

The Practicality of Critical Pedagogy: A Case Study of Iranian EFL Learners' Motivation

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Abstract

The most basic goal of education besides enhancing students' educational success is to improve their social skills; this goal is achieved only if learners are trained to become critical thinkers and responsible ones for their own social change. Consequently, this study is focused on the impact of critical pedagogy on EFL learners' motivation. In this study, 54 students were randomly and equally assigned to the experimental and control groups (27 students in each group). The instrument applied in this study was a motivation questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to the students in both control and experimental group (as the pre and post questionnaire). The results revealed that the critical approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language increases the learners' motivation reflecting a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group.

Keywords

critical pedagogy, motivation, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners

1. Introduction

A common felt experience for many learners and teachers is that motivation, however strong to begin with, will ebb and flow the learning process, subject to many internal and external influences over a course of study or even within the space of a single lesson. Most students in learning a foreign language experience lack of motivation which causes low proficiency in language learning. Several studies have shown that measures of proficiency in the foreign/second language are related to motivational features of students (Krusdenier, 1985; Domyei, 1994). Based on Anderson (1985), creating motivation is a fundamental step in developing children who will change into professional readers. But the fact is that most students do not have enough motivation to read the text and comprehend it. Over the past twenty years, there have been many different models of reading instruction put forth, yet few of these methods take into account the importance of motivation. It is obvious that learners who want to learn are likely to succeed more than those who do not (Fahim & Janpour, 2012). Fillmore (1991) declared that successful learning in a second language is dependent on the existence of the motivated students who realized the importance of learning the target language. Educational psychologists have long recognized the importance of motivation for helping the student to

learn (Lai, 2011). Therefore, it is very essential that language teachers implement some new approaches to increase EFL learners' motivation, especially their intrinsic one. Highly motivated students have strong desire to read and understand the text better. With regard to the lack of motivation and comprehension in reading among EFL students, critical pedagogy can be a useful approach in this field. The critical language educator relates knowledge of grammar and vocabulary to knowledge of social problems to act to solve these problems. Learners are active in the classroom and in society in critical pedagogy.

Critical pedagogy makes the students question and challenge domination, beliefs and practices that dominate to motivate the learners to be more successful language achievers. Kumaravadivelu (2003) stated that critical pedagogy joins teaching and learning activities to teachers' and students' real lives to assure the social relevance of classroom practices and stretch classroom boundaries. Recent approaches to teaching languages have mainly been influenced by constructivism and critical pedagogy. Here, learners are seen as individuals with different belief systems, background knowledge, and learning styles. In these pedagogical schools of thought following post-method principles, the ultimate goal of educational systems is to train learners to become independent individuals who can think critically. This goal requires curriculum developers and practitioners to plan, instruct, and practice efficiently.

Critical pedagogy is like a tree with some central branches. Empowerment is one of those main branches of great moment in critical pedagogy. It is mainly focused on promoting in students and teachers, the self-esteem to question, and the power relations in the society (McLaren & Peterson, 2003). Vygotsky (1986) regarded learning as being ingrained in social events and it happens when the learner is interacting with people, objects, and events within the environment. Vygotsky's proposal of the Socio-cultural theory increased concern with the influence of socio-cultural contexts in motivation and education more broadly.

Williams and Burdun (1999) emphasized the relationship between motivation and socio-cultural theory. They stated that motivation stimulates cognitive functions that lead the student to think and reflect about the language in his environment. Then, the ultimate and indeed a prerequisite for learning would be communication in a socially stimulating environment. Kim (2006) proposed that L2 learning motivation is not a static final product but a dynamically evolving process which leads to the dialectical relationships with L2 learners, previous L2 learning history, and their present socio-cultural surroundings. According to Naiditch (1993), students will be socially engaged citizens and more active individuals, autonomous, and energetic in the teaching-learning process through critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is a movement involving relationships of teaching and learning so that learners get a critical self-consciousness and social awareness and stand against oppressive forces (McLaren, 2012). Using critical pedagogy in teaching or learning helps not only learners to learn better but also increases learners' motivation, corporation and social action. Despite the significance of applying critical pedagogy in educational settings, it has been neglected in Iranian EFL contexts to some extent. So

investigating the impact of critical pedagogy on EFL learners' motivation needed to be reviewed. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the following question:
What is the impact of critical pedagogy on EFL learners' motivation?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Critical Pedagogy and ELT

Instead of ignoring or replacing well-developed teaching methods, critical pedagogy adds critical quality to the existing textbooks and everyday instruction. Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach that attempts to help students question and challenge domination, beliefs and practices that dominate. It is a theory and practice of helping students achieve critical consciousness. Luke and Gore (1992) declared that 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. 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.

Although there is not any procedural guideline for applying critical pedagogy in a program of teacher education, there are three tenets that are inherent in a critical pedagogy. These tenets are viewpoints stated by several critical theorists including Giroux, McLaren, Delpit, Ladson-Billings, Dillard, hooks and others. These three tenets are as the followings: a) reflection upon the individual's culture or lived experience; b) development of voice through a critical look at one's world and society, which takes place in dialogue with others; and c) transforming the society toward equality for all citizens through active participation in democratic imperatives. The language class is a location where people find new ways of communication and understand the world through a particular perspective (Wink, 1999). Auerbach (1995) and Pennycook (1989) declared that one's conception of the world is affected by one's views and values, any practice of language learning and teaching is intrinsically political and socially constructed.

Therefore, the macro social, cultural, and political contexts where the learner is situated should be integrated in the curriculum, and teachers should play an envisaging role in critical educational practice. The student often initiates as a member of the group or process (such as religion, national identity, cultural norms, or expected roles) he or she is critically studying. After the student reaches the point of communication where he or she begins to see present society as deeply problematic, the next behavior prompted is sharing this knowledge, paired with an aim to change the oppressive nature of the society. Critical pedagogy is required to manage the complex social system of the classroom and identify the

need of individual students. There is always disorganization regarding teacher's role in the society: transmission or transformation. In fact, this issue overlooks the experiences and abilities of the students. Their creativity is lost and become more dependent upon the teachers. Now the pedagogical paradigm has been moved toward transformation and teachers can cooperate with the students and other stakeholders, e.g. community people, colleagues, educationists, education administrators and etc. to transform. Critical pedagogy calls for cooperation. Teachers are the agents who work in complex social sites and who have the power to help transform. But it is difficult to practice it in existing school environment. Firstly, one needs to perceive that knowledge and production of knowledge might be made less external so that transformation is possible even if it takes a longer time.

Critical pedagogy encourages teachers to consider their practice critically and complexities of the educational process through various viewpoints. Moreover, critical pedagogues share an end of academic success for each student, demonstrated in the preparation and experience of children to be active citizens in a fully democratic society. For critical pedagogues, the goal of education is for social transformation towards an entirely democratic society, where (a) each comment is shared and heard in an equal way; (b) one critically investigate oneself and one's society and; and (c) one acts upon decreasing social discriminations.

2.3 Motivation and ELT

Motivation as the main determinant of second/foreign language achievement has attracted the attention of many investigators. Different definitions of motivation have been posited by the researchers. Gardner (1985) defined motivation as the combination of effort to get the goal of learning the language, and favorable attitudes toward learning the language. In addition, Brown (1994) stated that motivation is commonly thought of as an inner drive, impulse, emotion, or desire that moves one to special action. As one of the affective variables that can influence language learning, motivation appears as predictor of foreign language performance in a remarkable number of articles. Moreover, according to Dornyei (1994), motivation is the basic element in learning a foreign language. Gardner (2006) pointed out that students with higher levels of motivation will do better language learning than ones with lower levels of motivation.

James and Holton (2000) emphasized on the importance of motivation in class, because when there is motivation, students will participate in learning process at any stage, as motivation catches the students' attention toward learning and knowledge. If there is not enough motivation, the students will hardly achieve the learning goals, because as stated by Harmer (2001), motivation moves people to do things in order to achieve goals. In the case of learning a language, students may have several reasons for learning a second language; some of the students might be learning a language because it is a personal goal, but other students might be learning a language because they are at school and they have to pass the subject matter.

Lifrieri (2005) asserted that motivation is indispensable in the process of second foreign language learning. Brown (1988) believed that if there is proper motivation, it becomes easier for a person to

improve a second/foreign language learning. Motivation is this energy to study, to learn, achieve and to maintain positive behaviors. Motivation is what stimulus to acquire, transform and use knowledge (Groccia, 1992).

In agreement with Skehan (1989), learning is a situation where teachers have to pay attention to the class setting, classroom management, the tasks that are given to the students and methods which make students feel motivated to learn the second language. According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), another important aspect to consider talking about motivation, is the kind of material that teachers present to the students, no matter the presentation of the designing of those tools, if they are not interesting for the students, the teachers' labor will be harder trying to find the right material or strategy for them, looking for interesting, relevant and authentic material for the instructions. The implementation of authentic material may complete English classes by activating the class and creating a more positive attitude towards learning (Baker, 1992).

Afrough, Rahimi and Zarafshan (2014) investigated Iranian high school teachers' and students' ideas about demotivating factors with regard to practicing the speaking skill. To achieve this goal, 312 high school students and 92 high school teachers of English were interviewed. Then, the interviews were thematically analyzed. The findings along with the researchers' reviews of the related literature were used to develop a questionnaire to explore Iranian L2 students' and teachers' perceptions of the factors which decrease students' motivation to improve their L2 speaking ability. This questionnaire was administered to 150 Iranian male and 150 female EFL learners and 40 male and 40 female teachers. To analyze the data, the researchers employed principal components analysis with Varimax rotation. The factors which emerged were negative attitude toward learning L2, teacher's inadequate competence and performance, lack of technological facilities in the classroom, lack of adequate teaching materials, unfavorable classroom environment, and insufficient opportunities for speaking practice.

Lai (2013) investigated Taiwanese university students' English learning motivation from the perspective of various important L2 motivation concepts. A total of 267 undergraduate students from a science and technology university in New Taipei City, Taiwan, participated in this survey study. The results showed that the majority of the participants studied English for travel, instrumental and integrative motivation, as well as intrinsic motivation, but not for external pressure.

Jafari (2013) showed how motivated students are more successful than unmotivated ones. Firstly, the word motivation was discussed in detail, and various definitions were presented. Secondly, different types of motivation and their relationship with each other were discussed. Thirdly, factors such as personality variables, attitudes towards social or cultural milieu, and nonlinguistic outcomes of the learning experience were discussed. Finally, some recommendations for motivating language learners were enumerated. Results showed that language learning is facilitated when learners are highly motivated. Therefore, language teachers are highly recommended to motivate their learners in order to increase their chance of learning a language.

Akolkar (2012) studied the relationship between achievement motivation and mental health among higher secondary students. He focused practically on the relationship between Achievement motivation and mental health between male and female students, in order to understand if there is a difference between their motivation and their mental health or not. The researcher used a questionnaire as the tool of data collection. As the result, he found that male and female students significantly differ for their achievement motivation but there was no significant difference of mental health between male and female students.

Djigunovic (2012) carried out research regarding attitudes and motivation in early foreign language learning to examine foreign language learning attitudes and motivations. Findings were presented through over views of cross sectional and longitudinal studies which were carried out in different settings. The findings based on this research showed that the attitudes and motivation of the young foreign language learners are not stable learners' characteristics but change over time.

vasant (2012) carried out a study on the relationship between academic achievement and motivation in adolescents. In order to do this research, the researcher used recording as the tool of data collection. Data was evaluated in comparative scales. As a result, the researcher found that there was a correlation between family environment and educational achievement and this correlation was a positive correlation at a low level.

In another study, Tuan (2012) studied EFL learners' motivation and focused on motivation of EFL learners in order to investigate whether motivation has any impact on students' English learning or not. The researcher used a questionnaire survey in order to collect the data. Both students and teachers were involved in this survey. The result showed that the students had positive motivation toward learning of foreign language and also teachers should find necessity of motivation in developing students' English performance.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

In this study, 100 students were randomly selected among boy high schools located in Kerman, Iran. The population was intermediate male (14-16 years old) EFL students in high schools. A Cambridge Placement Test (CPT) was used to have almost homogenous groups. After administrating the CPT, a number of 46 students who couldn't get the desired score were omitted. Finally, the number of students reduced to 54 students who were randomly and equally assigned to the experimental and control groups (27 students in each group).

3.2 Instruments

The instrument applied in this study was a motivation questionnaire designed with some modifications based on the questionnaires of Gardner (1985), Tamimi and Shuib (2009), Chalak and Kassaian (2010). The questionnaire consisted of thirty closed-ended questions. The five-point Likert-scale was used for all responses with related labels (a. strongly disagree, b. disagree, c. neutral, d. strongly agree and e. agree)

to gather the data. The questions were divided into two parts (Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Motivation). The reliability of the questionnaire used in this study was 0.89 (pre-test) and 0.76 (post-test). It was obtained through Cronbach's Alpha formula.

3.3 Procedure

This study was a quantitative experimental study. In this study, the independent variable was critical pedagogy, and dependent variable was motivation of EFL learners. Motivation questionnaire was given to the students in both control and experimental group (as the pre and post questionnaire) with the permission of the school head. Cambridge placement test was used to homogenize the participants. Based on the Cambridge placement test, the students were homogenized as the intermediate ones and then were randomly distributed into two groups of control and experimental ones each containing 27 students. Both groups received the same materials during the course considering the same teacher, and the same setting. Both groups participated in the study for 22 sessions, and 10 reading comprehension texts were practiced in both groups. In control group, the reading texts were practiced in a traditional way, but in the experimental group, the students were engaged in the social construction of knowledge. During the engagement between teacher and students and students themselves, the life experiences of students were underlined through which the students began to recognize each other as sources of knowledge. While producing and evaluating their learning materials, students were engaged in the decision making process in class, which in turn resulted in their own decision-making outside the classroom. The reading texts related teaching and learning activities to teachers' and students' real lives. From this perspective, the teacher worked to lead students to question ideologies and practices considered oppressive, and encouraged liberatory collective and individual responses to the actual conditions of their own lives.

4. Results and Discussion

In this part, the data investigating the impact of critical pedagogy on EFL learners' motivation is analyzed.

4.1 What is the Difference between EFL Learners' Intrinsic Motivation in Control Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test?

To investigate this question, the Independent Sample T test was used (Table 1). Regarding the P-value that is more than 0.05 (p-value = 0.01), it can be said with more than 95% confidence, that mean of intrinsic motivation in control group in pre-test and post-test was not significantly different ($t = -1.49$, $df = 26$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 1. Independent-Sample T Test of Intrinsic Motivation in Control Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test

Time	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-Test	Df	P-Value
Pretest	27	57.11	6.91	-1.49	26	0.1
Posttest	27	59.52	5.61			

4.2 What Is the Difference between EFL Learners' Intrinsic Motivation in Experimental Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test?

To investigate this question, the Independent Sample T test was used (Table 2). Regarding the P-value that is less than 0.05 (p-value = 0.04), it can be said with more than 95% confidence, that mean of intrinsic motivation in experimental group in pre-test and post-test was significantly different ($t = -2.19$, $df = 26$, $p < 0.05$). It means that the mean of intrinsic motivation in experimental group after using critical pedagogy ($M_2 = 57.30$, $SD_2 = 8.80$) was more than before using critical pedagogy ($M_1 = 50.96$, $SD_1 = 12.01$).

Table 2. Independent-Sample T Test of Intrinsic Motivation in Experimental Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test

Time	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-Test	Df	P-Value
Pretest	27	50.96	12.01	-2.19	26	0.04
Posttest	27	57.30	8.80			

4.3 What Is the Difference between EFL Learners' Extrinsic Motivation in Control Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test?

To investigate this question, the Independent Sample T test was used (Table 3). Regarding the P-value that is more than 0.05 (p-value = 0.05), it can be said with more than 95% confidence, that mean of extrinsic motivation in control group in pre-test and post-test was not significantly different ($t = -0.71$, $df = 26$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 3. Independent-Sample T Test of Extrinsic Motivation in Control Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test

Time	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-Test	Df	P-Value
Pretest	27	47.78	8.48	-0.71	26	0.5
Posttest	27	49.30	7.98			

4.4 What Is the Difference between EFL Learners' Extrinsic Motivation in Experimental Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test?

To investigate this question, the Independent Sample T test was used (Table 4). Regarding the P-value that is more than 0.05 (p-value = 0.09), it can be said with more than 95% confidence, that mean of extrinsic motivation in experimental group in pre-test and post-test was not significantly different ($t = -0.17$, $df = 26$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 4. Independent-Sample T Test of Extrinsic Motivation in Experimental Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test

Time	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-Test	Df	P-Value
Pretest	27	45.96	10.74	-0.17	26	0.9
Posttest	27	46.44	11.12			

5. Conclusion

This study has investigated the impact of critical pedagogy on EFL learners' motivation. According to the results (Table 1-4), intrinsic motivation in experimental group increased after using critical pedagogy, but no change was seen in intrinsic motivation of control group. In the case of extrinsic motivation, critical pedagogy made no change, and both control and experimental groups revealed the same level of extrinsic motivation. It can be said that there is a relationship between critical pedagogy and EFL learners' intrinsic motivation; experimental group showed a better performance due to considerable level of motivation in the classroom.

Evidence from this thesis shows that critical pedagogy increases EFL learners' motivation. Equally important, learning to read a text critically requires developing an awareness of how the themes that students read can lead to individual and collective transformation. Critical pedagogy makes the students take a stance and express their own beliefs and views towards the material at hand. The challenge is not limited to the students—it is also assumed by the teachers who must continually question and renew their own practice. In this space, learners develop a deeper understanding of their social environment, their histories, and themselves. Simon (1992) believed that they also learn to develop their social visions and explore possible ways of acting upon and affecting the world around them.

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