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Investigating the Applicability of Critical Pedagogy Principles among Iranian EFL Teachers: From Theory to Practice

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Dr. Esmail Zare-Behtash

(Corresponding author)

Chabahar Maritime University, Iran

Iman Izadi

Chabahar Maritime University, Iran

Reza Rezaei

Vali-e Asr University of Rafsanjan, Rafsanjan, Iran

ABSTRACT

Critical pedagogy is derived from critical thinking which is considered as a postmodern approach and a newly developed paradigm in thinking about education. Critical pedagogy (CP) provides recommendations and guidelines to account for social relations and injustice in human education. This study aimed at elaborating on ILI language teachers' awareness of critical pedagogy components and the extent to which they can employ these issues in their teaching experience. To this end, 100 language teachers teaching English at Iran Language Institute (ILI) were chosen randomly to participate in the study. Since this was a mixed design study, the data gathered through CP questionnaire and the interview phase threw lights on some significant facts in this regard. The researcher made use of various statistical procedures such as descriptive statistics, factor analysis, as well as grounded theory in order to analyze both quantitative and qualitative data. Results revealed that although majority of the instructors in ILI seem to be aware of critical pedagogy principles, they do not feel free to implement them in their language classes due to some obstacles of which the top-down and centralized educational systems were known to be the most significant one. Moreover, it was revealed that obstacles in implementing CP principles in language classes will not prepare students to get familiar with these issues.

Keywords: *Critical Pedagogy (CP), Critical Thinking, ILI Instructors, EFL Context, Language Teachers*

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1. Introduction

Critical pedagogy is an approach toward education whose main purpose is to familiarize learners with some existing systems both inside and outside the classroom (Hollestine, 2006). Regarding the viewpoints on critical pedagogy, Canagarajah (2005) stated that critical pedagogy is not just a collection of ideas or thoughts, but a way of performing learning and teaching. Since the most significant goals of education are to improve learners' academic success and make them try for betterment of the society, critical students and teachers should be prepared for situating learning in the relevant social and cultural contexts and commit themselves to transform the means and ends of learning in order to construct an ethical, educational and social environment. Bassay (1999) held the view that through practicing critical

pedagogy, teachers can assist the students to improve essential skills they require for tackling with a complex and ever-changing world around them.

The traditional approach to language teaching whose goal was to transmit knowledge to students was called "banking model" by Freire (1993). This model did not give weight to the role learners, themselves, could play in the process of learning and failed to find a nexus between education and different aspects of the society learners live in. Paulo Freire (1970) was known to be the first figure who introduced critical pedagogy in the realm of education. Criticizing the banking model, he believed that education should be a dialogical process in which teachers and learners can freely share and discuss their experiences in a non-hierarchical manner.

Pedagogical theories of John Dewey (1933) had some undeniable effects on nourishment of critical pedagogy. In his seminal work, *democracy and education*, Dewey (1933) believed that an ideal classroom is a place where learners feel free to commit errors and correct themselves. In this way, they can develop the required skills to be prepared for engaging in a more genuine environment outside the educational setting. Kumaravadivelu (2003), also, held the view that critical pedagogy should make a connection between teaching or learning activities and the teachers' or learners' real lives so that the social activities be mirrored in the classroom or vice versa. Since we believe in post-method era and believe in constructivism, we, undoubtedly, have to ponder over the main principles and components of critical pedagogy such as individual differences, their background knowledge, their belief system, their learning styles, and a host of other relevant issues. Giroux (1989) claimed that critical pedagogy should not only respect the students' voices and differences, but also relate these differences to a wider world outside the classroom so that the notion of equality be reflected in the society.

Several prominent figures such as Freire (1970), Giroux (1992), Luke (1988), and McLaren (1989) have developed their idea on critical pedagogy. However, the common points of their ideas regarding this issue can be summarized as cooperative learning, consciousness-raising among learners, relating educational setting to a wider community, and critical thinking about injustice or inequalities surrounding us. In addition, Barnett (2015a) claims that criticality is not just concerned with thinking: it is a way of being and acting. It means that one should engage responsibly, ethically and actively with the world in order to demonstrate a care and concern for humanity and the world in which we live.

Going through various studies conducted in this realm, one can find a few lines of research which account for this kind of pedagogy in Iran educational setting. Moreover, the studies recorded in the literature were mostly focusing on one aspect of language learning from critical pedagogy viewpoint or the performance of a special group of teachers was studied after receiving some relevant education.

Having several branches across the country, Iran Language Institute (ILI) is a very popular Institute benefiting from a great number of experienced instructors

with high academic degrees and, mostly, the brilliant students prefer studying English or other languages in this Institute. Despite the great emphasis laid on principles of critical pedagogy, very few, if any, studies have been conducted to investigate the ILI instructors' perspective toward critical pedagogy and observe whether they implement such principles in their language classrooms. Therefore, the present study aims at investigating the applicability of critical pedagogy among ILI instructors and whether they know these issues theoretically or implement them practically. Thus, the results of such a study can be of great significance for all the stakeholders of English language teaching (ELT) in Iran, in general, and ILI complex in particular as well as other language teachers and practitioners in different educational settings of the country.

2. Literature Review

Critical pedagogy has been an interesting issue for several years and scholars in different fields of study have conducted a great deal of work on this kind of pedagogy all around the world. Studying the effects of critical pedagogy on racial awareness, Milner (2003) came to the conclusion that pre-service teachers can highly benefit from this kind of pedagogy in their educational experience; because this pedagogy could encouraged them to change their ideas toward students, and thereafter teachers considered the students as complete people who could play a role in the context outside the classroom, that is the society. As Moore (2013, p.521) puts it, teachers can only hope to impart "an extra edge of consciousness" to their students. Teachers and institutions will develop many diverse approaches to curricula and to pedagogy in response to their students, their contexts and their own beliefs and personalities.

In a study conducted by Yilmaz (2009) in Turkey, the general attitude of a group of elementary school instructors toward critical pedagogy was investigated. Yilmaz (2009) reported that due to their various educational backgrounds, workplace environment, and their educational level, the participants had different viewpoints on critical pedagogy. Many scholars believed that enhancing critical thinking in learners and applying critical pedagogy in an educational setting can lead to improvement of reasoning skills among different groups of learners. Regarding this issue, several various lines of research have been conducted in some



language learning milieus. Considering the critical pedagogy training to a group of in-service teachers in Singapore, Zhang (2009) reported that both teachers and learners were highly influenced by critical reading and the participants stated that their critical thinking ability in various aspects was promoted after receiving such educations.

In another study carried out by Hollstein (2006), some pre-service teachers at Ohio University were asked to respond to some questions on critical pedagogy. The main themes emerging from the study were participants' unfamiliarity with critical pedagogy, their inability to apply critical pedagogy in their classrooms, and their misunderstanding about critical pedagogy in mistake for social activism. Regarding the practicality of critical pedagogy among Iranian language teachers, Sahragard, Razmjoo, and Baharloo (2014) conducted a cross-sectional study in which 20 language teachers with different academic degrees answered some questions on critical pedagogy and mentioned whether they implemented it in their classrooms. Results of their study revealed that the language teachers were, more or less, familiar with CP principles but, according to the participants' viewpoints, putting those principles into practice was not an easy task.

In another study carried out by Alibakhshi and Macki (2011), the viewpoints of a group of guidance school teachers on critical pedagogy were taken into account through a mixed design approach. Results indicated that although majority of the teachers were somehow familiar with CP principles in general, due to several themes, known as obstacles, emerged in qualitative section of the study, the participants believed that they could not apply those principles in their language classrooms. Moreover, in another study benefiting from mixed design approach, Abdelrahimi (2007) investigated the relationship between teachers' gender and experience and their general attitudes toward critical pedagogy. The overall results of his study indicated that gender and teaching experience made no significant difference in teachers' awareness on critical pedagogy.

Since Iranian students like to learn English and they know that English courses at school, per se, cannot provide them with enough knowledge of English, majority of them prefer attending language learning institutes as a way to improve their English language learning. Having several branches

across the country and benefiting from experienced teachers in all levels, Iran Language Institute (ILI) is one of the greatest institutions enrolling so many language learners annually. Keeping that in mind, the present study's researchers intended to know to what extent language instructors in ILI are familiar with critical pedagogy principles and whether they implemented these issues in their language classrooms. Accordingly, the current study is an attempt to shed light on the familiarity rate of the ILI instructors with critical pedagogy principles and the extent to which they put into practice these issues in their language classrooms in order to benefit from its advantages and make the students familiar with such a phenomenon in language learning. To this end, the current study aims at providing answers to the following research questions:

1. Are ILI instructors aware of critical pedagogy and its underlying principles?
2. To what extent can ILI teachers implement such issues in their language learning classrooms?
3. Can they really familiarize students with such a phenomenon through their teaching or not?

3. Methodology

Design of a study is primarily dictated by the nature of research questions the study addresses. The current study's questions can be classified as both quantitative and qualitative, or mixed ones. Therefore, a mixed design study was drawn upon. Mixed method takes both quantitative and qualitative features into account during data collection and data analysis phases. Results obtained from quantitative phase of the study were enriched and completed via the information gleaned through an in-depth semi-structured interview. Therefore, a more profound insight could be produced regarding the issues of critical pedagogy among Iranian instructors.

3.1. Participants

Benefiting from multi-stage sampling, the researchers selected 100 language teachers, both male and female aged 23 to 45, from among all ILI English teachers teaching in different branches of ILI in Shiraz, Iran. Majority of the teachers, 75%, were MA holders and the rest had BA degree in English teaching. They have been teaching English for more than seven years in Iran language Institute (ILI) and some other educational contexts. Participants for the second phase of data collection were selected from among those answered the

first part positively. After interviewing the 17th participant, we reached data saturation point where no new information was provided by more participants.

3.2. Instrumentation

In this study, two kinds of instruments were employed. The first one was a critical pedagogy questionnaire developed and validated by Maki (2011) and the reliability of the questionnaire was reported to be 0.82 through Cronbach alpha coefficient. Therefore, it was considered as a reliable and satisfactory instrument for collecting data on critical pedagogy. The questionnaire included 30 items on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, and coded 1 to 5. In order to confirm the questionnaire's underlying constructs, the researchers conducted a confirmatory factor analysis and finally, 6 factors or components emerged.

Due to factors loading on questionnaire items, the emerged factors were named as follows: the first factor including items 1 to 9 was named "socio-cultural components"; the second factor consisting of items 10 to 13 was named "language and ideology"; the third factor, "ethical remarks and educational equity", was loaded on items 14 to 17; the fourth factor manifesting through items 18 to 21 was named "learners' requirements and their heterogeneity"; the fifth factor named "students' viewpoints on teaching procedure and first language role" included items 22 to 27; and finally the sixth factor, "critical thinking", was loaded on items 28 to 30.

In qualitative phase of the study, a semi-structured interview was conducted. The interviewees were asked several questions to elaborate on critical pedagogy and reflect their viewpoints. Open-ended questions are the main building blocks of semi-structured interviews; therefore, participants can freely express their ideas about the phenomenon under investigation (Aray et al., 2010).

3.3. Procedure of the Study

The data collection procedure was performed during 2015-2016 academic year in Iran Language Institute (ILI). As the study's design dictated, two different phases were gone through. First, the required quantitative data was gleaned through a critical pedagogy questionnaire which was distributed among participants to fill in. Second, the qualitative phase was conducted through a face-to-face in-depth interview. Participants were informed about purpose of the study and they signed the

consent form before taking part in the study. The participants' permission was also obtained by the researchers to audiotape each interview for the purpose of qualitative analysis. The amount of data gathered in this section was determined based on data saturation point. Finally, the data was transcribed verbatim and analyzed by the use of qualitative techniques of the grounded theory.

In order to analyze the quantitative data through appropriate statistical procedures in SPSS, first, the items were loaded on various factors through factor analysis and based on the information the items shared, each factor was named differently. Then, the data was analyzed by the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics

4. Results

In this study, 100 language teachers teaching English in Iran Language Institute (ILI) participated and provided us with some precious information on critical pedagogy and its applicability in the ILI educational context. To this end, a questionnaire consisting of 30 items (6 different dimensions) was administered to the participants and their responses to each dimension were analyzed separately. In this section, first, the quantitative results are presented, and then, the qualitative part and the extracted themes will be introduced.

4.1. Quantitative Results

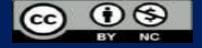
4.1.1 Factor 1: Socio-Cultural Components

The first factor consisted of nine items (items 1 to 9) which were mainly coping with socio-cultural issues. Descriptive statistics for participants' responses to this factor is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for participants' responses to factor 1

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	No comment	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q ₁	34.0 %	47.0 %	9.0 %	10.0 %	0%
Q ₂	39.0 %	38.0 %	11.0 %	7.0 %	5.0 %
Q ₃	47.0 %	38 %	11.0 %	4.0 %	0 %
Q ₄	27.0 %	44.0 %	16.0 %	12.0 %	1%
Q ₅	11.0 %	10.0 %	30.0 %	35.0 %	14.0 %
Q ₆	26.0 %	45.0 %	7.0 %	14.0 %	8.0 %
Q ₇	34.0 %	48.0 %	8.0 %	4.0 %	6.0 %
Q ₈	10.0 %	27.0 %	21.0 %	28.0 %	14.0 %
Q ₉	21.0 %	54.0 %	12.0%	8.0%	5.0%

As shown in table 1, more than 30 % of the participants strongly believed that learning is a social process and it takes place as a result of social interaction, while 47% agreed, 9% had no comment, and 10 % disagreed with item one. In item 2, again more than 35 % of participants strongly agreed that whatever is said in the classroom must be in line with improvement of the society, 38% agreed, 11% had no comment, 7% disagreed, and



just 5% strongly disagreed with this item. In item 3, more than 80% of the participants believed that their knowledge must have a representation in the society; in addition, more than 70% of the participants answering item 4 agreed that school can be considered as an appropriate place for discussing social issues while 13% were completely disagree with this item. In item 6 which accounts for course book designing, majority of the participants (nearly 70%) agreed that in writing language course books, various factors including local values, beliefs and interests should be taken into consideration. Regarding the relationship between language, power, and ideology which were the main content of item 7, over 80% of the respondents agreed that there is a relationship between these three concepts and the rest had no idea or disagreed with the issue. In item 8, 28% of participants disagreed that educational materials can be domesticated, 14% strongly disagreed, 21% had no comment, 27% agreed, and 10% strongly agreed. In item 9 which accounts for tests and the degree of their effects and consequences on individual's life, educational, political contexts, more than 70% of the teachers agreed that test should have some real effects and consequences in the society, but a few of the participants did not have a bright idea in this regard. In order to see whether there is a significant difference between the means of sample and population on the first dimension of critical pedagogy, a one sample t-test was run and the results are shown in the following table.

Table 2: Inferential statistics for participants' responses to factor 1

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
fac1	58.717	99	.000	33.79000	32.6481	34.9319

As indicated in table 2, there is a significant difference between mean of sample and that of population (sig=.000, df=99, mean difference=33). Therefore, it can be mentioned that ILI language teachers have a positive view toward the socio-cultural component; that is to say, they believe that in English language classes, various social and cultural issues must be attend to.

4.1.2 Factor 2: Language and Ideology

This factor, including four items, considers the language and ideology from the participants' viewpoint and how they are interrelated. Descriptive statistics for

respondents' responses to this factor is shown in the following table.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Participants' Responses to Factor 2

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Comment	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q10	22.0 %	36.0 %	17.0 %	16.0 %	9.0 %
Q11	44.0 %	38.0 %	4.0 %	10.0 %	4.0 %
Q12	18.0 %	47.0 %	17.0 %	16.0 %	2.0 %
Q13	17.0 %	21.0 %	33.0 %	20.0 %	16.0 %

As indicated in table 3, more than 50% of participants agreed that decisions about educational system are made by executive directors in a top-down process, 17% had no comment, 16% disagreed, and 9% strongly disagreed with the item. In item 11, more than 80% of the respondents agreed that teachers must be aware of hidden curriculum as well as ideologies hidden in course book contents, but a few of the participants did not have such an idea. Regarding the effects of language on making changes in individual's culture and beliefs, more than 60% of the respondents agreed and less than 20% disagreed with the issue. 17% had no comment, and the disagreed comprised 16% of participants, and just 2% strongly disagreed. In item 13, nearly 33% of participants had no comment about the idea that education is a political action and may lead to violation of the rights of some particular group, 20% agreed, 10% strongly agreed, 20% again disagreed, and 17% strongly disagreed with the issue. In order to observe whether there is a significant difference between the means of sample and population on the second dimension of critical pedagogy, a one sample t-test was run and the results are shown in the following table.

Table 4: Inferential statistics for participants' responses to factor 2

	Test Value = 0					
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
fac2	48.710	99	.000	14.01000	13.4393	14.5807

The results shown in table 4 indicate that there is a significant difference between mean of sample and that of population in this dimension (sig=.000, df=99, mean difference=14). And the mean of sample exceeds that of population; therefore, it can be concluded that most ILI teachers are aware of the relationship between language and ideology.

4.1.3 Factor 3: Ethical Remarks and Educational Equity

This category includes four items which take into account the ethical issues and educational justice from the viewpoint of English language teachers. Descriptive

analysis for this category is shown in table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for participants' responses to factor 3

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	No comment	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q14	20.0%	40.0%	24.0%	13.0%	3.0%
Q15	11.0%	38.0%	19.0%	20.0%	12.0%
Q16	11.0%	35.0%	24.0	23.0%	7.0%
Q17	33.0%	55.0%	6.0%	4.0%	2.0%

Regarding the effects of teaching methods on creation and reinforcement of social inequalities, nearly 60% of the participants agreed on the issue, 15% disagreed, and 25% had no idea in this regard. In item 15, 39% of teachers agreed that gender differences may cause differences in language learners' way of learning, 10% strongly agreed, 19% had no comment, and more than 30% did not have such an idea. With regard to the gender differences as essential issues in language teaching, 40% of the respondents agreed, 24% had no comments or ideas, and more than 30% disagreed on the issue. In item 17, more than 80% of the participants agreed that there should be a relationship between students' abilities, their learning styles, and the teachers' teaching methods. After that, in order to see whether there is a significant difference between the means of sample and that of population on the third dimension of critical pedagogy, a one sample t-test was run and the results are shown in the following table.

Table 6: Inferential statistics for participants' responses to factor 3

	Test Value = 0					
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
fac3	53.647	99	.000	14.15000	13.6266	14.6734

As the results in table 6 indicate, there is a significant difference between mean of sample and that of population (sig=.000, df=99, mean difference=14); therefore, it can be mentioned that ILI language teachers are aware of ethical remarks and educational equity in teaching.

4.1.4 Factor 4: Learners' Requirements and their Heterogeneity

This domination of critical pedagogy accounts for students' needs and their differences and how the educational system, including teachers and the provided materials, can cope with these issues. In the following table, descriptive statistics for participants' responses to this category is provided.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics for participants' responses to factor 4

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Comment	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q18	40.0%	45.0%	8.0%	4.0%	3.0%
Q19	37.0%	46.0%	2%	11.0%	4.0%
Q20	15.0%	51.0%	20.0%	10.0%	4.0%
Q21	31.0%	50.0%	2%	11.0%	6.0%

As indicated in table 7, more than 80% of the respondents agreed that course book contents must be based on the students' needs and wants, but a few of them did not believe in it or had no idea. Moreover, regarding the compatibility of teachers' teaching methods with students' interests or desires, majority of the participants, more than 80%, had positive ideas and a few of them had neither positive nor negative attitude toward it. In item 20, 51% of respondents agreed that learning attitudes and styles of male and female students are different, 15% agreed, 20% had no comment, 11% disagreed, and just 3% strongly disagreed that different genders have different attitudes and styles of learning. In item 21, 80% of the participants agreed that if students are not satisfied with course contents, teacher must revise them and make some necessary changes, while less than 20% of them did not have such an idea. Then, in order to consider whether there is a significant difference between the means of sample and population on the fourth dimension of critical pedagogy, another one sample t-test was run and the results are shown table 8.

Table 8: Inferential statistics for participants' responses to factor 4

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
fac4	50.287	99	.000	15.70000	15.0805	16.3195

As the results in table 4.8 indicates, a significant difference is observed between the mean of population and that of sample (sig=.000, df=99, mean difference=15). So it can be stated that Iranian language teachers believe that students' needs and differences must be taken into consideration in language teaching.

4.1.5 Factor 5: Students' Viewpoints on Teaching Procedure and First Language Role

In this category, students' comments and ideas about language teaching procedure and the use of language learners' mother tongue (L1) are taken into account. The following table shows the descriptive statistics for the participants' responses to this category.

Table 9: Descriptive statistics for participants' responses to factor 5



Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Comment	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q22	0%	2%	2%	25%	71%
Q23	2%	1%	4%	22%	71%
Q24	3%	12%	10%	38%	37%
Q25	12%	15%	18%	33%	22%
Q26	19%	25%	10%	24%	22%
Q27	10%	18%	14%	44%	14%

Participants' responses to item 22 indicated that more than 90% of respondents disagreed that the only person who must think about students is the teacher, and students do not have qualification and ability to think about their affairs, 2% had no comment, and 2% agreed with this view. In item 23, in addition, nearly 95% of the respondents disagreed with the idea that teacher is the only person who must speak in the classroom and students are just some passive listeners. Moreover, in item 24, nearly 75% of respondents disagreed with the view that it is not necessary for the students to play a role in determining educational materials and resources, 10% had no comment, 12% agreed, and 3% strongly disagreed.

Regarding the priority of English language learning over Persian learning, more than 50% of the participants disagreed that learning English has priority over learning Persian, 17% had no comment, 15% agreed, and 12% strongly agreed with this perspective toward English and Persian languages. Moreover, considering the next item about making students' accent close to that of native speakers, 46% of the participants disagreed, 10% had no comments and nearly 45% agreed that closeness to native speakers' accent is the most important point in English language teaching. In the last item of this category, 43% of participants disagreed that in English teaching as a foreign language, Persian language must not be used, while 15% strongly disagreed, 14% had no comment, 18% agreed, and 10% of participants strongly agreed with this item. Finally, in order to observe whether there is a significant difference between the means of sample and population on the fifth dimension of critical pedagogy, a one sample t-test was run and the results are shown in the following table.

Table 10: Inferential statistics for participants' responses to factor 5

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
fac5	27.153	99	.000	4.76000	4.4122	5.1078

As the results in this table show, there is a significant difference between mean of sample and that of population (sig=.000, df=99, mean difference=4). Therefore, it can be mentioned that ILI language teachers believe that students' comments and ideas as well as their mother tongue must be taken into account in the process of language teaching.

4.1.6 Factor 6: Critical Thinking

The last category accounts for language learners' critical and creative thinking as well as the way they should follow their language learning procedures. The following table shows the descriptive statistics for participants' responses to this factor.

Table 11: Descriptive statistics for participants' responses to factor 6

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Comment	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q28	53%	39%	6%	1%	1%
Q29	36%	51%	5%	7%	1%
Q30	55%	34%	2%	3%	6%

As shown in table 11, 53% of respondents strongly agreed that learning is a dynamic process in which students learn by doing not by memorization, 40% agreed, 6% had no comment, and just 1% strongly disagreed with this item. Therefore, more than 90% of the participants believed that effective learning takes place by being involved in it not the act of memorization. In item 29, more than 80% of the participants agreed that prior experiences of students provide the basis for learning new subjects and materials, 5% had no comment, 8% disagreed, and 1% strongly disagreed with the issue. Finally, in the last item, almost all of the participants, 90%, agreed that language learners must think about what they learn and take practical steps to realizing them and a few of them did not have such an idea. In order to consider whether there is a significant difference between the mean of sample and that of population on the sixth dimension of critical pedagogy, a one sample t-test was run and the results are shown in the following table.

Table 12: Inferential statistics for participants' responses to factor 6

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
fac5	27.153	99	.000	4.76000	4.4122	5.1078

As the results in table 4.12 indicate, a significance difference is observed between sample's mean and that of

population (sig=.000, df=99, mean difference=12). So, it can be stated that Iranian language teachers believe that critical thinking principles must be taken into consideration in language classes.

4.2. Qualitative Results

In order to observe to what extent ILI teachers can implement critical pedagogy issues in their language learning classrooms and find answers to the second question of the study, the qualitative phase of the study was run. Therefore, in addition to the above-mentioned quantitative results, the qualitative phase was also conducted for further investigation into the critical pedagogy principles applied by the ILI teachers. To this end, a face to face in-depth interview was conducted with 17 participants. The participants in this section were those who answered the questionnaire positively and it appeared that they were aware of critical pedagogy principles. After carrying out the interviews, they were transcribed verbatim. Then, using qualitative techniques of grounded theory, the researchers extracted the following themes which were introduced as the main obstacles in implementing the CP principles in ILI complex: Institutional obstacles, personal obstacles, and language learners' obstacles.

4.2.1. Institutional Obstacles

Almost all of the participants in the interviews believed that institutional barriers are the main obstacles for application of critical pedagogy in the language classrooms. They claimed that there is a center in the country that produces all of the educational materials for all students without taking into account the different needs and interests of language learners. This center, also, obliges all of the English language teachers to teach all of the produced materials and if they do not obey the procedures, they will be reprimanded. Moreover, the testing system is also dictated by the same center and these pre-arranged tests act as a kind of controlling instruments that, to some extent, harness the creativities and innovations of language teachers. Regarding these claims, one of the participants stated:

"I must teach what I do not believe in, because I know my students better than someone else, I know my students' needs and differences. There is not a space for my own innovation and creativity in the materials provided by the Center. We are imposed to teach what the Center dictates, and we are just transmitter of prescribed materials. Then, what is the role of our intellects as a teacher? In fact, we are slaves of textbooks".

Another participant mentioned that:

"The education system, in Iran in general and in ILI in particular, is test-oriented; you must prepare students to be good for the final exams. If students do not have a good performance in final tests or do not pass the test, you will be blamed. Well, it is clear that we, teachers, have to teach for tests and put emphasis on the main points which help students pass the test. Therefore, we should improve students' knowledge of testing rather than knowledge of subjects and contents. You have no choice except this method".

Prescribed teaching methods were considered as another indicated problem in the application of critical pedagogy from teachers' points of view. In a top-down manner, teaching the textbooks is dictated by education department either via a teacher manual or through some in-service training courses. Moreover, some participants believed that the rigid teacher-training sessions, hold periodically by ILI managers, do not take into account the real needs of language teachers and they do not hear the teachers' voices. Regarding these issues, one of the participants stated:

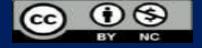
We are told how to teach different parts of a course book, and we have some periodical in-service education to remind us how to teach. Actually, we are not allowed to make changes in the way materials are presented to the learners. "There are supervisors from educational system who sometimes come and examine our way of teaching and if they do not become satisfied with our teaching, we will receive some negative points which influence our promotion and position for the following years. Due to this, we just follow the table of contents of the prescribed textbooks and the dictated teaching strategies".

4.2.2. Personal Obstacles

Some of the participants argued that personal barriers prevent teachers from being critical in their teachings. Based on received responses from the interviewees, some of them acknowledged that they lack the background knowledge and experience to understand and apply principles of critical pedagogy in their teaching. Moreover, some of the respondents stated that there are some rules which must not be violated and violation of these rules can have some negative consequences for teachers. On the other hand, some teachers touched upon other issues such as inequalities in teacher promotion, load of work and expectations, low payment, and teaching based on a particular framework which make them ignore critical approaches and innovations in their teaching experience.

Elaborating on these matters, a participant stated:

"I know the necessity of critical issues in language teaching, but up to now, I have not used these issues in my own teaching, because I have not enough knowledge to insert these issues in my



teaching. By the way, if a teacher criticizes these topics and structures and insert some other things in his or her teaching, he will be reprimanded. Moreover, after 5 years of teaching, due to the inequalities in education system, I got burnout, I am getting tired of teaching and that is why I am not looking for innovations in language teaching, I do not care for critical issues, it is not important for me whether students are learning in the same way or the other”.

4.2.3 Language Learners' Obstacles

Another theme that was extracted from the participants' responses was the issues related to language learners. That is, the issues related to learners stand against applying the principles of critical pedagogy in language teaching.

Some important issues the language teachers mostly complained about were learners' lack of motivation, their different proficiency level, and the class size which prevent teachers from applying critical approaches in their language teaching. Regarding these issues, a female participant mentioned:

Whenever I talked about change, I did not receive any positive feedback from students. They were more interested in traditional ways of teaching to kill the time. In addition, students in a class have different levels of proficiency, so some issues must be avoided; your teaching method must be adapted to lower-level students, you are not free to pose any topic. It is better to teach based on traditional language teaching methods. On the other hand, the management of a classroom with a large number of students is very difficult and it wastes your time and energy, so there is no enough time and energy to apply critical approaches in such crowded classrooms. By the way, when you cannot practice something in your classroom, it is not easy for language learners to learn it properly”.

Therefore, it can be concluded that being aware of CP principles is completely different from applying them in real language classroom. Majority of the participants stated that they know what critical pedagogy is and how its principles are significant for both language teachers and learners, but due to the various problems and obstacles revealed in the qualitative section of the study, they are not completely free to implement such issues in their language classrooms.

5. Discussion

In order to provide answers to the questions posed in this study, both qualitative and quantitative data were drawn upon. The quantitative data gathered through a validated questionnaire paved the way for answering the first research question which accounts for ILI instructors' familiarity with critical pedagogy principles. Then, qualitative data obtained via a semi-structured interview provided us with information about the practicality of

such issues in ILI complex as well as familiarizing students with these principles and components. It is also worth mentioning that since all of the research questions in this study are somehow intertwined, providing answers to one can lead into the clarification of some aspects of the other questions. Therefore, the questions are complimentary to each other and provide deeper insight into the phenomenon being investigated.

Regarding the first research question, it was revealed that majority of the instructors in ILI are more or less familiar with the components and principles of critical pedagogy. Providing answers to the factors emerged from the questionnaire, the participants mostly believed in critical and creative thinking, putting value to cultural and social differences, first language significance in teaching, and other issues related to critical pedagogy. For example, for the first factor, most of the respondents believed that schools and language learning institutes are appropriate places for discussing cultural and social problems and various local values, learners' interests, and beliefs should be taken into account in the language classroom, course books, and materials provided for these purposes. These issues are in line with three parameters Kumaravadivelu (2003) proposed, specially the particularity parameter in which he stated that every language teaching program should be appropriate for a particular group of teachers who teach a particular group of learners following particular purposes in a particular context. Akbari (2008) also believed that activities taking place in a language classroom context must be related to the ones occurring in the wider society outside the classroom.

The second factor accounted for language and ideology. Majority of the participants indicated that educational system is controlled by a top-down process and teachers need to be aware of the hidden curriculum and hidden ideologies inserted into the course books contents. Regarding the hidden curriculum, McLaren (2000) believed that the hidden ideologies and curricula keep instructors and educators as slaves to economic and political system, so that they cannot follow their own interests and creativities in the classroom. With regard to the third factor which accounted for ethical remarks and educational equity, most of the teachers believed that social inequalities have had roots in some factors

such as gender differences, learners' abilities and learning styles, and teachers' teaching methods. These results are in line with those of Alibakhshi (2011) who argued that if language learners' personality type, attitudes, learning styles, and interests are not given weight in language teaching procedure, learning cannot easily and smoothly take place and learners' achievements will abruptly decrease.

For the fourth factor accounting for learners' needs and heterogeneity, most of the participants claimed that everything presented in the language classroom should be in accordance with learners' needs and requirements. Moreover, different learners have various needs and the teacher must be patient enough to account for these differences. The findings related to this category are consistent with those of Shore (1993) who mentioned the concept of "power sharing" in which he considers the students' needs as input for classroom decisions and actions, and even the input for curriculum design. Attention to first language use and students' viewpoints on teaching procedure was the main focus of the fifth factor. Majority of the participants believed that teacher should not be the only person talking in the classroom; rather students should also have the right to express their ideas and viewpoints regarding various points during teaching procedure. Moreover, the instructors stated that there is no need to make the students' accent close to that of native speakers and first language can be used as a tool for clarifying some points while teaching another language. In addition, Akbari (2008) argued that learners' L1 can be considered as a boon to facilitate communication in L2 and provide instruction for some activities in the classroom. Regarding the last category, critical thinking, majority of the participants believed that learning is a dynamic procedure and learners learn something by doing not by memorization. Therefore, they considered critical thinking as a significant factor which can lead learners to a more successful learning experience.

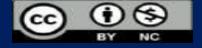
The above-mentioned findings are to a great extent similar to the results of the studies conducted by Maki (2011) and Sahragard (2014) who found that Iranian language teachers in various levels seem to be aware critical pedagogy principles and components.

In order to answer the second and third research questions, the qualitative data

was analyzed and deeper insights were provided with regard to the practicality of critical pedagogy in ILI complex. Results of this section indicated that majority of the teachers are aware of critical pedagogy principles but when they want to put them into practice, they encounter various problems which hinder them from moving forward. Some of the instructors believed that since they have to follow a fixed syllabus in ILI, there is no room for a negotiated syllabus and teachers do not feel free to manipulate the prearranged syllabus dictated to them. In addition, some of the participants stated that depending on the language learners' level of knowledge and understanding, some kinds of creativities and extra-syllabus programs can be implemented in language classrooms, but this is not the case for all groups and contexts. Comparing the instructors teaching at graduate courses with high school and Institute teachers, Sahragard (2014) found that University instructors can benefit more from negotiated syllabus than the high school teachers.

Regarding the applicability of critical pedagogy in ILI classes, majority of the participants believed that there are some major obstacles which prevent the teachers from implementing such issues. They stated that if they want to do something other than the prearranged syllabus or manipulate it, they will not be able to finish the course books or achieve the goals dictated by the institute. Therefore, a top-down educational system is watching their activities inside the classrooms. In addition, limited time of the courses and size of the classes were introduced as another hindrance for applying critical pedagogy components. Since teachers have to finish the course books in a limited time during each semester, they do not find any extra time to practice critical pedagogy in their classes. Similarly, in another study conducted by Maki (2011) and Sahragard (2014), teachers believed that the main barriers for applying critical pedagogy were class size, top-down educational system, teaching burnout, and etc. Furthermore, teachers stated that a centralized system of teaching does not allow teachers to add creativity to their teaching procedures and these matters can lead into teacher burnout, because they have to follow the same procedure over and over every day and every semester.

Regarding the last research question which is about familiarizing language learners with critical pedagogy principles, it was revealed that teachers cannot make



learners familiar with critical pedagogy by saying it or just talking about it. Rather, learners can learn something by doing it or being involved in it. As Benjamin Franklin says “tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.” While teachers are not able to implement critical pedagogy principles in their language classes, how is it possible to familiarize language learners with such issues? Therefore, it is evident that language learners cannot be aware of these issues unless they practice them or observe them being put into practice by their language teachers.

The total results of the current study are supported by some other lines of research conducted in this area. Pishgadam and Mirzaee (2008) claimed that issues related to postmodernism are not still put into practice in Iranian educational system which is a centralized and top-down system. Maki (2011) and Sahragard (2014) also came to the conclusion that although language teachers in various levels claim to be aware of critical pedagogy principles and components, they do not feel free to implement these issues in their language classes and cannot free themselves from the fetters of preplanned and prearranged decisions. In another study conducted by Wilson (2016), it was revealed that by providing delicate scaffolding and maintaining high engagement, we can pave the way for students to become better critical readers and more conscious thinkers as they step forward in their future studies.

Therefore, results of the current study as well as some other relevant studies indicate that language instructors at high schools, language institutes, particularly ILI, and universities seem to possess a positive attitude toward critical pedagogy and its significance. However, in all these levels, except in some rare cases, practicality of critical pedagogy principles is a matter of debate and instructors encounter various obstacles in practicing such issues in Iranian language learning and teaching context.

6. Conclusion

In this study, an attempt was made to elaborate on familiarity of ILI instructors with critical pedagogy principles and the extent to which they can implement such principles in their language classes. The final results indicated that majority of the language instructors are to a great extent aware of these principles and know that how influential these issues can be with

regard to the language learning procedure. However, from the practical angle, it was revealed that these language instructors are not able, or are not allowed, to implement critical pedagogy principles in their language classes. During the semi-structured interview phase, the participants claimed that there are some evident obstacles which prevent them from applying the critical pedagogy components in the classroom. The most important obstacle, they believed, was a centralized and top-down educational system in ILI complex. That is, teachers are given a prearranged syllabus to follow and they cannot manipulate it during the course. They also stated that large number of students and limited class size are some other obstacles which hinder language teachers from applying critical pedagogy issues. Moreover, the language instructors believed that when the educational system is not flexible enough to let them apply critical pedagogy components in the classroom, it will not be easy to make the students familiar with such issues, because learners need to observe how something is practiced and they should be involved in it, then, they will be able to learn it.

Finally, it can be concluded that although Iranian language teachers seem to be familiar with critical pedagogy principles and components, they cannot apply them in their teaching activities and they are still following the principles of method era rather than those of post-method era. Subsequently, they face problems in training language learners and find it difficult to enable them to master such issues in their language learning experience.

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Appendix: Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire:

1: strongly disagree 2: disagree 3: no comment 4: agree 5: strongly agree

1. Learning is a social process and it takes place as a result of social interaction.
1 2 3 4 5
2. Whatever is said in the classroom should help improvement of society.
1 2 3 4 5
3. Students must realize their knowledge in the society.
1 2 3 4 5
4. School is an appropriate place for discussing social problems and issues.
1 2 3 4 5
5. Language is an ideology, therefore, teaching a language is teaching a new ideology.
1 2 3 4 5
6. In writing language course books, local values, beliefs, and interests must be taken into account.
1 2 3 4 5
7. There is a relationship between language, power, and ideology.
1 2 3 4 5
8. Educational subjects can be domesticated.
1 2 3 4 5
9. In test preparation, their effects and consequences on individual's lives, and on educational, Social and political contexts must be taken into account.
1 2 3 4 5
10. Decisions about educational system are made by executive directors in a top-down process.
1 2 3 4 5
11. Teacher must be aware of hidden curriculum and ideologies hidden in contents of educational course books.
1 2 3 4 5
12. Language may lead to a change in individuals' culture and beliefs.
1 2 3 4 5
13. Education is a political action and may lead to violation of the rights of some particular group of society.
1 2 3 4 5
14. Teaching method in the classroom may lead to creation and reinforcement of social inequalities.
1 2 3 4 5
15. Gender differences may causes differences in language learners' way of learning.
1 2 3 4 5
16. Considering gender differences in language teaching is an essential issue.
1 2 3 4 5
17. There should be relation between students' abilities and learning styles and teacher's teaching methods and techniques.
1 2 3 4 5
18. Course book contents must be based on the analysis of students needs.
1 2 3 4 5
19. A teacher's teaching method should be compatible with student's interests.
1 2 3 4 5
20. Learning attitudes and styles of male and female students are different.
1 2 3 4 5
21. If students are not satisfied with contents and way of teaching, teacher must revise them.
1 2 3 4 5
22. The only person who must think about students is the teacher, and students do not have qualification and ability to think about their affairs.
1 2 3 4 5
23. Only the teacher must speak in the class and students must only listen.
1 2 3 4 5
24. It is not necessary for the students to play a role in determining educational materials and resources.
1 2 3 4 5
25. Learning English has priority over learning Persian.
1 2 3 4 5
26. In English teaching, to make students accent close to that of native speaker is the most important point.
1 2 3 4 5
27. In English teaching as a foreign language, Persian language must not be used.
1 2 3 4 5
28. Learning is a dynamic process which students learn by doing not only by memorization.
1 2 3 4 5
29. Prior experiences of students provide the basis for learning new subjects and materials.
1 2 3 4 5
30. Students must think about what they learn and take practical steps to realize them.
1 2 3 4 5