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**An Evaluation of Critical Pedagogy and its Relationship with Teachers’
Teaching Styles in ESP Courses in Iranian Universities**

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In

TEFL

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IN THE NAME OF GOD

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For my beloved parents

&

*For Ehsan and his many,
generous and critical gifts*

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Abstract

With the advent of the approaches seeking equality in the society, critical pedagogy has gained considerable weight in educational systems across the world. Critical pedagogy endeavors to establish equality and fairness in different veins of education by respecting all the social, political, and cultural views brought in by teachers and students (Kincheloe, 2008). This study mainly attempts to examine the application of critical pedagogy in Iranian universities by ESP professors. It also strives to ascertain the relationship between teachers' teaching styles and the application of critical pedagogy in ESP courses. The two questionnaires used in this study, namely critical pedagogy and teaching style questionnaires, were filled out by 123 male and female ESP professors holding M.A. or Ph.D. degrees. The critical pedagogy questionnaire was developed and validated by the researcher. Based on the commonalities of the variables, five components were extracted out of the questionnaire, which were called critical thinking, curriculum, learning-centeredness, socio-political issues, and gender. The results show that the ESP teachers in Iranian Universities are inclined toward applying principles of critical pedagogy. Moreover, the teaching style questionnaire developed by Larson (2007) was validated by the researcher for ESP context. Then, the relationships between the two subcomponents of teaching style questionnaire and the application of critical pedagogy were calculated. The results show an almost strong relationship of 0.66 between Intellectual excitement and critical pedagogy application on the one hand, and a low correlation of 0.36 between interpersonal rapport and the application of critical pedagogy on the other. The results of the study can be used by teachers, teachers' educators, and material developers.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, English for Specific Purposes, Teaching style, Validation

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List of abbreviations

ESP	English for Specific Purposes
CP	Critical Pedagogy

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Language teaching has experienced the wax and wane of methods with the advent of GTM in 1900. Methods have replaced one another due to different reasons. In some cases the theoretical foundations on which they were constructed were undermined. A good example is Chomsky's challenging behavioristic and structuralistic view in favor of transformational Grammar, which in turn replaced ALM with Cognitive methods such as Silent Way. In some other cases the methods were way beyond practicality (e.g. Suggestopedia) which brought them to a dead end. This swing of pendulum, to borrow Brown's (2007) term, ended in postmethod era, when the uniqueness of methods was considered as a major factor deterring teachers from using a prefabricated fixed method in different classroom contexts (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Kumaravadivelu (2003) maintains that the so-called methods are believed to be fruitful only for the novice teachers who are not cognizant of the do's and don'ts of teaching. Consequently, Post method era has given rise to what is called "beyond methods". He believes that, due to the complexity and uniqueness of different classroom contexts, teachers should be well-prepared to utilize strategies and methodologies which might not be similar to those in their other teaching experiences.

A trend which has been publicized by scholars of the field calls for criticality on the part of language teachers. This trend rooted in the top-down criticism (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) set against the so-called methods used in the educational systems, in which power is disseminated from the policy makers to material developers and, in turn, to the teachers. In such circumstances, teachers are deemed to be sheer

implementers of what is dictated to them. However, nowadays, critical pedagogy (henceforth CP) is considered as a practice which tries to emancipate both learners and teachers from the power relations prevalent in the society and educational system. Teachers are expected to be critical of their own teaching, educational system, syllabus and whatever relates to their experience of teaching. As such, CP is assumed to facilitate the situation for individuals to share their own critical views about the educational context (Thousand et al., 1999).

Like general language teaching, English for Specific Purposes (henceforth, ESP) can be influenced by innovations in teaching and learning approaches such as critical pedagogy. ESP, as one of the branches of English as a foreign or second language, is designed for a special group of people who aspire to work in a special context (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In other words, ESP courses are developed to teach a specific area of technical English to people with different needs and objectives majoring in different fields. In the early seventies, many attempts were made to design courses of English for specific purposes (e.g. Pratt, 1973). Rodgers (1969) states that the nature of such courses seems to be learner-centered because they target the needs of learners who try to learn English used in their specific fields. However, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out the concept of learner-centeredness is to some extent misleading as it implies that the only individuals who are important in the learning process are learners. They believe that learners together with teachers and all those who are somehow involved in teaching and learning are essential elements of an educational system, and thus it is wise to replace learner-centeredness with learning-centeredness.

Learning-centered approaches as such call for an individualistic view where all the individuals including teachers and students are conferred a sense of freedom to negotiate their needs with other stakeholders, which challenges the top-down procedures in education. In top-down criticism as proposed by Richards and Rodgers (2001), the policy makers and material developers dictate what to be done by teachers and students. Using a critical view challenges such top-down procedures and consequently leads to a real learning-centered approach.

CP concerns the whole teaching contexts including general English and ESP. Sullivan & Girginer (2002) believe that effective ESP programs require relevant

materials, knowledgeable instructors, and teamwork with subject matter professionals. That is, ESP curriculum consists of the components of materials, teachers, evaluation, and learning theories. Nowadays, the role of the ESP teacher is becoming a controversial issue. Due to the fact that ESP courses are so different around the world, no single model can be assigned for an ESP teacher (Robinson, 1991). There are certainly differing and conflicting perspectives regarding the abilities and qualities required by the ESP teacher. Stevens (2012) claimed that an ESP teacher is often a teacher of general English who is unexpectedly required to teach ESP courses. Such a teacher may not deal with his students' areas of specialism. Williams (1981) stated that in addition to the ability to write teaching materials or perform a needs analysis, there are some personal qualities needed by an ESP teacher such as enthusiasm, the knowledge of students' world, rapport and the ability to develop and administer a course.

Every teacher including the ESP teacher has their own personal qualities and teaching style. There are different categorizations for teaching style. Visual, auditory, group, kinesthetic, individual and tactile styles (Salem, 2001), Formal-Informal (Bennett, et al., 1976), Open-traditional (Solomon & Kendall, 1979), Intellectual Excitement-Interpersonal Rapport (Lowman, 1995) are but some of the divisions propounded for teaching style. According to these classifications, different measures of assessing teachers' teaching style have also been developed. The explanation of each measure is beyond the scope of this study; therefore, merely the instrument used in this study, i.e. Intellectual Excitement- Interpersonal Rapport (Lowman, 1995) will be elaborated on. This is a two-dimensional instrument characterizing teaching style of different teachers. Intellectual Excitement centers on the content to be learned, the precision of what is being presented and the way it is being presented. In this style teacher-student relationship is not as important as the content to be conveyed to students. On the other hand, what is focused on in Interpersonal Rapport is the learner. Classroom psychology and interpersonal relationship between teacher and students are of great importance in this style. This instrument will be elaborated on in Chapters Two and Three.

Despite the importance of ESP at tertiary levels and the contribution of critical pedagogy to teaching and learning, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, very

few attempts have been ever made to investigate ESP programs in Iranian universities from a critical point of view. This study is an attempt to evaluate teaching ESP from a critical perspective. It also strives to see if there is any relationship between teachers' teaching styles and their use of critical pedagogy in ESP courses.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Since three decades ago several scholars (e.g. Hutchinson, 1987; Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001) have elaborated on the history, development, and types of ESP. As Dudley-Evans (1998) states, most of the ESP courses depart from everyday dialogues and communications and focus more on a special field of study and its related jargon. ESP teachers are expected to prepare their students for a special field within a limited time. Thus, it seems pragmatic to them to abstract the situations the students may face in future and try to transmit them to their students. This very fact has been claimed to be the forte of ESP courses compared with general English courses, where varied facets of language are covered (Benesch, 2001). Therefore, ESP courses are supposed to be founded on the basis of communicative needs of the students surfacing through needs analysis. The problem here lies in the fact that although students are asked to provide their views about their needs, they do not take part in the process of material development. A true needs analysis, thus, should provide the opportunity for the learners to criticize and modify the content to be presented to them. They should also be able to realize the hidden agenda, including the ideology and beliefs, which is disseminated through the use of a foreign language and culture.

Those involved in teaching and learning process should be empowered to identify inequalities and to solve the problem of injustice. Teachers and learners in ESP classes are not of course exceptions. They must be aware of the power relations that surround the educational system. Benesch (2001) argues that the traditional needs analysis, a typical criterion for defining ESP, should be replaced by critical needs analysis. The issue of power in ESP courses relates to those who make decisions regarding the content of the course and the nature of teaching and assessment.

Critical needs analysis tends to draw students' attention to issues of power and to the fact that it is possible to raise questions about classes and assignments. It sees students not as learners who need to learn the contents of the textbooks, but as thinking individuals who can participate in the learning process and can help shape the nature of the course and the forms of assessment.

Today, critical pedagogy remains a source of direction for those educators involved in a struggle against oppression. The time has come for teachers who still dare to hope for an improvement in the educational system, to practice critical pedagogy and to incorporate its principles into their teaching practices. In spite of the fact that some scholars attack some of the ideas underlying critical pedagogy, its central message remains really important in contemporary education (Macrine, 2009). Holding on critical pedagogy makes educators create a learning situation which empowers learners to be critical of different aspects of their learning context.

The forerunners of the movement such as Freire (1998), Giroux (1992), and McLaren (2000) believe that education is a "political act" and that the politics which surrounds education influences the whole elements in the educational system such as materials, teachers, and students. Therefore, teachers and students must be aware of the political system that is prevalent in their society (Kincheloe, 2005). They also insist that teachers and students are to be "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1988) and "cultural workers" (Freire, 1998). In other words, teachers and students should be made aware of the differing beliefs, thoughts and behaviors which they are exposed to.

Nowadays, having a critical view toward teaching and learning seems a necessity. CP is an approach through which critical views can find their way into classrooms. ESP classes, which are the focus of this study, thus, may need to benefit from the rewards of CP approach. In order for the researchers to examine whether principles of such approach are practiced in classes, developing valid questionnaires may prove useful. Such work can be helpful for the researchers who strive for discerning the power relationship and the views of teachers about unequal power distribution in the educational system.

ESP teachers are supposed to bear some special abilities and skills related to the field they teach and the roles that they play in their classrooms depend to a large

extent on their style of teaching. This teaching style is deemed to be persistent in a teacher even though the situational conditions may change (Conti & Welborn, 1996). With the growing popularity that CP has gained in recent years and with its emphasis on the roles teachers play in the classroom and the influence of their beliefs on their students, adopting a suitable teaching style which proves useful for students is of great significance. It behooves teachers, thus, to embrace a teaching style that is congruent with the principles of CP.

Moreover, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, few comprehensive studies, if any, has been carried out to investigate whether CP principles are taken into account in teaching ESP to university students. In other words, it is not yet known whether ESP teachers are familiar with CP and whether they teach ESP in line with the principles of such pedagogy. One of the problems this study has addressed is, thus, the degree to which CP principles are incorporated into Iranian ESP teachers. Furthermore, there is paucity of research on the teaching style (e.g. Grasha, 1994; Jarvis, 2004; Lowman, 1995), and almost no research has done on the influence of teaching style on the teachers' opting for critical pedagogy. To fill this gap, therefore, the researcher decided to examine if teachers' teaching style has any relationship with the application of CP principles. If proved, it can be a remarkable finding which indicates that teacher styles can predict their criticality and their worldview in general.

To answer the above problems, a CP questionnaire was developed and validated by the researcher; moreover, the teaching style questionnaire developed by Larson (2007) was rendered to validation procedures. As no study has validated the CP and teaching style questionnaires in an ESP context, this study can be of assistance for future researches.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

Critical pedagogy has become popular among language teachers in recent years, and a lot of studies have been reported in this field. The main purpose of the current study is to investigate the application of critical pedagogy in ESP courses. In so doing, a questionnaire is developed and validated to measure the application of CP in