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Critical pedagogy from the perspective of the Saudi English language and literature university students

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Abstract

This study attempts at introducing critical pedagogy in addition to its possible applicability in EFL classrooms in some Colleges of Arts in KSA. (Giroux, 1997) defines critical pedagogy as follows: While pedagogy is most simply conceived of as the study of teaching and learning (Knowles, 1973), the term critical pedagogy embodies notions of how one teaches, what is being taught, and how one learns. In this study Critical pedagogy is mainly aims to view the relationship between Language learning and social change. Through a quantitative method the necessary data has been collected to undertake this study. A questionnaire was distributed to (40) EFL students at Qassim University. The aim of the questionnaire was to gather the necessary data as related to the learners' attitudes towards the importance of the overall improvement of syllabuses, as well as the importance of considering their vital role regarding what they need the language for, in colleges of Arts in KSA. The result of the study shows that English language and literature courses require more improvement, and that students are in need to take part ahead in decisions making regarding what course they have to take that lead to expected outcomes. This situation increases their motivation and may create positive attitudes towards English Language learning. The study also shows that teaching English is done via lecturing where professors talk more than they listen to the learners.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, teaching methods, transformative pedagogy, participatory approach, critical education, CP

1. Introduction

The educational philosophy of Paulo Freire focuses on the fact that education aims at developing critical thinking by presenting the people's situation to them as a problem so that they can discern, think about, and act on it. Therefore, learners must be treated differently, they should be the primary content of curriculum and dialogue forms the context of the educational situation. Students have to participate in designing materials as well as using learning materials produced by themselves and the teacher engages in the process of knowing as a learner among learners. As mentioned above the study focuses on the relationship between learning and social change. The literature review also shows that critical pedagogy aims at leading to social change. Therefore, the proponents of critical approaches to second language teaching are interested in relationship between language learning and social change. From this standpoint, language is not simply a means to express or communicate; instead, it is a product that is constructed by the ways language learners recognize themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their potentialities for the future. In this study the researchers try to investigate how EFL learners viewpoints has dramatically change towards English Language and its Literature. The study endeavors to answer questions such as: How do EFL learners in Saudi Arabia view English Language and its literature today? To what extent English Language is seen as a global language rather than a language representing the western culture? How attitudes towards a language positively impact its learning?

2. Statement of the problem

During the last decade the Saudi EFL learners' point of views towards English Language and its literature have positively changed. English is seen by many as a heart of life, where we cannot imagine a village without its speakers. These views are proofed by the huge enrolment of students in English departments, particularly in Colleges of Arts. However,

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Both EFL teachers as well as learners still blame the textbooks, learning tools and the overall curriculum required in colleges of arts, as a real cause for the poor outputs.

Today, students of English Language and literature seem unsatisfied with the syllabuses provided to them in Colleges of Arts in KSA. Many teachers in the colleges of Arts, still believe that adding more novels, drama and poetry references will enrich students' vocabulary as well as their English sentence structure competences. On the other hand, students of English language and translation may find it productive when they are allowed to take big decisions regarding what they exactly want the language for, the thing which may positively impact their future careers. This situation will definitely increase their motivation towards learning, the thing which will impact their overall competences and abilities in using and learning the Language effectively.

3. Study Questions

1. How do EFL learners in Saudi Arabia view the textbooks and the overall syllabuses required in colleges of Arts?
2. What is the importance of regarding students as decision makers in today's EFL classes?
3. How attitudes towards a language positively impacted its learning?

4. Study Hypotheses

1. Many EFL learners in KSA believe that improving the learning tools, textbooks and the overall disciplines is important today.
2. It is extremely important to deal with students as decision makers in today's EFL classes.
3. Positive attitudes towards a language impacted its learning.

5. Literature review

Studies show that, critical pedagogy is a relatively old concept, primarily uncovered by prominent Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in his book titled "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed in the 1960s and 70s. Freire's (1970) [1] problem-posing model of education endeavored for empowerment as a goal of education and he criticized the traditional education assumes learners as empty agents who receive knowledge from teachers. Fundamental aspect of critical pedagogy is to overcome discouraging life situations by raising awareness of the power relations embedded in society. Just as discussed by critical discourse analysts, the reason for minority marginalization is resulting from the power imbalance in society.

Studies also showed that power is unequally and unfairly distributed in society, and the dominant classes exercise power under obligation and through consent. Accordingly, some critical pedagogues hypothesize that educational institutions are indeed a part of societies with uneven distribution of power that they are political sites and they are not neutral, therefore they tend to manifest and reproduce societal power imbalance. Moreover, Paulo Freire pointed out that the educational philosophy also proposes that education aims at developing critical thinking by presenting the people's situation to them as a problem so that they can discern, think about, and act on it. In this regard, the life situation of the learners should be the primary content of curriculum and dialogue forms the context of the

educational situation. Students use learning materials produced by themselves and the teacher engages in the process of knowing as a learner among learners. This line of curriculum theory compares its preferred practices with those of what it calls traditional or banking education. Regarding this concept, critical pedagogy specialists refer to teaching that is merely the transmission of knowledge from teachers to students. By contrast, in the problem-posing model of critical pedagogy the teacher participates in critical dialogue along with the students, contributing them to identify the subjects they themselves see as problematic, and rather than solving problems, reflect back these problems (problem-posing) as the incentive for a process of collaboratively constructed knowledge. Freire also states that during the dialogical engagement between teacher and students themselves, the life experiences of students are underlined through which the students begin to recognize each other as sources of knowledge. While producing and evaluating their learning materials, students are engaged in the decision making process in class, which in turn results in their own decision-making outside the classroom (McLaren, 1988) [8].

6. Critical pedagogy as a teaching approach

As a teaching approach critical pedagogy does not ignore nor replace well-developed teaching methods. Instead, it adds critical quality to the existing textbooks and everyday instruction. Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach attempts to help students question and challenge domination, and the beliefs and practices that dominate. In this regard the researchers are strongly believe that Saudi EFL students are willing and able to determine their need for language today. And that it is extremely important to consider their demands in taking big decisions around the curriculum that should be taught, particularly to students of Language and Literature. Adding critical textbooks by decision makers including learners is one of the main objectives of critical pedagogy. This to say that, it is a theory and practice of helping students achieve critical consciousness.

Luke pointed out that critical pedagogy is not single-strategy pedagogies of empowerment and liberation but should be able to evolve in response to local contexts and needs. Critical teaching is principled and it has a coherent view of society and the role of power in forming relationships in society. The critical language educator relates knowledge of grammar and vocabulary to knowledge of social problems and how to act to solve these problems. Learners are active in the classroom and in society in critical pedagogy. We focus on a critical pedagogy in teaching education because of the goal of preparing citizens for participation in a democratic society. It is not always easy to distinguish critical pedagogy, active learning, and the learner-centered or learning centered approaches. Each is predicated through student engagement and suggests involvement via such strategies including collaborative and cooperative learning and problem-based learning. Whether or not a teacher is philosophically content with the principles of critical pedagogy, applying it in the classroom presents teachers with the same dilemmas that become apparent when using active learning or learner-centered approaches.

7. Some criticisms against critical Pedagogy

Regarding criticisms *against* critical approach, studies show that critical pedagogy still exists more as a theory of pedagogy rather than a practical specification, informing educators about the principles that should govern their work but saying little about how they might actually do it. In fact, the work of many critical theorists has come under a similar criticism to the one that was raised earlier in reference to experiential educators. The literature reviewed also showed that some critical theorists are more interested in displaying the shortcomings of schooling than providing models toward which schools should aspire.

Pinar, Reynolds, and Slattery suggest that greater collaboration between critical scholars and school teachers could further strengthen a critical classroom practice. It is agreed that critical theory continues to be excessively abstract and too far removed from the everyday life of schools. Additionally, some studies declared that critical educational theory has been unable to move from criticism to substantive vision. Such views can be illustrated by maintaining that critical theory has been unable to posit a theoretical discourse and set of categories for constructing forms of knowledge, classroom social relationships, and visions of the future that give substance to the meaning of critical pedagogy" (Giroux, pp. 37-38). In this regard, the literature reviewed also showed that some of the best writings of critical theorists offer little suggestion of strategies that teachers might use in practice. Furthermore, these writings provide no explication of what attempts are made within these educators' own classrooms to implement

the critical pedagogy they espouse. These critiques impel educators, both experiential educators and critical pedagogues, to begin to develop a critical praxis.

8. Material and Methods

The researchers have collected the required data for the current study via a quantitative data collection method. A questionnaire was conducted and distributed to a sample of EFL Students at Qassim University. The aim of the questionnaire was to gather the necessary data as related to the learners' attitudes towards the importance of the overall improvement of syllabuses, as well as importance of considering their vital role regarding what they need the language for in colleges of Arts in KSA. Thus, a questionnaire of (15) items was distributed to a sample of (40) EFL students randomly selected to investigate this study.

In order to check the apparent validity of the study questionnaire and the validation of its statements according to the formulation and explanation, the researchers conducted a pilot test.

9. Data Analysis and Discussions

After collecting the data, the researchers conducted statistical calculation to analyze the data collected. The statistical calculation and the results analyzed, confirmed the validity of the hypotheses. The following tables show the data analysis.

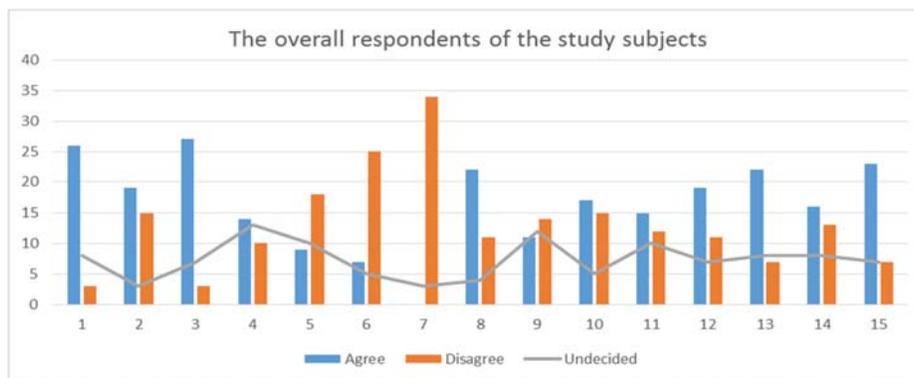


Fig 1: The frequency distribution for the respondents' answers about the entire questionnaire items

The above figure illustrates the frequency distribution for the respondents' answers about the (15) items of the questionnaire conducted as a data collection tool. First, the study subjects believe that adding more literature course books will enrich their English vocabulary as stated in item no.2. It is also clear from the above figure that the study subjects view their role as a significant one when it comes to the decision making regarding courses they have to take. As stated in item no.3 "learners are to be considered before deciding which English course they have to take". Regarding items no.7 "I do not know why I am learning English" the majority showed their disagreements with this item, this indicate students' awareness with the importance of English language today taking inconsideration that competence in languages required a positive attitude. This view is also confirmed in item no.6 where the majority of the respondents see English not only as a language of better jobs, but also as a language that can take them further ahead

particularly those who intend to go abroad for their post graduate studies in English speaking countries. Additionally, they agreed that teaching methods in colleges of Arts is a traditional one where professors talk more than they listen to the learners. This is clear in item no.15 "EFL professors need to listen to learners more than they talk".

In this regard, the researchers think that most EFL teachers are still doing lecturing while teaching, due to lack of language laboratories particularly in most newly established higher education institutions. This situation has resulted in poor EFL students with limited English proficiency, particularly when it comes to speaking and writing. Moreover, there is a need to adopt communicative approach in higher education today than just lecturing. The researchers think that communicative approach is one of the best methods of teaching English, simply because unlike other subjects, teaching English deals with complicated skills that requires teaching the four skills as a one whole.

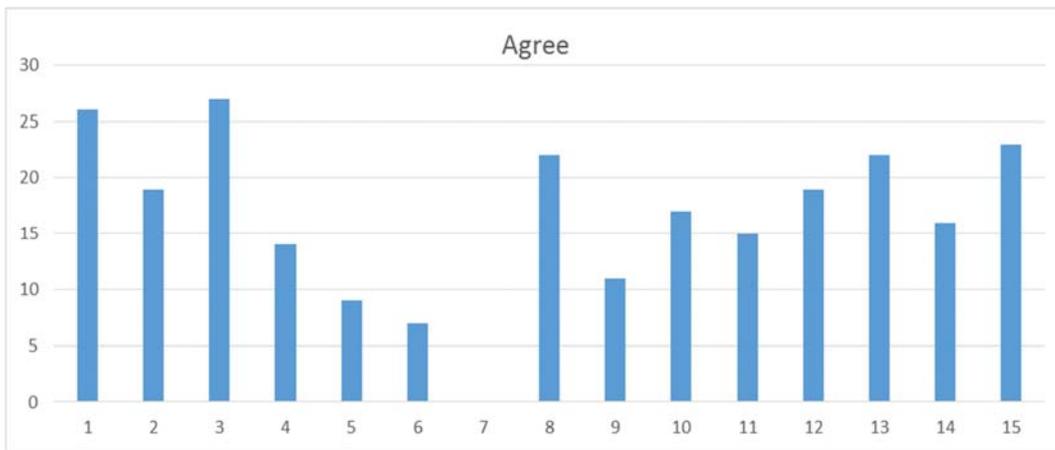


Fig 2: The frequency distribution for the respondents' agreements on the questionnaire items.

The above figure shows the respondents' agreements on the questionnaire items. It is remarkable that the majority of the respondents fully agreed with items (1, 3, 8, 15) where they confirmed the importance of English language and its literature. They view English today, not only as a language of better jobs, but also as a language that can take them

further ahead particularly those who intend to go abroad for their post graduate studies in English speaking countries. Moreover, the respondents still believe that the overall teaching of English in colleges of arts is boring, simply because professors and teachers talk more than they listen to the learners.

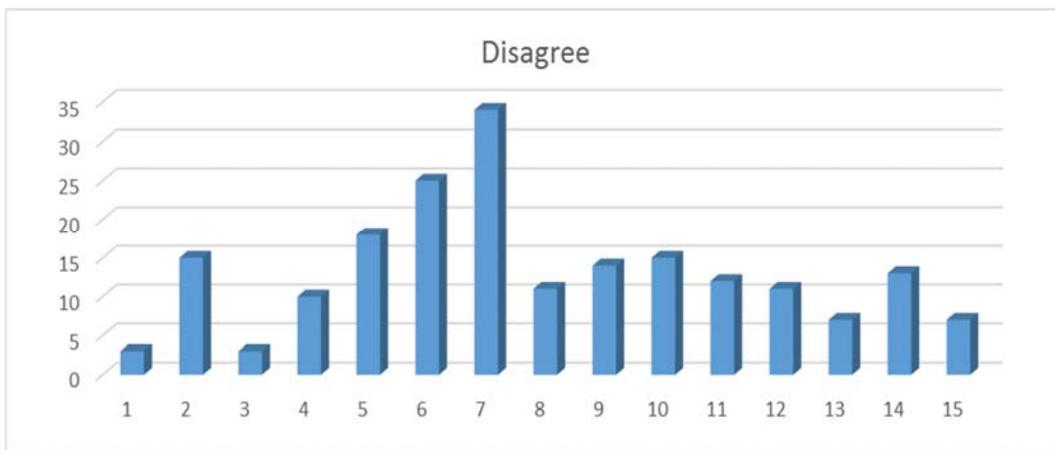


Fig 3: The frequency distribution for the respondents' disagreements on the questionnaire items

The above figure shows the respondents' disagreements on the questionnaire items. It is remarkable that the majority of the respondents are fully disagreed with items (5, 6, 7,) where they referred to the fact that they do not receive

parental supports at home. However, they are aware of the importance of English language and its literature and that they have joined the English department in purpose, this indicate that students are to some extent motivated enough.

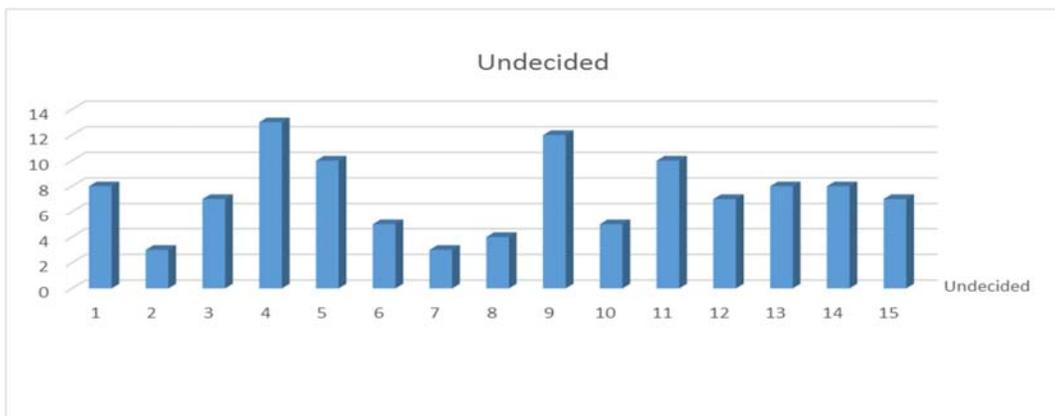


Fig 4: The frequency distribution for the respondents' on undecided questionnaire items

The above figure illustrates the undecided items of the questionnaire. It is remarkable that the majority of the respondents find it difficult to decide the following items (4, 5, 9, 11) where the issue of time allowed for practice in EFL classes is undecided. Additionally, the majority find it difficult to confirm whether they are regularly taken part in class discussions or not.

10. Finding

In the light of the data analysis, the researchers found that, English language and literature syllabuses as well as their teaching approaches require more improvement, and that students need to take part ahead in decisions making regarding what course they have to take. Teaching English is also done via lecturing where professors talk more than they listen to the learners.

This situation has resulted in poor EFL students with very limited English proficiency, particularly when it comes to speaking and writing. Moreover, there is a massive need to adopt communicative approach in higher education today than lecturing. The researchers think that the communicative approach is one of the most efficient methods of teaching English, simply because unlike other subjects, teaching English deals with complicated skills that require teaching the four skills as a one whole. Finally, the researchers recommend the following:

1. EFL students have to be consulted by decisions makers before deciding which course book they have to take.
2. Communicative approaches have to be adopted in EFL classes rather than the traditional lecturing ones.

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Appendix1

Students' Questionnaire
The Questionnaire items

No	Questionnaire Items	Agree	Disagree	Undecided
1.	As an EFL student I am not satisfied with the textbooks.			
2.	I am aware of the importance of literature in enriching my English Language Vocabulary.			
3.	EFL learners are to be considered before deciding which English course they have to take.			
4.	In many colleges of arts, Literature track lacks textbooks such as novels, drama and poetry.			
5.	My parents never ever encouraged me to take English as a major.			
6.	I view English as a language of better jobs only.			
7.	I don't know why I am learning English.			
8.	Literature teaching methods are very boring.			
9.	I am rarely taken part in my English class discussions.			
10.	I am afraid of my future, although I am taking English.			
11.	During classes, the time given for practice is very limited.			
12.	I need more freedom to state my ideas clearly while classes.			
13.	Learning materials are limited in EFL classes.			
14.	I am very pleased cause I am learning English and its literature.			
15.	EFL professors need to listen to the learners more than to talk to them in classes.			