012), Shabani and Khorsandi (2014), and Sahragard et al (2014) have used Yilmaz's questionnaire (2009) to study the Iranian EFL teachers' viewpoints on critical pedagogy.

However, most of the studies focused on only one aspect of the language or were case studies on a single group, based on their performances in the classrooms. Also some of the studies have been conducted to collect the attitudes of the teachers towards the critical pedagogy, especially in the Iranian ELT settings; while none of them has submitted some guidelines and solutions to provide a situation for CP to be applied in Iranian language institutes.

Conclusion

Critical pedagogy is a concept, which is not really familiar for the most EFL teachers of Iran. This study has attempted to gather different definitions and terms, which has been referred to the CP in an overview, and familiarize the foreign language teachers with CP's principles. In the same vein some empirical research has been studied, however, none of them had offered some guidelines for practicing CP in Iran. Therefore, more empirical studies are needed to be conducted in the future to fill this existing gap.

It is hoped that the present study had been provided enough information for the Iranian EFL teachers and other stakeholders to reconsider the current education system of Iran, which is based on a One Size Fits All curriculum, and provoke them to alter it to the critical pedagogy, especially in the universities and language institutes of Iran.

References

Aliakbari, M., & Allahmoradi, N. (2012). On Iranian school teachers' perceptions of the principles of critical pedagogy. *International journal of critical pedagogy, 4*(1), 154-171.

Aliakbari, M., & Faraji, E. (2011). Basic principles of critical pedagogy. *Second international conference on humanities, historical and social sciences. IPEDR, 17*, 77-85. Singapore: IACSIT press.

Davari, H., Iranmehr, A., & Erfani, S. M. (2012). A survey on the Iranian ELT community's attitude to critical pedagogy. *English language teaching, 5*(2), 101-111. doi:10.5539/elt.v5n2p101

Duncan-Andrade, J. M. R, & Morrell, E. (2008). *The art of critical pedagogy: possibilities for moving from theory to practice in urban schools. New York:* Peter Lang.

Izadnia, M. (2011). Incorporating the principles of critical pedagogy into a teacher efficacy measure. *English language teaching, 4*(2), 138-150. doi:10.5539/elt.v4n2p138

Kincheloe, J. L. (2008). *Knowledge and critical pedagogy: an introduction.* Springer Science and Business Media B.V.

Pishvaei, V., & Kasaian, S. A. (2013). Design, construction, and validation of a critical pedagogy attitude questionnaire in Iran. *European online journal of natural and social sciences, 2*(2), 59-74. Retrieved December 3, 2014, from: http://www.european-science.com

Rafi, M. S. (2009). Promoting critical pedagogy in language education. *International research journal of arts and humanities (IRJAH), 37*, 63-73.

Riasati, M. J., & Mollaei, F. (2012). Critical pedagogy and language learning. *International of humanities and social science, 2*(21), 223-229.

Sahragard, R., Razmjoo, S. A., & Baharloo, A. (2014). The practicality of critical pedagogy from Iranian EFLinstructors' viewpoints: A cross sectional study. *International journal of critical pedagogy, 5*(2), 178-193.

Shabani, M. B., & Khorsandi, M. (2014). An investigation into the role of Iranian EFL teachers' critical pedagogical views in their educational success. *Journal of language teaching and research, 5*(1), 144-153. doi:10.4304/jltr.5.1.144-153