INVESTIGATING ON CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN EFL CLASSROOMS: CONSCIOUSNESS, PRACTICE AND PERCEIVED PROBLEMS

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Abstract

Although critical pedagogy has brought about positive changes in the field of education by shifting from traditional pedagogy to emancipatory pedagogy, not much attention has been paid to the implementations and problem side aspect in Nepal. This paper investigated the consciousness of English language teachers in the tenets of critical pedagogy. Moreover, it also presented the discussion of how Nepali teachers teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) at higher education institutions practice the critical pedagogy approach and delved the problems the teachers face when put the theory into action. I employed the mixed methods design where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. I explored the informed consciousness of teachers about the critical pedagogy. Though they have not been following the exactly the same critical pedagogy procedure of practice in the EFL, they have been trying to be the active agent of transformation by applying the techniques like dialogue, debate, reflective practices, allowing the learners experiences, opinions in the classroom discussions. However, the teachers' and students, status quo tendency and adopting the safe method are found as the major difficulties of proper practice of critical pedagogy in EFL classroom.

Keywords: *Critical pedagogy, banking mode, problem posing mode, dialogue, praxis.*

Introduction

Traditionally, teachers were taken as the sole source of knowledge who deposited the essential knowledge on the learners bit by bit. They were the agent of knowledge transfer and students were the consumers of knowledge. Learners were always passive without any active role during their learning. They were not aware about socio- political issues and the learners were not provided with their agency of learning. Critical pedagogy approach came into existence in reaction to this sort of traditional depository mode of education. Critical pedagogy, based on the seminal work of Paulo Freire (1970) has been used as a transformative pedagogy in the institutions throughout the world. It takes shape as a dialogue in which teachers and students mutually investigate everyday

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themes, social issues and academic knowledge. Through dialogue and problem posing, the students become the active agent of their own learning. Critical pedagogy aims at helping students achieve critical awareness. It aims at improving social justice with an emphasis on action. Duncan, Andrade & Morrel (2007) summarize critical pedagogy as:

An approach to education that is rooted in the experiences of marginalized people; that is central in a critique of structural, economic and racial oppression; that is focused on a dialogue instead of one way transmission of knowledge; and that is structured to empower individuals and collectives as agents of social change (as cited in Larson, 2014, p. 122).

This transformative approach is contrasted to a banking approach to education "in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is depositor" of knowledge (Freire, 2005, p 72). In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. An educator looks at students as if they are empty container ready to be filled with knowledge. Banking concept of education regards humans as adaptable, manageable beings. The more the students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop critical consciousness (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). The banking system maintains the status quo whereas transformative approach challenges it. As alternative to banking model, Freire (2005) proposed problem posing model which can lead to critical consciousness. Problem posing concept affirms humans in the process of becoming- as unfinished, uncompleted beings. It solves the student – teacher contradiction by recognizing that knowledge is not deposited from teacher to student but is instead formulated through dialogue and interaction between them.

Critical pedagogy connects the words with the world. For this connection to be established, the learners must develop the skill to tackle with their world problems (Akabari as cited in Noroozisiam &Soozandehfar, 2011). The learners should learn to read the world before they read the words. They must come to an understanding of the cultural, political and social practices that constitute their world and their reality before they go through the prescribed text. The key Freirean concept of critical pedagogy includes problem posing, dialogue, praxis, codes. In the classroom, problems are posed by the learners which form the main content of the lesson. Problem posing educational method includes three stages: listening, dialogue and action (Wallerstein, as cited in Larson, 2014, p. 122). Dialogue is the key to the problem posing. According to Freire (2005), "problem posing education regards dialogue as an essential to the act of cognition which unveils reality. Dialogue requires critical thinking and equality among all participants. Praxis, another key component of critical pedagogy is "reflection and action" Freire (2005). It consists of an ongoing cycle of reflection that leads to action those results in more reflection, further action and so forth. Codes are concrete

physical expressions that represent all of the aspects of a theme surrounding a problem. They can take many forms like photographs, drawings, stories, movies, songs and are used to enhance critical thinking and dialogue.

Wallerstein, (as cited in Larson, 2014, p. 122) outlines some basic steps for critical pedagogy. First the teacher familiarizes him/ her to the learners and identifies their problem. Then codes based on the problems are provided and the students are asked to elicit further critical thinking and dialogue. Within this process students should name the problem, understand how it applies to them, determine the cause of the problem, generalize to others and finally, suggest alternative solution to the problems. The last of these steps involves action on the part of the learners. However, there is not one sole kind of critical pedagogy. It is flexible in nature so that it can fit the local context of learning. Norton & Toohey (2004) claim "critical pedagogy cannot be a unitary set of texts, beliefs, convictions or assumptions" (p.2). Since critical pedagogy is flexible and its aim is to use experiences and issues that are directly or indirectly connected to the students as the learning materials. Multicultural, multiethnic, multi -religious, multilingual countries like Nepal is the proper situation where critical pedagogy makes sense.

Role of Learners in Critical Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy regards learning as active and creative process through critical thinking. It always puts learners at the central of teaching and learning activity, where the learners should struggle to gain such knowledge which helps them to fight against inequality and injustice in the classroom. Critical pedagogy advocates in favor of learners' freedom, to think for themselves, to behave intellectually without oppression from powerful elite, to cherish their beliefs and traditions and cultures without the threats of forced change (Brown, as cited in Poudel, 2014). Students, as Giroux (1997) puts it, are active participants in that together with the teacher they correct the curricula and that they share their ideas and learn to challenge assumptions. According to Degener (2001), students contribute to curricular decisions and determine areas of study and the associated reading materials.

Role of Teacher in Critical Pedagogy

Teachers in this approach are viewed as problem posers. As a pioneer to this approach Dewey (1963) believes that learning through problem solving and practical application leads students to a more active role in determining their experiences and positions within society In CP, teachers play the role of transformative intellectual since they are taken as agents of transformation in their society. Smyth, (2001, pp 22-23) writes "Teachers must go beyond the roles of technicians,

managers or efficient clerks imposed upon them by others and be unwilling to continue to accept the way things are in schools." Poudel (2014) referring to Holliday's key speech, quotes NELTA editorial review of NELTA conference proceedings (2011):

…teachers' role as a passive-technician is not enough rather they have to be a transformative intellectual. Teachers should understand that classroom is socially constructed and historically situated and they should create such an environment where students from various backgrounds can get opportunities to utilize their prior knowledge. In general, English teachers are not simply in-charges of classroom but also agents for social changes. They can also contribute to foster democracy and critical thinking skill by creative inclusive learning environment where students can exercise their values, assumptions and identities shaped by local, national and global socio-cultural settings and expectations. (p. III)

As the teachers are the agents to bring desirable change in the students, they are expected to bring the theories in to classroom practices. Teachers need more opportunities to reflect on their practice and engage in discussions with other teachers about their success and failure. Such discussions can be enriched by drawing on praxis.

Praxis in Critical Pedagogy

Praxis is the self creative activity through which one identifies the surrounding world. When the ideological concept is brought into practice, it is praxis. The requirements of praxis are theory both relevant to the world and nurtured by actions in it and an action component in its own theorizing that grows out of practical and political groundings (Buker, as cited in Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Praxis implies a combination of the awareness gained from ideological critique with reflective strategies for social change (Prasad & Caproni, 1997).

Praxis aims at bridging the gap between theory and transformation action (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Praxis for Freire (1970) is both reflection and action, both interpretation and change. Critical consciousness is brought not through intellectual effort alone but through praxis. Thus praxis is the critical reflection and action which aims at implementing educational practices. Though teachers in EFL context have positive perception about the theory of critical pedagogy, very few teachers are found to be implementing the essence of it through praxis. Critical pedagogy may be challenging endeavor in EFL cultural context when there are hierarchies and constraints.

Critical pedagogy, though having a long history in the European and American language teaching system has recently entered in the Asian territory. In the countries like Nepal where English language

is taught and learnt as a foreign language, teaching learning process has been inspired by teacher centre lecturing, grammar translation method, paraphrasing, drilling, repetition, and memorization. The teachers are taken as the sole source of knowledge, having abundant deposits and they transact it to the students according to their needs. The students are rarely taken to the critical situation with the opportunities of dialogue. They are spoon fed gradually. Moreover, the teachers in the higher level are well theoretically informed about the need of interaction, contextualization of the teaching items, the ground reality might be different. This research tries to explore the existing situation of classroom in terms of the pedagogy the teachers implement to empower the learners.

From a decade of my experiences of teaching to the students of higher levels in semi urban area of Nepal, I realized that teaching and learning can better take place in dialogic situation and in problem posing way. Thus, I am interested to see what extent the teachers of campus level are aware about the criticality of language teaching, how they implement these ideas in teaching and the problems they face while implementing the theory in to practic

Methodology

This research employs mixed method research design (Creswell, 2009, Doyle, Brady & Byrne, 2016), which systematically integrates quantitative and qualitative method in a single study for the purpose of fuller picture and deeper understanding of a phenomena, (Creswell, 2009, p.203).Within the mixed method design, the researcher makes use of the convergent parallel design. In this design, quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently but remain separate (Creswell & Clark, as cited in Doyle, Brady & Byrne, 2016). Equal priority is assigned to quantitative and qualitative data and results are usually merged in the interpretation phase of the research where meta-inferences are developed (Doyle, Brady & Byrne, 2016). This study comprises two phases Quantitative data were collected from 20 teachers who have been teaching at Bachelors and Masters Level through random sampling. The researcher reviewed resources including books, journals and research articles to develop a theoretical framework for the instrument. Apart from this, specific attention was paid to a few prominent figures' works of the field namely Friere (1970), Shor (1992), Giroux (1997), Norton & Toohey (2004). A five point Likert scale was developed to find out the level consciousness of Nepali EFL teachers in critical pedagogy. The data elicited from the instrument were analyzed using descriptive statistics. After the first phase, the researcher selected two participants purposively to dig out the implementation aspect of critical pedagogy and problems. I visited the teachers in their convenient location, shared the background of the study in brief. After briefing, they agreed to be the part of the study by being the interviewee. I agreed to use the pseudonym to protect their anonymity

and for confidentiality. I engaged in the interview with them individually. During my focused interview with them, I tried to maintain the natural environment. The individual interviews lasted between 10 to 15 minutes. I was able to collect deep and rich data from their experiences which enabled me to explain the practice and problems. It was recorded in mobile phone recorder for the further analysis and interpretation. The descriptive mode of data was transcribed, coded, categorized and interpreted connecting with the theoretical tenets.

Results and discussions

The findings related to both quantitative and qualitative date have been presented and discussed in this section. The findings from the quantitative data are simply presented in the frequency table with analysis whereas the data from the qualitative procedure have been presented in the pattern of themes.

Table 1 Awareness of EFL teachers in theoretical tenets of critical pedagogy

S. N.	Tenets of Critical Pedagogy	Responses in Percentage				
		SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %
1	Teachers make the learners learn, think, and act more independently.	75	25	-	-	-
2	Teachers help students to develop their position and place in the world.	45	35	20	-	-
3	EFL teachers should design teaching strategies & techniques based on learners' specific features.	50	50	-	-	-
4	Teachers books are those designed locally in light of learners' real life.	30	70	-	-	-
5	Teachers must share their authority with the students in the classroom	45	20	20	10	5
6	Teachers should participate in dialogue and discussion as learner among the learners.	65	35	-	-	-
7	Teachers are not only the source of knowledge.	25	55	20	-	-
8	EFL teachers should encourage and help learners to create learning opportunities themselves.	65	35	-	-	-
9	Teachers should use dialogue and open communication in EFL classroom for sharing ideas.	40	60	-	-	-
10	The content of EFL classroom and books in Nepal is unrelated to learners' real life concerns and problems	5	50	30	15	-
11	Genuine and real life dialogue should form the context of teaching and learning in EFL classroom.	30	70	-	-	-
12	EFL teachers should have critical and socio- political approach to the content of course books.	20	80	-	-	-
13	The role of a teacher is to improve learners' critical thinking skill.	25	65	10	-	-
14	Environmental, social, and political issues are suitable topics to focus on in EFL classroom.	20	55	20	5	-
15	Main goal of education is to understand the dominant social norms.	25	55	10	10	-
16	Teachers' role is to aware students about inequalities in society.	30	60	10	-	-
17	The teacher adopts negotiated syllabus.	35	45	15	5	-
18	The teacher and students collaborate with each other to draw the conclusion in the issue of discussion	60	35	5	-	-

Table 1 reveals the teachers' familiarity with the different aspects of critical pedagogy. The statements and the responses in five levels indicate their awareness and theoretical knowledge about it. Majority of the informants (75%) strongly agreed and (25%) agreed that teachers should work for learners' autonomy by allowing them to learn, think and act more independently. Equal number of teachers (50%) revealed their strong agreement and agreement on the need of teaching strategies based on learners' specific interests. Teachers (65%) accepted that they participate in class dialogue and discussion as learners. A large number (80%) of teachers believe in the creation of critical and social-political context while dealing with the content. The teachers responses varied from strongly agreed to strongly disagree in the issue of the aim of education, 55% teachers believe that understanding the dominant social norms as the key goal of education. Unlike it 25 % are strongly agreed on the same tenet whereas 10 % / 10%participants remained neutral and disagreed on the issue respectively.

In the issue of syllabus, 45% teachers agreed on the negotiated syllabus, 35% strongly agreed, 15 % remained neutral on the type of syllabus adopted in critical pedagogy. In overall, the frequency distribution displays that EFL teachers are conscious about the syllabus, content, materials, teaching techniques, activities and teachers' role envisioned by critical pedagogy. Though they show their informed awareness in overall critical teaching procedure, there has been a question about its implementation in the real classroom. I conducted I in-depth interview to explore the models and patterns of its practice in the class. I draw the following themes from the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data.

Critical Consciousness and Informed Practice

As it is the new concept in the context of Nepal, I wanted to explore the critical knowledge and practice of critical pedagogy among the teachers teaching at HEIs. I explored that both teacher A and teacher B having the qualification of M. Ed and M. A. and M Phil scholar in English Language Education are familiar with the theoretical tenets of critical pedagogy. Teacher A said that he had carried out many research studies on it and also presented a paper on the same issue at TESOL conference. While, teacher B admitted that he has heard about it but did not have in depth knowledge about the concept. Teacher B being engaged in teaching English more than eight years is subtly informed about the approach and has materialized in the classroom in his own way without being consistent to theoretical patterns. When I asked them about their eagerness in presenting the lesson critically, teacher A said:

... I am strongly and enthusiastically motivated to present lessons embracing critical pedagogy. As it is the pedagogy which relates teaching topics, teaching matters, teaching

contents to the local context meaningfully and it also values students' opinions experiences and interests. Most importantly, it is a generative mode of teaching…

Teachers being theoretically informed about the critical pedagogy like teacher A are strongly inspired by generative mode of teaching similar to Freire's problem posing concept of teaching. The banking system of education is not followed which according to Monchinski (2008) pits teacher against students and both against the joys that the education can bring and should bring. At the same time, teacher B agrees to the concept of criticality and is inspired to create meaningful local context in teaching English language classroom.

I explored the teachers furnished with theoretical critical pedagogy approach are using it in practice. The teachers with knowledge and skills at both cognitive and affective levels have been found implementing the theory of praxis in the classroom. The classrooms activities are developed to address the concept of praxis (action plus reflection) as proposed by Freire (1970).The teachers have shared the actual classroom lesson with specific topic. While teaching Myth (a topic in Expanding Horizons in English), he provides them chance to put their understanding from their local context.

…Before dealing with the topic Myth, I asked the students to tell if they are familiar with the myths. I gave them chance to put their understanding. I asked them to tell about the Nepalese myth, local myths for example; Ramayana that is familiar to them. Later, I presented the lesson relating to the local context of Nepal. And then, I assigned them group work and asked them to discuss on the myth; relating local myths to Norwegian myths…

He encourages their opinions, understandings. The ideas received from them are discussed with the class. Teacher A demonstrates more openness to students interacting with their experiences. Affirming identities, making sure both teachers and students see each other as an intelligent and creative and welcoming all students, ideas and experiences are the basis of critical pedagogies in language teaching (Cummins, cited in Norton &Toohey, 2004), teacher A presents the classroom teaching generating ideas from the learners and empowering them. The students' opinions and experiences are valued in the classroom. Connecting the classroom with the students' real life context is one way to ensure that teachers have been practicing the essence of critical approach. On the other side of spectrum, there are dominant and prevailing ideologies that exist in society and academic institutions. Haynes, Gale and Parker (2015) state that we remain constantly aware of these types of ideologies to ensure that we do not bring cultural invasion of historically and socially constructed thinking to our interpretations and understandings as it is constructed

from the notion of superiority/inferiority, male/ female, white/ black, poor/ rich . Praxis requires teachers to reflect upon these dominant ideologies and recreate knowledge and understanding in new, alternative and liberating ways. The students' positions and academic voices are to be addressed by the educators in order to promote equality in terms of race and ethnicity. While having the interview with teacher B, I explored that he creates comfortable classroom atmosphere to ensure the setting envisioned by critical pedagogy approach.

Teachers told that they often use socio political stance to bridge the traditional trend with critical pedagogy. They agree that our systems are discriminatory as it values only the powerful minority and talented pupils but ignores the minority and underprivileged. They act as agent of transformation rather than transmission.

Dialogue, Debate and Discussion as the Part of Practicum

To Freire (1970), dialogism is the base of critical education. It is one means of actively involving students in the issue. The use and practice of dialogue limits teachers talk and encourages learners voice (Shor, 1992). It creates mutual acceptance and trust between the students and teachers. The teachers in my study have shown their strong concern about dialogue, debate and discussions. They often listen to their students and learn about their problems that are important within their communities. Dialogue in opposition to monologue challenges a readymade truth and status quo and promotes egalitarian way of learning (Friere, 1970). Teacher A shares the experience of using these tools while teaching CULTURAL PLURALISM (a topic from Expanding Horizons in English). He asks them to favor one stance either sigularism or pluralism and debate over the issue. The teacher empowers the students and gives them voice which enables them to decode the hidden codes to construct reality.

Problems in Planning and Practice

Despite the positive experiences within English language classrooms using critical pedagogy, problems and challenges have not been absent from these practices. Teachers involved in the interview have shared the challenges which they think should be addressed. The problems are related to curriculum, contents, instructional materials, time, and size of the class, cultural expectations, and readiness of the learners and so on. When teacher A was asked about the inclusion of content relevant to critical pedagogy in the courses he teaches, he pointed out the number of courses that have been designed incorporating critical pedagogy approach such as; course of compulsory English prescribed for B. Ed. first year, Reading Writing and Critical Thinking of the same year. Similarly, Expanding Horizons in English prescribed for B. Ed. second year and

other literature courses of bachelor and masters level include the content. Moreover, it is not difficult to manage the instructional materials. On the basis of the nature of topic, the teacher can prepare the materials such photos, newspaper cutouts and so on in the classroom.

The most importantly, both the teachers agree that traditional power hierarchies and habituation in banking mode have been interfering in the implementation of the critical pedagogy. In one hand do not want to change their learning habit since they themselves are socialized from their earliest experiences in school to expect some manifestation of the depositing concept of education in the classroom. On the other hand, teacher A claims that;

If we want to practice critical pedagogy in all classrooms of Nepal, you will also feel the same problem in teachers' side as well. Teachers feel much more comfortable to present in depositing mode. It is less risky.

There are a lot of good teachers who really care for their students, their subject matter and the art of teaching but in their daily practice perpetuated the banking concept of education (Monchinski, 2008). Furthermore, although critical pedagogy is the new concept in the context of Nepal, educators involved in higher education institutions have critical consciousness. The key problem is the comprehensive level of knowledge and strong desire to convert that knowledge into skill and practice.

Conclusions

This study uncovers the fact that though language teachers teaching HEIs of Nepal are aware of critical pedagogy and favor the beneficial consequences of its principles and premises, they occasionally apply such pedagogy in their teachings. Analyzing the quantitative data and reflecting on the in depth interview with the teachers I noticed some obstacles which prevent teachers from practicing the principles of critical pedagogy. Centralized education system in which decisions are made in top-down manner is the major problem. They argued that the pre-planned decisions about courses, materials and teaching procedures reduces the learners' creativity and criticality. They also complained that large number of students with diverse ethnic background in a single class prevents from conducting learner centered activities. Thus, it does not encourage the formation of friendly and supportive learning atmosphere in which learners could develop mutual trust and understanding of one another. Teachers who have been practicing critical pedagogy suggest that materials developers and language classes should be sensitive to learners' needs, their learning styles and local knowledge in order to enhance quality of teaching and learning. From this mini research, I came to delve that language classrooms can be the places of genuine

interaction. It is possible to say that working with critical language can be the great opportunity for the teachers to rethink their role and the role of students in the society. Critical pedagogy demands engaged and imaginative teachers who aren't afraid of leaving their "comfort zones" and taking risks in the classroom (Monchinski, 2008). Critical pedagogy demands teachers who are committed to their fields, teachers who will follow developments inside and outside their subject matter. Critical pedagogy demands teachers who will not knowingly fool themselves and their students, teachers who will face the relations of power in their classrooms, their schools, and their societies. There exists an imperative need to decolonize the methodological aspects of ELT and move toward the concept of post method by being sensitive to each learning context and consider it as a unique experience. Nepali teachers in this study being theoretically informed are reluctant to use this approach despite having knowledge about the tenets of critical pedagogy, lack of focused training and workshops, crowded classes, poor classroom management and logistic support. I witnessed teachers' appreciation for critical pedagogy and passion for practicing it for transformative education. They are also enthusiastically motivated to play the role of theoretically informed educators to active agent for social transformation.

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