

Towards a Critical ELT Pedagogy Approach at Universities in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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ABSTRACT

Critical Pedagogy (CP) is an approach that engages learners in questioning their power in relation to some given inequities in the society. It promotes the development of critical thought, social awareness, and learner voice alongside language proficiency. Language, as a vital tool for expressing one's thoughts, plays a crucial part in what is known as Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) which involves learners' roles in their teaching approaches and their learning style(s). This study does not only describe the status quo of ELT in Kurdistan Region of Iraq, but also advocates for an alternative approach. Through eliciting feedback from 35 local university teachers and interviewing 10 of them, this paper aims to shed light on EFL teachers' attitudes and challenges towards critical pedagogical approach. The forthcoming deep analysis will set the main findings in perspective in relation to scholarship on critical pedagogy and ELT in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Kurdish ELT teachers recognize that the adoption of critical pedagogy in Kurdistan Region has been met with systemic challenges such as resource inadequacy, teacher qualification shortfalls, class sizes, the curriculum limitations, and the students' general attitudes. Despite the challenges, attempts are made to apply the principles of CLT in some classes.

KEYWORDS: Banking Education, Critical Pedagogy, Language Pedagogy, ELT, Kurdish EFL Learners

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, English is the language that is most frequently spoken. Speakers of different languages try to learn English due to the significance of the language. According to current statistics, one in four people can communicate in or comprehend English (Ismail & Yusof, 2016). English is essential to research, aerospace, computers, diplomatic efforts, and tourism. Thus, proficiency in the language ensures success in both the classroom and the global marketplace. It also makes one feel confident about themselves and allows one to enjoy music, television shows, movies, and literature. For these explanations, to carry on the global growth process, Kurdish university students in the Kurdish-speaking

region of Iraq (KRI) needs to accept English as a key to success. Nevertheless, KRI's English language instruction faces several limitations, which will be discussed throughout this paper, putting an argument forward for enhancement in the process of teaching and learning.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF MAJOR LANGUAGE LEARNING THEORIES

Generally, four substantial ideas about language acquisition can be highlighted: Behaviorism, Nativism, Constructivism, and Social Interdependence. The concepts of constructivism and nativism are centered on how cognition promotes language growth, while the first model depends on the idea of the response to stimulus behavior (Skinner, 1985). The foundations of sociolinguistics and sociopsychology form the basis of social relations theories.

Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (KUJHSS) Volume 1, Issue 1, 2017.

Received 28 September 2024

Accepted 30 October 2024

Regular research paper: Published 29 June 2025

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According to behaviorist theory, reinforcement that is beneficial and ongoing exposure help to build language. First proposed by Pavlov in his research, Skinner (1957) expressed the thesis with more excellent reinforcement (Sofi-Karim, 2015a). According to Skinner, language learning happens through a stimulus-response-reward cycle (Sofi-Karim, 2015b). He revealed that the youngster mimicked his parents by making connections involving words and natural items, whereby the parent's approval served as the incentive and the item being discussed as a stimulation.

In 1959, Chomsky raised a different idea known as nativism. He introduced the concept of universal grammar, the notion of natural, physiological grammatical groups, including a noun group and a verb group, that support adult language acquisition and linguistic growth in kids (Sofi-Karim, 2015 a). Additionally, he proposed the existence of a language training mechanism that made a universal grammar functional. Chomsky (1965) characterized conversation among adults as degenerate, implying that language acquisition occurs at this level in children. According to him, the youngster is bombarded with various speakers, hearing instances of speech from people with various voices and dialects. As a result, the youngster gains competence and can form coherent phrases. According to Chomsky (1976, p.20) "Having a language allows us to generate an infinite amount of phrases."

Constructivism, a framework that Piaget (1964) created, attributes language acquisition to three distinct processes: equilibration (the mental reorganization of details), accommodation (creating space for the knowledge by even changing it), and integration (the introduction of the details). This idea states that a kid's awareness of an expression differentiates from an adult's comprehension because the youngster undergoes several stages before reaching adult comprehension.

The theory known as social interactionism maintains that language development requires interpersonal encounters. This hypothesis, which derives from Jerome Bruner's (1966) research on social education, holds that language development occurs due to encounters that support an infant's language acquisition. This approach also emphasizes the practical significance of language. Furthermore, it addresses how language acquisition results from socializing, which teaches children how to integrate into the community. According to Nor & Ab Rashid (20018), encounters give newborns the

encouragement and structures they need to acquire language. Psychologists are using cutting-edge research methods like magnetic resonance imaging with magnets (fMRI) to attempt and better comprehend this.

Nonetheless, it is clear from the studies and hypotheses that frequent engagement with the language and innate capacity derived from neuro-functionalities are the two main components of Aquitanian language learning (Van Assche et al., 2018). One of the fundamental requirements for developing language learning materials is to ensure that learners receive enough time to get used to sound and writing (Rashid et al., 2016). Thus, the importance of social contacts, conversation, and engagement increases for language acquisition.

3. FROM BANKING EDUCATION SYSTEM TO CRITICAL PEDAGOGY EDUCATION SYSTEM

In 2016, Freire, alongside his supporters, rejected the typical teacher-led classroom, which linearly imparts skills from the teacher to the pupils. They also stood firm, opposing the banking model of schooling. In his groundbreaking book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2016), Freire strongly criticized the banking model for teaching and argued in favor of a thorough examination. In his view, creating issues was a crucial instrument for enabling students to move from being data processing machines to being capable decision-makers by increasing their awareness of and resistance to repressive social norms.

In the conventional conception of education, a comprehensive investigation of the relationship between teacher and pupil at any stage comprises a patient, observing object (the students) and a recounting topic (the teacher); according to Freire, "learning thus involves an act of putting in, whereby the educator is the depositor, and the pupils are the recipients" (2016, p48). Rather than interacting with the class, the teacher sends out communiqués and makes deposits that the learners patiently take in, retain, and regurgitate. Since learners involvement entails collecting, filing, and retaining the deposits, the "banking" notion for instruction gives limited learning opportunities (Freire, 2005, p. 72).

The teacher-student connection is paradoxical within the banking framework for education because specific behaviors and mindsets foster a restrictive atmosphere. Additionally, it makes the assumption that understanding is a gift that those who possess it impart

to others who do not. Teachers are the information repositories, whereas students are ignorant, passive beings. The teacher bestows information on the learners; the students cannot challenge the ideas. In the eyes of the public, teachers have the power to think, discipline, exercise legitimacy, and make judgments on behalf of their charges. Accordingly, the teacher is the focus of this approach to education, and the students—who are not even thought of as humans—are the things being studied (Freire, 2005).

Freire (2005) promoted a different approach to the banking paradigm that involves problem-posing instruction that can result in a critical mindset. The teacher has faith in the children's imaginative capacities in this schooling. The teacher now functions as a student to pupils instead of an teacher or depositor. It is believed that humans are sentient creatures. Critical pedagogy training, therefore, turns into a laboratory activity. The approach aims to humanize kids while also bringing them up to speed.

In contrast, the stifling monotonous discussion is used throughout this as a teaching strategy. Problem-posing instruction challenges the hierarchical structure of "banking" learning by treating both teachers and pupils as subjects. New relationships between students and teachers and the resolution of teacher-student disputes occur through discourse.

According to Hooks (1994), Freire (2016), and Sharif Uddin (2019), critical instruction is a pedagogical approach that addresses repressive power dynamics and inequities that present in educational contexts. Freire's critical pedagogy aims to liberate disadvantaged students from the status as components of instruction and turn them into objects of their own emancipation and autonomy. According to Freire, an teacher is not only someone who imparts knowledge but also continuously learns throughout a process that involves mutual growth (Freire, 2005). Therefore, according to Freire's problem-posing approach, autonomy is the goal of education (Chin & Osborne, 2008).

This lab method provides versatility in overcoming the limitations of banking education. Changing the classroom's seating configuration is one option. One can arrange all of the seats to create a circle. This small deed has significant meaning (Saleh, 2013). It establishes a mutually beneficial interaction between the teacher and the pupils. Incorporating students into choosing the course's objectives, aims, and materials is a further

strategy to mitigate the power imbalances and disparities inherent in the banking framework of schooling. Giroux (1997) asserts that since all decisions regarding educational content and material relevance depend on the pupils' requirements and preferences, there is no predetermined curriculum or framework. One could work with the pupils to do this. The teacher must give this procedure direction and organization. "The liberating teacher does not wipe his or her hands off the learners" (Shor, 1997, p56). Instead, collaboratively, teacher-student and student-teacher build the educational environment's methodology.

Through examining the practices of educators committed to the critical instructional concept, Kareepadath (2018) found that the formalized educational setting and teacher personality interplay in particular manners that shape the character of classroom instruction. The rigid school schedule and program are a constant obstacle to teachers' efforts to be analytical in their instruction. However, the investigation conducted by Emenyeonu (2012) shows that the main obstacles to applying critical pedagogy in Oman include society, students' dearth of radiation exposure, exporting instructional resources, and learners' incorrect perceptions of the approach. Motlhaka (2016) looked at the application of critical methodology and its effects in English language classes to improve the teaching methods of English teachers and increase students' capacity for critical thought.

4. CRITICAL LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

Critical methodology in language instruction is a standpoint in speech curriculum concept and educational practice that encourages and improves instructing and investigating languages in methods that encourage social fairness. In this instance, the widely used expression "social justice" refers to one or more questions of modern society (or societies) that represent the needs of women, minorities, working people, non-heterosexuals, and marginalized populations, as well as viewpoints that value harmony and conserving the environment.

This context views language generally as having both practical and structural parameters, socially engaged as conversation, and involved in the formation of people and the upkeep and modification of societal systems. Its primary protagonist, Brazilian literacy teacher and instructional designer Paulo Freire (1958 [2004]) coined

the phrase “critical philosophy” in the late 1970s, a few years after his publications gained international recognition. This implies a relationship to the field of social theory, commonly referred to as “critical theory,” yet early research did not find a strong correlation between the two (Blake & Masschelein, 2003). Using the more expansive and well-established phrase “radical methodology” may have been wiser in light of the extensive advancements in this field.

In practical linguistics and language instruction, a relatively popular name for social justice-oriented approaches is “critical pedagogy.” Initially, Freire’s critical pedagogy aimed to promote understanding of the two primary languages in a manner that would enable the working class and impoverished to understand actuality and take action to better their lives. This method was founded on radical, evolving, and Catholic critiques of humanity. In Freire’s research, the class served as the central unit of evaluation, complemented by the notion that the “human vocation” included the capacity to better oneself and assist humanity.

4.1 PRINCIPLES OF CLP

The six guiding principles of Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) are as follows:

- (1) CLP is a political procedure;
- (2) CLP is student-centered;
- (3) CLP transforms classrooms into democratic public circles;
- (4) CLP is intensely collaborative;
- (5) CLP uses emancipatory power; and
- (6) CLP aims to transform society.

These ideas clarify the fundamental features of CLP as proposed by the numerous evaluated studies (Sacadura, 2014).

Teaching critical languages is a political endeavor. According to McLaren (1989), critical methodology’s primary focus is politics’ importance in comprehending the schooling system. This serves as a foundation for the initial CLP concept, which states that pedagogy is political. It maintains that learning and instructing languages are political operations in an ideological environment—the classroom. This goes against the conventional belief that schooling should be neutral. As per Aliakbari and Faraji (2011), this principle is the primary focus of critical pedagogy. The term “political”

must be clarified in this regard since it has multiple meanings and interpretations.

According to Dahl (1991), “political” within this context of CLP means any human interaction that entails considerable authority, law, or responsibility. It is a situation in which the teacher serves as the only source of information and the only person in charge of control and authority within the learning environment. Another name for this conventional perspective on teaching is the teacher-centered approach. CLP adopts the student-focused approach, which is precisely the antithesis of this strategy.

The second principle is as follows: CLP focuses on the student. A classroom that prioritizes student needs is known as a CLP setting. A learning setting that prioritizes students is one in which (1) teachers acknowledge their position as learning enablers, and (2) the teaching methodology shifts from simply transferring information to supporting students’ independent exploration of knowledge through mentorship and critical group discussions.

The third recommended premise is that CLP transforms classrooms into democratic, open areas. Giroux’s idea and talks on CP serve as the primary foundation for this theory. To gain a deeper comprehension of this idea, it is necessary to address its central concept—the public realm adequately. The Frankfurt School theorist and psychologist Jurgen Habermas established the concept of the general sphere (Crookes, 2012). He additionally served as an expert in critical thought. Pedagogy of critical terminology is interactive. It is assumed in the argument that CLP helps to turn language classrooms into liberal public spaces that students will be allowed to freely debate and discuss topics in class once this change has taken place.

The fourth premise is as follows: CLP is quite dialogical. Critical language education uses liberating responsibility; popular perceptions of authority are consistently unfavorable and hostile to democratization. However, this idea fails to consider that power always exists in human institutions, including democratic governments (Crookes, 2012). This widespread misunderstanding may have its roots in the excessive abuse and misuse of power across nearly all periods of human political evolution, which may have contributed to the perception of power as evil.

The goal of critical language acquisition is to alter society. The ultimate goal of CLP is to revolutionize

society (Crookes, 2012). The core of CLP is changing a regular language class into one sensitive to the concerns and challenges plaguing the community that those language students live in. It seeks to render each language learning chance an occasion to talk about and confront societal and political problems, which makes language training more purposeful. By utilizing critical discussions in the classroom, CLP raises students' awareness of the socio-political issues in their environment.

4. 2 Significance of CLP

The two primary goals of education are to help pupils succeed academically and to equip individuals to improve society. These goals are possible only if educators use critical pedagogy (CP), encouraging students to think critically and take ownership of their educational experience. McLaren (2003) claims that CP builds students' self-esteem, challenges societal power structures, and promotes raising consciousness and cooperation among educators and pupils alike. Even if most conventional teaching methods and strategies give students a predetermined array of instruments, the materials assume that students will learn from them. According to conventional methods, professors impart knowledge to students who do not actively participate in the educational procedure.

It follows that students can have an essential function in learning, something that conventional structures do not reflect. The critical methodology is believed to be a socio-political strategy that aids educators in fostering democracy in the educational environment. Nobody can downplay the importance of CP. CP aims to offer students studying second languages the chance to think critically, be bold, take chances, and confront social norms in the learning environment. Furthermore, Freire (1970) states that critical instructional design in cooperative learning environments demonstrates students' active engagement through instructional tasks like dialog. Given the unique characteristics of humans and their developmental processes, the conversational form may have a significant role in the development of crucial and proactive acquisition of languages.

In dialogic environments, learners are better able to overcome their challenges. Alsamadani (2010) highlighted the significance of people's self-regulation techniques in assisting the process of fostering language acquisition. McLaren (2003) states that critical pedagogy (CP), a form of postmodern educational activity,

simplifies teaching while attempting to raise students' awareness of the repressive systems and underlying inequality around the globe. According to some definitions, critical pedagogy is an instructional strategy that seeks to objectively examine the social and cultural contexts in which a particular language is employed and its intended uses, as opposed to merely imparting the prevailing viewpoint on language, culture, and other subjects.

Critical pedagogy includes encouraging students to think strategically, talk freely, take the initiative, participate in language interactions, and so forth (Piosang, 2018). CP stems from critical theory. One of the key contributors to critical educational methodology was Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator. According to Freire's perspective from 1970, CP has to do with philosophical and operational advancement, which is arguably the most significant achievements of Freire's 1970 (Tokas, 2015). CP was the notion of consciousness—a consciousness related to activity yet beyond comprehension. According to McLaren (2003), critical instruction is a method of considering, negotiating, and changing the connections between classroom instruction, generating knowledge, school institutional framework, and the political and material relationships of the community, humanity, and nation-states.

CP is considered a mode of thought. Its doctrine is based on a variety of critical concepts, such as post-colonialism and queer theory. According to Barjesteh et al. (2015), the advocates of CLP feel that learning is entwined with society's cultural, political, and economic structures in daily life and should be challenged and pushed for societal advancement. It is more important to consider the connection between learning and instruction than the one involving teachers and students. The CP indicates that understanding, empathy, and shared goals should form the foundation of this connection. Scholars of all centuries practiced analytical thinking as the primary lens to examine actuality before developing critical philosophy. The Greek thinkers, the Renaissance researchers, and academics of the 19th and 20th centuries debated the applicability and the practices of analytical thinking.

4.3 Critical Language Pedagogy in ELT Classes

One of the most important prerequisites for implementing a critical model in any regional ELT environment is the democratization of decision-making,

particularly with regard to material, teaching methods, and assessment (Piosang, 2018). Socio-political indifference and hazy generalizations plague ELT lessons as long as departments in capitals choose the material and examination procedures. The immense potential that CP holds for curriculum development and pupil empowerment will materialize once learning, and by expansion ELT, cultivates the necessary mindset, begins locally, and recognizes the importance of student perspectives as valid points of departure in any meaningful educational endeavor.

Culture has long been regarded as an essential component of language acquisition and instruction environments; many language teaching instructional materials have drawn their content from it. Nevertheless, most of the cultural material has come from the intended language because the rationale behind learning a new language involves that one desires to interact with people who speak the language (Piosang, 2018). One can only communicate effectively with knowledge of the social conventions of the community whose members they are attempting to establish ties with.

4.3.1 Teachers' Perspective on CLP

Teachers perceive CLP as a critical approach to imparting knowledge to learners. As critical educators who see critical language instruction as a means of bringing about change, teachers base their decisions on the idea that critical methodology in any educational institutions' additional language educational facilities can be seen as an empowering instrument that fosters social transformation by opposing the present situation and encouraging the growth of critical awareness. Hegemonic ideologies have become more powerful and robust, spreading misconceptions and encouraging estrangement, significantly impacting society and other countries (Da Silva et al., 2018). The strategy's success in the countries where its implementation has been used proves that the urgent requirement for Critical Language Instruction is absorbable.

Critical teaching of languages has taken up a lot of room in study and practice across the globe because of its importance to learning. The field first appeared in Brazil thanks to the efforts of Paulo Freire, who was jailed and banished in the 1960s government for his beliefs and actions supporting learning for the underprivileged (Da Silva et al., 2018). The fundamental ideas of critical pedagogy primarily stimulated the innovative thinking

of scholars working with their natural languages. English teachers refrained from participating in the initiative (Lakshmi et al., 2023). This is most likely because, in the 1970s, Brazilian English specialists were big fans of the communicative methodology since mastering a language meant gaining linguistic and interpersonal abilities devoid of any political or ideological overtones (Cox et al., 1999).

In order to encourage social transformation, the method would consist of figuring out where students fit into the environment and letting them participate in the vital growth procedure. In order to facilitate this method, teachers must be able to offer learners the tools they need to think independently instead of handing them pre-made justifications (Pessoa et al., 2017). It is possible—even necessary—for schools to implement critical language teaching, and doing so in light of current political circumstances is essentially a form of opposition. In this view, if teachers acknowledge that learning is political and should thus seek to promote social justice, teaching effectively is vital—even though it could prove a dangerous job for the individuals participating in the process (Pennycook, 2021).

Any instructional endeavor intended to promote providing an objective viewpoint has to distance itself from its difficulties and complications, irrespective of the absence of prompt answers, as Duboc and Ferraz (2018) clarify. Teachers perceive essential task cycles as an option for the growth of counter-hegemonic instructional methods, even though the intimidating information that keeps coming out indicates that academics and teachers are ineffective in a manner in which numerous modifications have been imposed on humanity without any public input (Duboc & Ferraz, 2018). Teachers agree that “a critical approach among the deficiencies (or among the gaps) of the educational system is necessary” in an environment of social and political unrest. Deconstructing the methods of discourse that are always present in the classroom—whether they are found in educational materials, curricular standards, or the students themselves—will help the project succeed.

Curriculum standards, or the views, ideas, and opinions of the teacher and the students in question, are essential in achieving the objectives of the curriculum (Shin & Crookes, 2005). Teachers should enthusiastically encourage their colleagues to take up this task. Promoting critical awareness ought to inspire people by teaching them to see past the illusions surrounding them,

understand how it is built and functions, and comprehend the ways they can break free from repressive and controlling elements of society. It should also teach these individuals how to reinvent the community to express themselves and engage in social interaction. Examining advertisements critically enables one to comprehend how these texts influence reality (Shin & Crookes, 2005). Therefore, it could be said that teachers have an essential role in the entire process of education, and their influence should be considered in making any changes.

4.3.2 Learners' Perspective On Clp

Critical perspectives on education seek to advance the development of students' critical consciousness. The accusation against these methods is frequently that they are brainwashing which is not what Freire suggests (Silva, 2018). One essential component of language instruction is that its components should be connected to the problems and concerns that learners face in their lives, aspects that they may be competent to enhance or alter with the help of knowledge or learning a second language, and the resulting shift in awareness. In order to create an ecological essentials analysis, the training team working on Freire's initial literacy programs lived in the areas where learners were receiving the instructions (Halabsaz & Hedayati, 2016).

Incorporating visual Pie Chartry (pictures or photos) or actual events about parts of the educational experience has been and continues to be a defining quality. Using pictures as projected tools, learners can build or express specific elements of the subjects or linguistic information they want to acquire and be able to command through discussion and remarking on the visuals (Brown & Sekimoto, 2017). Additionally, as fostering students' independence and capacity for action is one of the strategy's fundamental goals, students are heavily involved in creating educational and instructional materials. Similarly, parents and other individuals posted remarks on the university's Facebook wall, raising doubts about the necessity of talking about genders throughout library week.

Learners have the authority and capacity to make their own decisions. Elsa Auerbach was the most recognized early supporter of Freire's concepts in ESL, and her works are still precious for educators wishing to understand what critical language methodology entails in action (Wallerstein & Auerbach, 2004). Recent supporters of

critical methodology in international languages have offered insightful advocacy, evaluations, and specific accounts of genuine short instructional efforts. The field has additionally branched into more theoretical language instruction (Benesch, 2009) alongside more research-oriented materials (e.g., Norton & Toohey, 2004). Because it concentrates on the demands of learners and their involvement in their learning, it adheres to additional advancements like task-based language learning and Student autonomy.

Most notably, Vandrick (1998) has supported feminist pedagogy in teaching languages by describing feminist student engagement methods using components of the feminist method. In order to help male learners achieve this objective, the model guarantees that female learners receive equal attention and guidance. A teacher using a feminist language curriculum ensures that the material covered in the learning environment is free of bias, steers clear of stereotypes, and prioritizes topics about women.

Critical pedagogy is based on critical self-reflection and the realization that one's social context can serve as an avenue of information. Put differently, and critical instruction can help students from culturally disadvantaged backgrounds comprehend how marketing influences or shapes their daily lives and how individuals can change how advertising influences culture. Critical instructional methods, a teaching strategy that aims to revitalize students' learning experiences via historically and culturally meaningful instruction (Crookes, 2012). For a considerable amount of time, critical academics and theories have maintained that achieving equity and social justice requires a democratic, liberatory, and transformative educational experience. In this process, the role of the students should be highlighted as the process serves to make changes in the mentality as well as the behaviors of the students.

5. METHODOLOGY

In this paper, two tools of data collection have been utilized; survey and interview. For the survey, 35 university teachers are surveyed and 10 were interviewed. They are from different public universities in the Kurdistan Region-Iraq with various teaching experiences, but they are all specialized in English language teaching. The following section is provided to present and analyze the data collected from the respondents and interviewees.

6. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The survey information along with the data collected from the interviews give insights into how critical university-level English teachers in the Kurdistan Region apply critical language pedagogy techniques. In this section, the data will be presented and analyzed based on certain topics, starting from the background information to their attitudes towards language pedagogy, then teaching techniques and their approaches to professional development.

6.1 Teachers' Background Information

As it is a norm in most of the surveys, the background information of the respondents presented in this table:

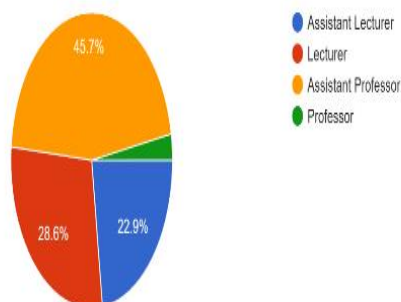
Number	Degree	Percentage
11	MA	31.4%
24	PhD	68.6%

Table 1 presents Background Information

As table 1 shows more than two third of the respondents have PhDs, while the remaining one third have MA. This data is important because it is an expectation that university teachers are more likely to have their doctorate and teach at the university level. However, for the interview, the ratio is 50% MA holders and the other 50% is PhD holders. This was due to the commitment of the interviewees as 5 of each category were interviewed.

Another part of background information is specified to the academic title of both the respondents of the survey as well as the interviewees as shown in this pie chart.

Academic Title
35 responses



In Pie Chart 1, (45.7%) of the respondents report being currently an "Assistant Professor" at their institution. The rest hold positions such as "Lecturer" (28.6%), "Assistant Lecturers" (22.9%) and "Professor" (2.8%). Again, this breakdown follows the characteristics of the target population. Although a significant segment of the respondents are at a junior level of occupation, the scholarly and professional profiles, in conjunction, maintain the characteristic profile of the faculty at the university in general. As for the interviewees, one out of ten was a "professor", three of each other categories were selected to have a comprehensive view of all the different academic titles.

As a result, table 1 and pie chart 1 ensure the survey's effectiveness regarding capturing input from the intended parameters—Kurdish university-level EFL teachers. This gives much credence to the insights in the data concerning critical pedagogy perspectives and practices in this demography. The high proportion of PhDs holds promise regarding qualifications, given that scholars identify limited teacher training as impediments to adopting critical pedagogy (Brime & Abdullah, 2020). However, the "Lecturers" numbers here mean most respondents are not senior faculty deciding curriculum standards and policies. This may delimit their pedagogical freedom. However, the data emanates from teachers are well-placed to offer an insider's perspective on critical pedagogy instruction.

6.2 Attitudes Toward Critical Pedagogy

The first part of the survey aims at posing some questions related to the basic principles of critical pedagogy in order find out the attitudes of the teachers towards these principles as shown in this table:

Table 2
part of the survey related to the principles of critical pedagogy

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Strongly agree	Agree
3- Integrating critical thinking skills into language lessons is essential for effective teaching	6.8%	4.6%	0%	34.3%	54.3%
4-The use of technology enhances the effectiveness of English language teaching	0%	2.5%	3.2%	42.9%	51.4%
5-Traditional lecturing is less effective than interactive teaching methods in ELT	2.8%	11.4%	8.7%	45.7%	31.4%
6-Continuous assessment is more beneficial for student learning than end-of-term exams	0%	6.6%	0%	51.4%	42.9%
7-Promoting student collaboration is a substantial factor in language acquisition	0%	0%	8.5%	42.9%	48.6%
8-Incorporating cultural sensitivity into language instruction enhances student engagement and comprehension	0%	5.8%	11.4%	31.4%	51.4%
9-It is imperative to comprehend the cultural heritage of students in order to develop effective courses	0%	0%	25.7%	14.3%	60%
10-The integration of culturally diverse examples into instructional materials enhances the relevance and efficacy of lessons	0%	2.8%	5.8%	20%	71.4%

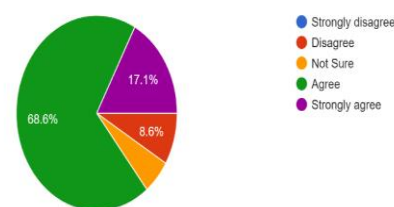
Table 2 shows the responses to basic principles of critical pedagogy adapted from the academic literature. The average rating for this set of questions is 3.2 on a scale from 1 to 5, which indicates a general agreement with the values of critical pedagogy. Question 3 to 6 further explained the following issues: integration of analytical thinking, adaptation of instruction, use of interactive methods, and leveraging technology. These scored highly on agreement, conformity to the literature on critical pedagogy affecting the development of critical thought, and actively encouraging the active participation of learners (Crookes & Ziegler, 2021). Questions 7–10 on continuous assessment, peer collaboration, and prompt feedback also attracted positive comments. Literature also suggests these methods for making the language content socially relevant for diverse students (Kwee & Dos Santos, 2022).

The core techniques of critical pedagogy, i.e., critical reflection, individualized instruction, egalitarian classrooms, and sociocultural consciousness techniques, are responded to very positively by Kurdish university lecturers. However, it is moderate, showing a good chance for better practice. Research shows that the barriers against critical pedagogy in this context will likely be systemic blockades, such as standardized curricula, limited class time, and solid teacher-centered expectations (Ghafar & Mohamedamin, 2023). Consequently, while the teachers theoretically hold critical pedagogy in high regard, resource, training, norm, and policy constraints are blocking its application in practice. Targeted professional development initiatives could help address this discrepancy.

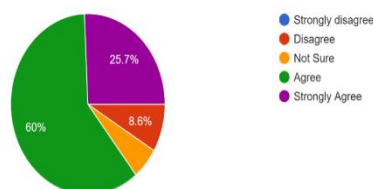
6.3 Teaching Techniques

In this section, the data related to revealing the teaching techniques of the included teachers in the survey.

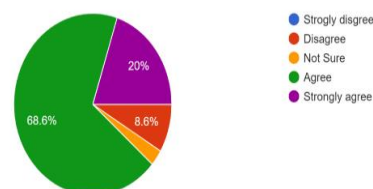
11. Encouraging students to acquire English can be facilitated by valuing their linguistic heritage.
35 responses



12. Cultural sensitivity should be a primary consideration when designing language curricula.
35 responses

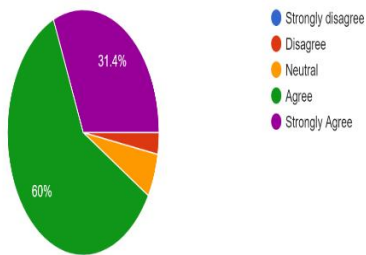


13. I make a conscious effort to design entertaining and relevant lessons for every student.
35 responses



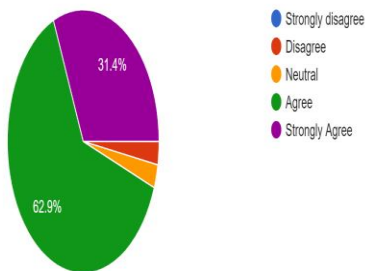
14. I prioritize questioning and conversation among my students in my teaching style.

35 responses



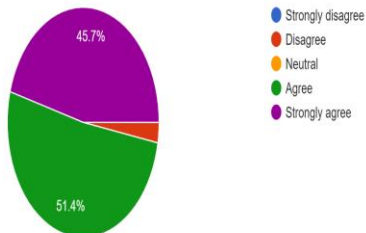
15. I modify my teaching strategies frequently to keep students engaged and involved.

35 responses



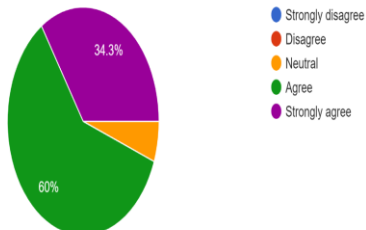
16. Giving students practical or hands-on experience improves their learning process.

35 responses



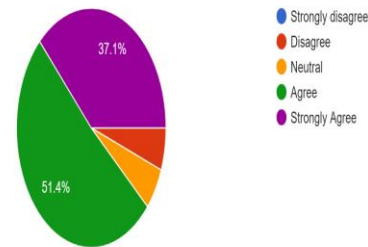
17. To accommodate various learning styles, I employ a range of instructional strategies and resources.

35 responses



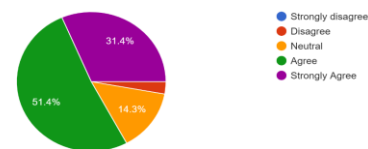
18. Student feedback is essential to the development of my lesson plans and classroom activities.

35 responses



19. Incorporating prompt and constructive feedback into my teaching methodology constitutes a fundamental element.

35 responses



Pie Charts 2-11 report using student-centered and engaging teaching techniques when practicing critical pedagogy. The average rating across these items is 3.5 out of 5, slightly higher than the previous section on abstract attitudes. Pie Charts 2-7 reflected strong agreement with catering lessons to the needs and interests of learners, using discussion, modification of techniques, providing hands-on learning, and allowance of diverse styles. The first symbolizes an orientation to responsive, democratic classrooms rooted in critical pedagogy (Shin & Crookes, 2005). Similarly, Pie Charts 8-11 illustrate an uninterrupted application of quick feedback, diverse forms of assessments, peer review, and student self-evaluation. On the other hand, research supports strong feedback loops during critical thinking and language skill development. They are also coupled with peer interaction.

In general, teachers profess to use learning-centered instructional approaches advocated within critical pedagogy scholarship. However, the mid-range scores are indicative of a growth area. Critical pedagogy itself is not referred to directly in making teaching choices. This is to say that more training could help educators to be purposeful in anchoring the methods in critical pedagogy, which helps develop critical thinking and socio-political consciousness. Critical reflection of power dynamics in the classroom is very important in teaching that will be able to enlighten rather than perpetuate structural oppression (Kina & Gonçalves, 2018).

6.4 Professional Development

In this section, the data related the professional development of the surveyed teachers is presented in table 3.

question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Strongly agree	Agree
20- I take part in professional development events on a regular basis to improve my teaching abilities	0%	14.3%	2.8%	45.7%	37.1%
21-Keeping up with the most recent ELT research and approached is essential to my professional development	0%	2.8%	5.8%	45.7%	45.7%
22-Working together with other language instructors is a crucial aspect of my professional development	0%	2.8%	11.4%	34.3%	51.4%
23- I often incorporate self-reflection and self-evaluation into my work routine	0%	2.8%	2.8%	25.7%	68.6%

Table 3 assesses teachers' attitudes toward continuous professional growth and staying abreast of developing techniques. This segment has scored the highest mean value of 4 out of 5. Question 21 and 22 demonstrate a high level of agreement around the importance of participating in workshops, collaborating with others, reading research, and reflecting engaging in practice. The salient studies similarly underscore the importance of sustained training and challenging preconceptions for the meaningful adoption of critical pedagogy (Da Silva et al., 2018). Furthermore, they also manifest openness to feedback, attending seminars, and trying new ways of teaching. Critical pedagogy is a vision of teaching as a never-ending learning process for the student and the teacher herself (Kina & Gonçalves, 2018).

Openness to learn more indicates readiness to reconsider power relations and to build skills that catalyze the critical awakening of students. It probably requires prompting to specifically attach growth opportunities with the principles of critical pedagogy. The target professional development programming could offer guided support to applying critical techniques in the local context. This may include, but not be limited to, strategies that would improve teachers' analytical thinking, discussants' tactics, examples tailored to Kurdish classrooms, and training local trainers in the training of localized critical pedagogy. With enough scaffolding, teachers can progress from an abstract sympathy with the world's injustices to the real classroom practices of giving students empowering tools to analyze and change those social injustices critically.

7. DIFFERENCES AMONG UNIVERSITIES IN KURDISTAN REGION-IRAQ

While these provide general trends from the survey data, differences between institutions offer key details. The sample included teachers from some public and private universities in the Kurdistan Region. However, as the size and resources of institutions vary so widely, their

demographics of student bodies and language requirements, class size, and qualifications of teachers would vary a lot as well. These likely will affect the practicality of critical pedagogy and to what extent it becomes adopted. Schools with large class sizes, limited budgets, and few PhDs on the faculty might need help applying more participatory teaching methods, group work, and activities with critical analysis. Universities catering to urban student populations may also have greater diversity in learner backgrounds versus more homogenous rural campuses. This makes the discussions around sociocultural identities and biases richer.

Finally, institutions with more stringent English proficiency requirements would have more latitude to incorporate critical content. Such nuances would blur in aggregate results as the individual questions of the questionnaires. Follow-up studies may use surveys of a similar nature but at the individual university level. Comparisons of findings show where the principles of critical pedagogy resonate and where the institutions need more scaffolding. It would also highlight the strengths of some departments from which other schools would draw best practices. Tailoring interventions to individual university contexts would accelerate the transition to the adoption of comprehensive critical pedagogy.

7.1 Teacher Perspectives

Interviewing teachers from different universities regarding their experiences and views toward critical pedagogy would be informative above the questionnaire data. This could need in-depth observations of what the teachers lived through but were not in any way captured by the questionnaire. While the literature identifies this as a common barrier, the qualitative data will clarify how it plays out in the individuals' teaching contexts. In terms of giving interviews, there could be a list of topics that can be incorporated into the interview question and answer, such as the ways teachers conceive of critical pedagogy, what their criticisms are for traditional Education, what

techniques are currently used to foster discussion and critical thinking, what structural or cultural factors are hampering them, what training still needs to be accomplished, or what stories of success do they have to share. Comparing narratives would illuminate both common themes and individual constraints requiring customized support.

7.2 Student Attitudes

Another dimension that should be discussed in the survey data is students' willingness and reluctance to use critical pedagogy. Structured focus groups could provide more about learners' willingness and reluctance. The norms of a conservative social environment may have made students less willing to question authority figures and their experience of oppression openly. Their feedback is valuable in the sensitive and constructive design of the critical pedagogy curricula. To compare them, focus groups would involve schools whose students are required to learn different languages and then establish if their proficiency levels determine the students' openness to critical content. Furthermore, balanced gender representation would bring to light differences in willingness between male and female learners to participate. Understanding the worldview of the learners and their needs in critical pedagogy is instrumental in its effective implementation that should attract the learners instead of alienating them.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the survey results are useful, a few caveats should be noted to contextualize them and to help guide further research. The first significant caveat of the results is that these are entirely self-reported data of teachers. More objective information about how they teach could be gained from observation of their classroom work. Self-reports could exaggerate the use of progressive techniques due to social desirability bias. Secondly, though a large sample size of 35 respondents and 10 interviewees was reached, it was very small compared to all university teachers in the Kurdistan Region. A larger, randomized sample would further increase the generalizability of findings to the population. Moreover, conclusions gain further power regarding the overall adoption of critical pedagogy through replicating the research across several universities.

Third, the questionnaire design and the interview are open for tightening to capture the nuances. Follow-up focus groups could provide more data about the particular enablers and barriers. Open-ended questions eliciting detailed written responses may also enhance the qualitative quality. Fourth, measuring student outcomes would validate better than just the teacher's self-perceptions. Exposing students to critical pedagogy

might be able to correlate results with learning gains, exam performance, critical thinking ability, and multicultural competence through studies. Post-graduation longitudinal tracking might also reveal long-term social impact.

It would be very useful to include comparative data from other Middle Eastern contexts. This would make clearer tendencies directly related to the Kurdistan Region, as opposed to general trends of adaptation of critical pedagogy to localized contexts. Working with researchers across the region would get knowledge moving in both directions. Rectifying these limitations would leave much room for further research.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1- There is a gap between the agreement with the reality of CLP and its implementation in practice. This could be due to constraints documented in prior research, such as curriculum restrictions, norms of teacher authority, and limited resources.

2- Professional development through comprehensive training programs on implementing critical pedagogy is needed. This may involve the development of strategies for teachers and could include strategies for stimulating analytical thinking, ways of leading discussion, examples at local levels, and manageable activities in large classes.

3- The real institutions that house the qualifications of the teachers, diversity of students, class size, and available resources are subject to more pressure and challenges that make critical pedagogy all the more worthwhile but certainly require focused efforts. This might include working with teachers on the objectives of critical pedagogy and how to translate these into day-to-day instruction in order to help accelerate the acceptance of this empowering pedagogical approach.

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