Critical pedagogy in SLA: A state of the art study

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Abstract

In this study, the author tried to present definitions for critical theory and critical pedagogy and to provide historical background and development and adaptation of the theory to the field of second language learning and teaching. Also, the principles of critical thinking and the value of being critical are introduced. Moreover, the practical study of critical pedagogy in the second or foreign language contexts, critical theory and language teacher education are offered, and their findings are reviewed. It is attempted to illuminate the role of critical pedagogy in these contexts. The critiques of critical pedagogy are mentioned. Finally, a conclusion about the use of critical pedagogy in second language acquisition is offered. The results of this meta-analysis study showed the

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1.   Introduction

This paper as a state of the art article aims to examine the findings of studies that examine the role of critical pedagogy in second language acquisition. At first, some theoretical concepts related to critical theory and critical pedagogy are stated and then the empirical research in this realm are discussed.

As Knowles (1973) said, pedagogy is the study of teaching and learning, so critical pedagogy is about what is taught, how something is , and how something is learned (Giroux, 1997)."All descriptions of pedagogy—like knowledge in general—are shaped by those who devise them and the values they hold" (Kincheloe, 2004, 5-6).Bercaw and Stooksberry (2004) described the primary goal of education as "academic success", which is emphasized by different classes in the society from critical scholars to policy makers. In order to meet the ends of education, there are have been some decades that many scholars examine some methods for teachers' preparation. Williams and Burden (1997) said that the aim of education is said to help learners to think for themselves and to perpetuate the forms of thought and act in next generations.

During the history, many roles are given to teachers based on their beliefs about learners as resisters, receptacles, raw materials, clients, partners, individual explorers, and democratic explorers. As said, these roles are mainly based on the views on training, teaching, and the teaching requirements. So, during the period, according to the increasing knowledge about these factors, the role of teachers shifts from an instruction to a facilitator or a reflective practitioner.It is that a teacher as a reflective practitioner must have critical reflection in order to think critically about his/her daily works and create a harmony between his/her views and theories in action.

Both students and teachers are affected by learning and teaching, so critical pedagogy is concerned with both students and teachers and also their changes(Abrahams, 2005). This mutual transformation of information is referred to correct and meaningful learning by Freire (1970). "Critical pedagogy seeks to identify possibilities in the classroom by offering schema to connect word to world and by its unyielding urgency of transformation. It broadens the tenets of critical thinking through problem posing and dialogue" (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007, p. 235).

Definitions of Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy

Critical thinking, as one of the most pervasive academic literature terms, is seldom clearly or comprehensively described by practitioners or theorists. The term has been interpreted from different standpoints, though not without commonalities. Reed and Kromrey (2001) agreed on several definitions mentioned for it despite long years that this issue is searched by many scholars. Critical thinking is considered thethought of as "a process of analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information" (Paul & Scriven, 1987, p. 1). Glaser (1941) described critical thinking as "attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences; knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning; and some skills in applying those methods" (cited in Ramasamy, 2011, pp. 5-6). Ennis and Millman (1985) asserted that they described critical thinking for the first time as "the correct assessing of statements" (p. 46).

As Paul and Scriven (1987) said, critical thinking is the combination of intellectual standards that appears among disciplines and elements of thinking that are a part of all reasoning. According to them, "critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action" (p. 1).

McCarthy and colleagues (1999) defined critical thinking as "related to and equated with reflective judgment, intelligence, logical thinking; problem solving, nursing process, research, decision-making, diagnostic reasoning, therapeutic judgments, and the scientific method" (p. 142).

Kwak (2008) defined critical thinking as "Modernist theorists conceive of it in terms of both the ability and the disposition to evaluate beliefs, their underlying assumptions, and the worldviews in which those views are embedded" (p.121). Brookfield (2012) explained that critical thinking is not just a mean in order to catch good scores in the academic courses, but also it a thinking way helping human beings to stay intact despite different political, social, cultural, educational Flows that try to tempt people to think on the way that is in line with their intentions. As he said, the central point of critical thinking is taking informed action that is based on beforehand experiences and is "an action that is based on thinking and review, which means there is some evidence we take seriously as supporting such an action" (p. 13). Churchill, et. al. (2011) in a narrow view defined "critical" as criticizing and challenging in order to find the faults. Lowe, Prout, and Murcia (2013) defined critical reflection as "taking a holistic and balanced view of experience, events or situations" (p. 4). Moon (2000) also described it as "situating one's own actions in larger cultural, social and societal contexts to make sense of them and think about productive ways forward" (p. 446).

Many theorists discussed skill, disposition, and experience as the general points in defining critical thinking. David and White (2010) designed some stages containing some sub-branches for critical thinking, respectively: recognition, analysis, evaluation, and thinking about alternatives.

A number of definitions are for critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2004), but it is rooted from critical theory established by Frankfort School in 1923 (McLaren, 2003). Wink(2005) described it as "a prism that reflects the complexities between teaching and learning. It sheds light on the hidden subtleties that might have escaped the researchers' view previously. The prism has a tendency to focus on shades of social, cultural, political, and even economic conditions, and it does all of this under the broad view of history" (p. 26).

Gore (1993), Lather (1991), and Kohli (1998) asserted that theory and practice of critical pedagogy provide mechanisms for a socio-cultural examination of schools mainly based on social structures, like race, class, gender, ability, and sexuality in school and the greater society. Gore (1993) and Shor (1996) defined critical pedagogy as a critical pedagogical praxis.

The Value of Being Critical

Nowadays, critical thinking is used in preparing most of the educational curriculums as most of the teachers found it a useful new process to be in classrooms. It can be as a combination of particular skills like proper assessment of reasons or identification of fallacious arguments (Mason, 2008).

As Carroll (2007) said, "One of the key elements of critical thinking is the recognition that one's worldview can be a major hindrance to being fair-minded" (p. 4). In order to challenge the viewpoints to make sure that they are right. He mentioned that the critical thinker benefits two senses: the weak sense and a strong sense. The weak sense makes the critical thinkers be able to recognize, compare and contrast ideas while the strong understanding helps them to "have a certain *disposition* as well as a recognition of the many affective, cognitive, and perceptual biases that inhibit and distort our judgment" (p. 5).

Critical thinking is a lifelong process that can be improved by experience and being informed about it during the process of development. In 1980s, American Philosophical Association (APA) presented critical thinking as a purposeful and self- regulated judgment that makes the critical thinker to be able to interpret, analyze, evaluate, inference and explain. Also, it is mentioned that critical thinking is one of the necessary parts of the inquiry.

Different features are for a critical thinker. Paul and Scriven (1987)stated a critical thinker's ideas are not because a critical thinker tries to explore the best choices. Facione(1990) indicated the characteristics of a critical thinker clearly:

Habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results that are precise (p. 2).

At the early years of the rise of critical theory, many critical thinking scholars, (Such as Ken Osborne (1990), Henry Giroux (1997), and Stephen Sweet (1998)) argued the needs to move beyond educational ideology and employing it in the classrooms practically. Critical pedagogy includes some ideas that "leads us to advocacy and activism on behalf of those who are the most vulnerable in classrooms and society" (Wink, 2005, p. 165).

Critical pedagogy empowers the critical thinker with some features as it "gives voice to the voiceless; gives power to the powerless. Change is often challenging, and critical pedagogy emphasis on change from coerciveness to collaboration; from the transmission to transformative; from inert to catalytic; from passive to active" (Wink, 2005, p. 165).Critical pedagogy stands on the belief that it is a reflection of one's beliefs, assumptions and actions in order to develop the voice and engage in action to promote social justice. Three kinds of critical pedagogy are mentioned in the literature: transformative, generative, and transmission.

Principles of Critical Thinking

Abrahams (2005) defined critical pedagogy by means of several key principles as:
1. Education helps both students and teachers to pose their problems and solve it.
2. It helps both students and teachers to perceive the reality of the world.
3. It creates conciousnazation that is depth knowledge (becoming critically conscious of the socio-historical world in which one intervenes or pretends to intervene politically (Macedo, 1994, p. Xi-Xii).
4. It is transformative, and it happens when teachers and students can acknowledge a change in perception.
5. Education is political. Those who teach the Critical Pedagogy model resist the political constraints that those in power set on them from the classroom to the community.

> Critical Pedagogy "is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationships among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society and nation-state" (McLaren, 1998, p. 45).
>
> Kumaravadivelu (2001) theorizes alternatively pedagogical principles: namely, particularity, practicality, and the opportunity. He advocates "a context-sensitive, location-specific pedagogy that is based on a correct understanding of local linguistic, socio-cultural, and political particularity" (p. 544).

Eleven principles of critical thinking are presented byLarson (1994):
1. Gather complete information.
2. Understand and define all terms.
3. Question the methods by which the facts are .
4. Question the conclusions.
5. Look for hidden assumptions and biases.
6. Question the source of facts.
7. Do not expect all of the answers.
8. Examine the big picture.
9. Examine multiple causes and effects.
10. Watch for thought stoppers.
11. Understand your own biases and values.

Critical thinking is as a biased process of thoughts and actions by Brookfield (1997). He proposed a model for critical thinking including five phases: " (a) a trigger event, (b) appraisal, (c) exploration, (d) developing alternative perspectives, and (e) integrating into thinking and living" (p.26).

Rawling (n. d, p. 62) describes the main features of an enquiry-based approach as one that:
- involves learners as active participants in a sequence of significant learning through enquiry
- provides opportunities for the development of a wide range of skills and abilities
- provides possibilities for open-ended enquiries in which attitudes and values may be clarified and an interchange of ideas and opinions can take place
- provides scope for an effective balance of both teacher directed work and more independent student enquiry

The Historical Development of Critical Pedagogy
The first roots of critical thinking, as an old concept, belong to the lessons of Socrates in order to learn his students' reasoning (Soeherman, 2010). After him, many practitioners and theorists viewed critical thinking from a set point of view, although some of them like Ennis (1993), reformed their prior assumptions for times.

Any attempt to search the roots of critical pedagogy results to Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educationalist, as "the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy" (McLaren, 2000, p. 1). In 1970s,Freire claimed an anti-authoritarian, dialogical and interactive approach in rational power issues. He mainly emphasized on being critical not only in the classroom and about education, but also in the society and critiques related to the daily life's social and political practices (Freire, 1998). In fact, Freire's (1973) expression of "reading the word and reading the world" was representative of his view about critical thinking. It means that education is produced collaboratively and collectively through the reality of students' lives.
Freire (1984, p. 68) offered that critical consciousness can be achieved by problem posing and authentic dialogue of students and their teachers:
Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality.

Following the statements of Freire about the complexity of defining a singular pedagogy, Gaudianoand de Alba(1994) said,"one cannot speak of pedagogy but must speak instead of pedagogies which respond to particular necessities, interests and conditions" (p. 128).

"Pedagogy of possibility", as one of the methods of critical pedagogy was introduced by Simon(1987)that inherent in this view is an "educational practice that is at enabling a particular moral project, a critical 'not yet' of how we might live our lives together"(p. 372). As he claimed that it is a transformative pedagogy, so:

"will require forms of teaching and learning linked to the goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside their immediate experience, and to envisage versions of the world that is 'not yet' – in order to be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived" (p. 375).

2. Research on Critical Thinking and Pedagogy

Critical thinking is not a new idea and since 1980s, many empirical studies on critical thinking and critical pedagogy have been conducted in different disciplines (e.g. philosophy, mathematics, art, literature, medical sciences, language, etc.). The abstract of some of these studies are mentioned below:

Shaban Rafi (2010) promoted critical pedagogy in language teaching by means of both qualitative and quantitative method on female and male English language teachers. A questionnaire was used for the qualitative section of the study and the quantitative part; a pretest was given, then in the treatment phase they were taught English Essay Writing (EEW) by incorporating Paul's E&S of critical thinking in two hours program in a day over 2 weeks, and final posttests I and II were held. The results of paired sample t-test showed a "marked difference (41.26 Mean Score) was measured in the performance of English language teachers in the result of critical thinking instructions into the composition of English Essay Writing. A significant difference was measured between Post-test I and II among the CSS students" (p. 63).

Shin and Crooks (2005)examined the role of critical pedagogy in the EFL context of Korea. They examined the responses of Korean students to the critical dialogues and non-authoritarian interactions with teachers. The results of qualitative analyses of data showed that they were not resistant to the materials including critical topics, and also they were capable of coping with critical approaches. It also issues that the "students recognized the classes as challenging though not as focused on exam preparation as their regular course offerings" (p. 113).

Searching in the literature showed that very few studies carried out in Iran have focused specifically on how critical thinking skills are understood and developed at second language classroom level. Some of these studies are:

Safari and Pourhashemi (2012) examined the applicability of critical pedagogy in an educational system of Iran as an ELT context through a qualitative study. The participants of this study were 12 Iranian English language teachers of both genders teaching English in various institutes who were selected. The data collection procedures in this study were conducted by means of some instruments as journal writing, observation and semi-structured interview. The principal findings of this study were:

> "lack of familiarities with the approach, shortage of fluent and competent teachers, inaccessibility to the critical textbooks and published instructional materials for both teachers and learners, resistance of school principals against any innovative approach, fossilized unequal power relationship between teacher and students, absence of culture of critical thinking in

education, inefficiency of pre-service and in-service classes for English teachers, culturally and politically inappropriate for our education" (p. 2550-2553).

Barjesteh, Alipour and Vaseghi (2013) conducted a study on improving Iranian EFL learner's reading comprehension ability through critical pedagogy strategies. 60 Iranian male and female university students were selected among 84 BA second–year students majoring in English translation. Two instruments used in this study were: language proficiency test (TOEFL and Longman, 2003) and a set of reading tests and Watson–Glaser critical thinking appraisal. The results of independent sample t-tests showed the positive effects and facilitative role of critical pedagogy strategies on the reading comprehension of the learners in the critical group.

Critiques of Critical Pedagogy
Due to the versatile nature of critical pedagogy, several critiques are suggested for it by various scholars. Some of them are mentioned below:

One of these critiques is linked to Jennifer Gore's (1993, p. 40) critique who offered two stands for critical pedagogy as "pedagogical practice" which "offers concrete suggestions and examples taken from their own pedagogical practice, and which is intended to help other educators". She also criticizes the "pedagogical project" that is presented by Girux and McLaren, because she believed that it should not be "critical *pedagogy*, but critical *educational theory*" (p. 42). So she concludes:

Their pedagogy might be seen to restrict its audience to those readers who have the time, energy, or inclination to struggle with it (namely, other academics and graduate students; not the avowedly targeted teachers or, in many cases, undergraduate students) and, in so limiting its audience, it subsequently limits its political potential (p. 38).

Another theorist who claimed some critiques on critical pedagogy was Elizabeth Ellsworth (1992). She observed critical pedagogy from a feminist perspective. She claimed that the word "critical" is a "repressive myth[s] that perpetuate[s] relations of domination" and hides "the actual political agendas … namely antiracism, antisexism, anti-elitism, anti-heterosexism, anti-ableism, anti-classism, and anti-neoconservatism" (p. 93). She continued that:

> "theorists of critical pedagogy have failed to launch any meaningful analysis of or program for reformulating the institutionalized power imbalances between themselves and their students, or of the essentially paternalistic project of education itself" (p. 98).

Bowers (1987) said,"The problem with Freire's position is not that he advocates critical reflection but that he makes it the only legitimate source of knowledge and authority" (p. 129).

Some scholars NIL some post modernism criticisms as Burbules and Rice (1991) who stated to three recurring ideas that appear in the literature: "the rejection of absolutes; the perceived saturation of all social and political discourses with power or dominance; and the celebration of difference" (p. 397). Weiler (1991) who mentioned to the modernist tendencies of critical pedagogy and postmodernism. Parker (1997) maintains many critical educational practices are located within modernist assumptions of teacher autonomy and leave much to be when viewed from a postmodern understanding of the nature of knowledge construction.

3. Conclusion

Theories and particularly, critical pedagogy theories make some changes in perception of those who are in touch with them. This result is tangible in the issues related to education, and especially –as this study is subjected- in language teaching and learning too. As it is in the literature, it can be applied in language

activities related to both language teachers (as teacher education programs) to projects related to language learners (as improving their macro and micro skills) in order to have significant language instructional activities.

Having a comprehensive understanding of the function and value of critical pedagogy concept and to apply it in language classes practically to make sense out of it and to practice to do the own thinking. One issue in implementing critical pedagogy is its interference with the traditional methods used in classes, so it is essential to think about the way that critical pedagogy strategies can be adapted to the past teaching method used for a class.

Having explored the literature in this paper, the former research make us think more about the way we teach as a teacher, the way we learn as a learner and to think more about the instruction process that occurs in classrooms. Teachers are believed as the most significant figures in meeting this end and if they have a thorough understanding of this kind of pedagogy, so they are able to transform it to their students more efficiently. Being aware of the challenges and the problems that can be in implementation and development of critical thinking and pedagogy skills in the classrooms is valuable too. Teachers need to bear in their minds that learning their students to apply this knowledge to other situations is one of the central activities in order to make sense of this type of pedagogy.

Breunig (2005) mentions some of the constraints of applying critical pedagogy as "lack of student preparation, institutional constraints, student resistance, and the fact that research is often valued over teaching in post-secondary institutions and student-centered teaching requires a lot of time" (p. 120).

Based on the current and also the related research to this realm, some groups are targeted for pedagogical implication of critical thinking and pedagogy. Some of these groups are EFL and ESL teachers who have an essential role in transforming these critical activities, learners who need to be eager to use them in their education, educational officials who desire to follow more recent teaching methods and techniques to apply in the educational system, and EFL/ESL textbook designers who try to design more up-to-date books mainly for educational purposes.

Concluding this study, it can be a good idea for the interested researchers to investigate the role of critical pedagogy in various aspects of SLA, especially its effect on learning different macro and micro skills of the second or foreign language. As Lather (1998) stated; the essence of conducting the present day task of critical pedagogical project is as "situate the experience of impossibility as an enabling site for working through aporias" (p. 495). He concludes that: "As an arena of practice, critical pedagogy might serve a transvaluation of praxis if it can find a way to participate in the struggle of these forces as we move toward an experience of the promise that is unforeseeable from the perspective of our present conceptual frameworks" (p. 497). According to the lack of studies done in this realm in the context of Iran, it is recommended to Iranian interested researchers too.

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