Raising critical consciousness in teaching reading skills using critical pedagogy principles: a case of an Iranian school graduate

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Abstract

This case study reports on critical consciousness development of a female school graduate in a reading comprehension course. Critical pedagogy (CP) principles were adopted in the course during which the participant was encouraged to read a set of passages critically and write critical journals. In addition, after reading each passage, she participated in a relevant critical discussion with the tutor. Thematic analysis was adopted to trace the participant's critical consciousness development. The results showed that even though she developed critical consciousness to a great extent, this could not modify her ideology about an issue affecting her life directly. Furthermore, thematic analysis of an unstructured interview revealed that the participant was satisfied with the implementation of CP principles in teaching reading skills. The findings suggest that teachers need to give further weight to students' critical consciousness and teacher training programs need to raise teachers' awareness of its impact on students' social life.

Keywords: *Critical pedagogy, reading skills, thematic analysis, critical consciousness*

1. Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) methodologies have failed to take into account the sociocultural and political facts and facets of local contexts. That is, they perpetuate the power relations and authority in the classroom context (Canagarajah, 2005; Sadeghi, 2008) and students are considered as a passive recipient.

Regarding reading skills, "reading was generally conceptualized as a passive act of decoding meaning and information in accordance with the intentions of the author of a text" (Hirvela, 2015, p.9). However, with the emergence of critical pedagogy (CP), language learners have been empowered and provided with further rights in their learning process (Giroux, 1983) and reading has been considered as a way of provoking thinking (Clarke, Truelove, Hulme & Snowling, 2014). Leather (2017) maintains that reading can be adopted to raise students' awareness of various forms of inequality in the society. Leather exerts emphasis on graded readers which address different forms of relevant discrimination and inequality and that are appropriate for given students' language proficiency level.

With respect to the importance of CP, a large array of studies investigated teachers' attitudes toward CP (e.g., Aliakbari & Allahmoradi, 2011; Alibakhshi, Rezaei and Mezajin, 2013; Jeyaraj & Harland, 2016; Mehrpour & Baharloo, 2015; Noroozisiam & Soozandehfar, 2011; Sahragard, Razmjoo and Baharloo, 2014; Samar & Davari, 2011; Sarani, Alibakhshi and Molazehi, 2014) in the Iranian and non-Iranian contexts. According to Templer (2017), given research on CP in connection with ELT, CP has been under the spotlight in Iran more than in many other countries. In addition, some more studies (e.g. Akbari, 2008; Mazdaee & Maftoon, 2012), discussing the risks and opportunities for critical pedagogues dealing with controversial issues, have been conducted in the

Iranian context. However, the extant literature indicates that relatively a handful of studies (e.g., Sadeghi, 2008, Talukder & Samuel, 2017) addressed the impact of implementing CP on different aspects of learning process. This niche in the literature was the main motive behind conducting a case study to explore to what extent the implementation of CP principles in teaching reading skills can develop critical consciousness in a female school graduate.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Brief history of CP

CP came into existence in the 1960s and 70s (Guilherme, 2017). Despite the fact that Freire is considered as the main scholar associated with CP, Giroux (1983) used CP for the first time in his seminal book entitled "*theory and resistance in education: A pedagogy for the opposition*" (Crookes, 2013); however, Socrates can be regarded as the first critical pedagogue. Plato and Socrates exerted emphasis on the dialogic relationship in education, something which is at the heart of CP. CP can thus be traced back to Greek philosophy (Guilherme, 2017). Kress (2011) noted that the philosophy of CP is based on confronting oppression which has been caused by social inequalities and which has negatively affected oppressed groups. Many factors such as philosophies of liberation in Latin America, the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, the Frankfurt school of critical theory, feminist theory, and neo-Marxist have contributed to the advent of CP (McLaren, 1997). McArthur (2010) and Mason (2010) assert that although CP has its roots in numerous theories, its main focus is on the premise that society and education are closely interwoven and the main purpose of education is to remove social inequalities.

Pradhan and Singh (2016) and Jeyaraj (2014) believe that as a society is fraught with issues such as racism, discrimination, education cannot adopt an indifferent stance. According to Gruenewald (2003), CP challenges issues which lead to

discrimination and inequality and raise students' awareness of inequalities. It comprises three principal tenets, namely combating social inequalities such as racism, classism, and sexism, rejecting the mainstream of education which considers schools as value free, and celebrating the idea that schools contribute to the emergence of inequality and mystify the roots of inequalities and their role in perpetuating inequalities (Luykx & Heyman, 2013).

In McLaren's (1997, p.1) words,

> Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship 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.

Traditionally, it was believed that if teachers provide students with linguistic knowledge, students can function properly in the society. Freire (1970) refers to the traditional education as banking education. In this traditional education, teachers deposit knowledge into students' mind and students receive knowledge as passive recipients without having the right to question it; however, Freire rejected the banking system education and considered it ineffective. He thus proposed the problem posing education in which a teacher poses a relevant problem and students are allowed to express their ideas and have their voice in the classroom. In essence, CP adopts the principles of Frankfurt school in order to create a more just society and highlights students' empowerment to assist them think and act independently with the aim of changing their life conditions for the better (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). This concept of pedagogy makes a connection between learning and social change (Giroux, 2017a). Basically, critical approaches to ELT do not approve of passivity; rather, they focus on challenging the status quo (Pennycook, 1999). As Akbari (2008 b, p. 277) puts it,

The discourse of CP, however, is the discourse of liberation and hope; it is the discourse of liberation since it questions the legitimacy of accepted power relations and recognizes the necessity of going beyond arbitrary social constraints; it is also the discourse of hope since it provides the potential for marginalized groups to explore ways of changing the status quo and improve their social conditions.

2.2. Implementing CP principles in education systems

CP is practiced in different disciplines (Jeyaraj & Harland, 2016). Lesser and Blake (2007), Aslan Tutak, Bondy and Adams (2011), for instance, argue for employing the assumptions of CP in teaching Mathematics. They believe that Mathematics can assist students to be cognizant of their own amount of fair share in the society.

Norton and Toohey (2004) assert that critical pedagogues are interested in the relationship between language learning and social transformation. The ultimate aim of CP is changing any forms of inequalities in the society and critical pedagogues attempt to make students aware of the inequalities in their society and nurture them in a way that they can look at immediate issues critically and transform the status quo.

Mejı́a (2004) refers to two forms of criticality as increasing students' awareness of imposition and developing autonomy to resist such an imposition. This indicates that teachers' ideology should not be imposed on the students and it behooves students to reach critical consciousness through dialogic relationship.

CP requires teachers and students who can get out of their comfort zones and challenge the unsatisfactory state of affairs. One way to do so is challenging issues which are socially and culturally relevant to the students' contexts.

Romanowski and Nasser (2012) claim that critical thinking is a chief element of any education system and in any educational system which highlights critical thinking, the focus is on encouraging students how to think rather than what to think (DuMond Kerr, 2010; Shokouhi & Pashaie, 2015). That is, language learners should examine critically what they consider as a routine. English language (EL) teachers can adopt issues common in the immediate environment as a starting point for increasing students' critical consciousness (Simmons, 2016) and/or they can bring global issues into their classes as it is the era of power and social unrest. They need to assist students to reflect on these issues critically and prepare them for adopting English in this world (Ruas, 2017). One of the serious challenges teachers are currently facing is the provision of a discourse of critique and possibility (Giroux, 2017b), which can take place in an atmosphere which is amenable to dialogic interaction and provide enough opportunity for students to put forward their ideas and discourage silence and oppression (Breunig, 2005) as "to be voiceless is to be powerless" (Giroux, 2017a, p.4).

Teachers play an important role in CP as they are responsible for raising students' awareness of inequalities in the society and helping them develop a new identity. In CP, educators are no longer the authority and students are encouraged to express their voice in a dialogic relationship (Abednia, 2015; Knupfer, 1995; Yaakoby, 2011). Mui (2013) and Lukinbeal and Allen (2007) believe that dialogic relationship between a teacher and his students can empower students to have their own voice in the classroom and assist students to develop their own identity and ideology. Basically, critical pedagogues attempt to equip students with sound judging ability by which they can be more successful in their future profession (Visano, 2016). Additionally, Templer (2017) believes that EFL classes can provide fruitful opportunities for teachers to address sociopolitical issues in the classrooms in many countries. However, it

seems that Templer underplays the problems which critical pedagogues may encounter in many authoritarian countries. Breunig further emphasizes that there are many challenges in the way of implementing CP principles such as inflexible institutional rules, unprepared students, lack of sufficient time and students' resistance.

2.3. Literature review

It seems only a few studies have addressed the impact of implementing CP on changes in the students' ideologies (Templer, 2017). For example, Talukder and Samuel (2017) investigated the impact of writing argumentative essay in light of CP principles on Bangladeshi EFL students' judgment. The course was composed of classroom interactions, discussion via Facebook, and easy writing on a real-life issue of Bangladeshi students. The results of the study showed that the critical course led to change in the students' misjudgments about the level of corruption in their country.

Sadeghi (2008) investigated the extent to which a critical course affected Iranian students' critical consciousness. Interviews, observation, field notes, journaling, were employed to collect the data. The study took place in a language institute in Bandar Abass where a total of 22 EFL learners participated in a discussion class. The researcher attempted to select socio-politically relevant topics for the classroom discussions. The results of the study revealed that the course had a significant effect on the learners' critical consciousness. The participants began to think critically about what they took for granted previously.

Abdollahzadeh and Haddad Narafshan (2016) investigated the effect of critical pedagogy on 54 Iranian EFL students' reading comprehension. The participants were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. The results of the study showed that experimental group taught based on CP principles developed

their reading comprehension and critical thinking. In the same vein, Izadinia and Abednia (2010) examined the effect of critical literacy on 25 Iranian EFL freshmen's personal development; in addition, they explored the students' attitudes toward reading comprehension course taught based on CP principles. To collect the data, the participants were asked to write class-assessments and two self-assessments at the end of the first month and at the end of the course. The results of thematic analysis illustrated that CP led to the development of their self-awareness and helped them to express their voice. Aston (2017) also describes an experimental study in which she exerts emphasis on climate change as a critical issue for writing and reading courses for EAP students in the UK. She holds that the best way for raising the students' consciousness of the detrimental impact of climate change on their life is to help them develop critical thinking.

The existing literature indicates the positive impact of CP on language learners' critical awareness; however, it seems the majority of the study was conducted in academic contexts and few studies, if any, addressed pre-university students. In addition, a case study, which seems to be unprecedented in the extant literature, can further illuminate how CP can contribute to the development of critical consciousness in language learners in difficult and constrained contexts. Moreover, as McLaren (2015) rightly puts it, educational researchers have overlooked females as if only males are vulnerable to the sense of inferiority in a group. This could also be due to the dominance of males in the action research studies. Therefore, to address this lacuna, the following research question guided the present study:

1. To what extent the implementation of CP principles in a reading comprehension course can develop critical consciousness in the female school graduate?

3. Method

3.1. The status of English in the Iran school system

Iranian school students start learning English from junior high school, and EL textbooks taught at Iranian schools are totally decentralized. That is, the EL textbooks are locally culture-bound (Mokhtarnia & Ghafar-Samar, 2015). After the Islamic revolution in 1979, a significant reform took place in the educational system of Iran with the aim of eliminating all traces of western cultural elements from the English textbooks and adding Islamic and local culture instead (Borjian, 2013). With respect to the methodology for teaching English, English language teachers adopted the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) (Rahimi, 2009) and each lesson in the EL textbooks contained a passage which followed by some reading comprehension questions and a list of vocabulary whose Persian equivalence was supposed to be memorized by students. However, recently the second reform has been implemented in the education system of the country part of which modified the English textbooks for the Iranian junior and senior students for the second time. This reform has resulted in two major alterations in the textbooks. First, they have become heavily culture-bound and second, they have turned their focus on the four macro language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing with the aim of providing students with more opportunity to develop their communicative competence.

3.2. The Participant in this Study

The participant of the present study, Maryam (pseudonym), was an eighteen-year-old high school graduate who majored in Science, who was eager to learn English. At the time of the study, she had graduated from high-school and already took the university entrance examination (i.e. *Kunkoor*). She said that she was quite interested in both science and EL. Given her language profile, she never took any private English classes and learned English merely at school. She could barely speak English but her reading comprehension was at

intermediate level. She noted that at school they were supposed only to read English passages in the EL textbooks and answer related reading comprehension questions. In addition, the medium of instruction was Persian, Iran's official language, and her English language teachers seldom spoke English in the classroom.

She completed her school studies in a small city in Iran and had a twin sister with whom she spent most of her time at home and rarely went out to participate in any social activities. In the city where she lived, women suffer from many social restrictions. Normally, women are not expected to work out and are mostly housekeepers. They have therefore less opportunity to participate in social activities or have their voice heard in the society. She was not an exception in this society and was a victim of the sociocultural norms of the society. She complained about lack of sports and educational facilities for women in this city and was also dissatisfied with all the restriction in her city but she accepted them as they were and she thought she had to practice the orthodox customs. All these features made her an appropriate case for the current study as, like the majority of the women in her society, she has a restricted social role and it seems she was oppressed by the norms established by men.

In essence, the instrumental nature of the case rather than its intrinsic worth, which assisted us to bring the broader issue into light, (Richards, 2003) determined our decision for selecting such a case for the present study. As Merriam (2009) puts it, a case may be selected as it is a representative of a concern, process or phenomenon. She further adds that case studies are amenable for exploring multifaceted and complex social phenomena and tracing changes in intricate social phenomena over time, which can provide readers with a more comprehensive picture of the target phenomena (Dornyei, 2007).

According to Prior and Woodward (2017), in a society where women and girls are considered inferior to men, inequality can be manifested in the following ways, which can also be reinforced by the common schooling system (McLaren, 2015):

1) Desire for having baby boys rather than baby girls and widespread abortion of female fetuses
2) Constraints for females' school attendance
2) Early marriage for girls.
3) Violence against women and girls.
4) Sexual exploitation
5) Unequal employment, pay, work conditions and responsibility in the family
6) Unequal social activities for women
7) Limited access to reproductive health
8) Unequal rules and rights for ownership and inheritance

I, as one of the researchers and the tutor in the present study, am a trilingual who can speak English, Arabic and Persian fluently. At the time of study, I have been engaged in teaching profession for 14 years, and have taught students with disparate language proficiencies and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In addition, I have been totally cognizant of the sociocultural norms of the society and all the restrictions with which she was struggling.

3.3. Procedure

At the outset of the study, we discussed her reading strategies and the parts on which she focused when reading a passage. I also examined her vantage point on authors' ideologies injected in different passages. These issues were explored to illuminate how she treated reading skills. Furthermore, the purpose of the study was explained to her and I clarified what CP attempts to achieve.

After the initial interview and discussions, I asked her to provide me with some topics of her interest. We hence decided on the topics through mutual agreement instead of prescribing any textbooks for the course. After finalizing the topics, which are presented in Table 1, I surfed the Internet for the germane passages. Having found the passages, I discussed their appropriateness, difficulty and attraction with her, hence the selection of the passages was an interactive process achieved through a mutual decision, and as the study took place at home, congenial atmosphere was dominant.

Table 1. Passages for reading comprehension

Session	Topics for reading
1	Appalling weather conditions in Khuzestan province
2	women's sports activities in Iran
3	University entrance exam in Iran
4	Social media
5	Unemployment in Iran
6	High divorce rate in Iran
7	Brain drain in Iran
8	New regulations for employing teachers by Iran Ministry of Education
9	Arab minorities in Iran
10	Consequences of Failing university entrance examination

A total of 10 passages were selected each of which dealt with a specific relevant topic, related to the social life of the participant in one way or another. CP is supposed to be meaningful by focusing on students' personal experience and social realities so that it can lead to criticality and social transformation (Giroux, 2017a).

The study lasted for about 10 weeks as each week we covered one passage. She was supposed to read each passage meticulously and write a critical journal on

each passage and bring it with her next session. Before she commenced writing critical journals, I clarified how she was supposed to write them and provided her with some examples of critical journal writing. The use of English language in the journal was not compulsory and she was allowed to use both English and/or Persian. At the beginning of each session, I attempted to ensure that she comprehended the related passage completely. Subsequently, we discussed the passage critically by focusing on the writers' perspective and her point of view on the issues discussed in the passages. Later on, I checked her critical journal and provided my feedback on the journal. More specifically, my feedback encouraged her to write critical journals. The feedback therefore included comments such as

this is a reading comprehension question rather than a critical question, you should not confine yourself to the passage, and you can include your experience.

With respect to the ethical code, she was informed that her identity would remain strictly confidential and the data would be used merely for the current research. Moreover, her participation in the study was not compulsory and it was totally voluntary and she was apprised that she could withdraw from the study whenever she desired.

3.4. Data analysis

Journal writing, unstructured interview and critical discussion were the main sources of data collection for the present study. The participant's journals were translated, coded and the recurring themes were identified. Moreover, the discussions and interview were audio-recorded, transcribed, translated, coded and the recurring themes were extracted. To ensure the accuracy of the data derived from the journals, class discussions and interview, the themes extracted

from the data were consulted with the participant, hence the concept of member checking (Saldaña, 2015).

4. Thematic analysis of the journals and interview

At the outset of the study when the participant was asked to provide some topics for reading comprehension, she suggested some uncontroversial and irrelevant topics such as eminent figures' biographies. She was guided to select more controversial ones dealing with issues affecting her life; so that, she could manage to analyze them more critically. The first passage thus dealt with the recurring dust storms in Khuzestan province, where the participant was living. The weather conditions in this province have put people's life in jeopardy. She posed some critical questions (Freire, 1970) after reading the passage. This can be best illustrated in the following example:

Is the government worried about the dust? Why? Why do neighboring countries shrink from their responsibility and don't block the dust?

Developing a culture of questioning in students and helping them to become problem posers can challenge the traditional approach to teaching, which gives teachers the complete authority in the classroom (Giroux, 2017a). She further put emphasis on the detrimental impact of the dust storms on people's life.

Dust storms not only cause road accidents but also act as a stumbling block to economical and social activities.

The second session was concerned with Iranian female athletes and the problems in the way of their sports activities. Iranian women have been banned from participating in many international sports events such as swimming as wearing *hijab* is compulsory for women in Iran. On the other hand, some

international federations like the basketball federation, which have not yet rescinded the head covering ban, also ban Muslim athletic women wearing the hijab from taking part in some international sports events. Meanwhile, some sports companies like Nike (https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2017/mar/08/nike-performance-hijab-female-muslim-athletes) celebrate diversity in sports by designing and producing sportswear for Muslim women across the world although the revenue for the companies cannot be overlooked.

After reading the passage, she proposed a solution to this problem, indicating that neither the Iranian authorities nor the international federations should make wearing or not wearing hijab compulsory. This should be left to women to decide whether to wear hijab. However, when I asked her which one, the Iranian authorities or the international federations, she agrees with, she agreed with the Iranian authorities. After I raised her awareness of women's rights by a thought-provoking question (Golding, 2011), she abandoned her previous ideology.

Tutor: *which one do you agree with?*

Maryam: *I agree with those asking women to wear hijab.*

Tutor: *in that case what happens to women's rights?*

Maryam: *well, the government should not make decisions by themselves without taking women's rights into account. Those who do not want to wear hijab should not be banned from sports activities and those who wear hijab should not be prevented from international sports events by international federations.*

She also provided an example of an athletic woman who was banned by the Iranian authorities from taking part in international sports events due to not wearing hijab, hence an example of relating issues in the passage with a real-world event (McLaren, 2003).

The third passage focused on university entrance examination conditions in Iran. As she had already taken part in the university entrance examination, she found this topic quite relevant. Graduate students who desire to enter state university have to take part in a competitive long multiple-choice examination, which is not considered a comprehensive index for evaluating students' skills in the target areas. She perceived this issue critically and suggested a straightforward solution to this issue:

I think Kunkur (university entrance exam) should be eliminated and students should be accepted based on their educational records as we cannot evaluate one's knowledge in four- or five- hour Kunkur.

She also posed the following critical question when we were discussing the passage:

Most of developing countries do not have university entrance examination. Why should we have it?

Given the fourth passage dealing with the hidden danger of social networks, she analyzed the advantages and disadvantages (Page & Mukherjee, 2007) of social networks and she emphasized the role of parents in controlling excessive and inappropriate use of social networks by their children:

Parents should monitor, control and talk with their children so that their children can distinguish true love from fake one in virtual world.

This solution to the widespread problem in the society stemmed from her critical thinking on the matter of social networks misused by people.

The fifth passage focused on the unemployment crisis in Iran with special focus on unemployment among women and college graduates. After reading the passage, she put forward some critical questions:

Why do unemployed women outnumber unemployed men?
Why does the government turn a blind eye to the unemployment crisis?

But when I asked her about the equality of job opportunities for women and men, she believed that men should be provided with more job opportunities than women.

Tutor: *Do you think women and men should be provided with equal job opportunities?*
Maryam: *No, men should be given more job opportunities.*
Tutor: *why?*
Maryam: *because men are responsible for the family.*
Tutor: *what if a woman held an academic degree and had a specialty, do you still believe she should stay at home and if there's a job opportunity, it should be given to a man.*
Maryam: *no, it should be given to both, equal rules should be observed, and women with academic degrees should not be ignored.*

The above excerpt indicates that she was negatively affected by the common ideology in the society, and it seemed she conformed to it. However, the discussion raised her awareness of this inequality.

The sixth passage exerted emphasis on high divorce rate in Iran. The themes of her journal revolved around solutions, critical questions and reasons. She put forward some solutions to prevent the rising divorce rate in the country:

One should not get married before knowing his/her prospective partner completely.

She also posed a critical question which can be considered of paramount importance in Iran:

Do divorced women have the same conditions for remarriage as the divorced men? Why?

This question can be considered highly critical. Divorced women encounter many problems for remarriage in the Iranian context as the Iranian society still cannot accept divorced women. She further came up with some reasons for high divorce rate in Iran. Given divorce laws in Iran, a husband has the right to ask for a divorce but when women are willing to get divorced, they should legally prove that the husband has serious problems such as addiction to drugs, psychological problems as stated in the marital laws of the country. When I asked her about this situation, first she approved of the common divorce rules:

Maryam: *I agree with the divorce rules in Iran*
Tutor: *I give you an example, if a man is addicted to drugs and his wife finds out and wants to get divorced, she is not able to get divorced as long as she can't prove it. Now regarding this condition what do you think?*
Maryam: *well, I think the issue of getting divorced should not favor men over women. Both should have the right to ask for divorce unconditionally.*
Tutor: *why did you change your mind suddenly?*
Maryam: *because there are some conditions which are really difficult to prove.*

It seems in some cases she accepted the rules implemented by men, as she had not thought about them critically and she thought rules are there to be followed unquestionably.

The seventh passage dealt with brain drain which is quite rampant in Iran. In her journal she put an emphasis on the reasons for educated people leaving the country.

The government does not appreciate educated people. That's why, they emigrate from the country.

During the discussion, she also referred to the government's responsibility regarding the brain drain.

The government knows about the brain drain crisis in the country but why don't they do anything about it?

When I asked her whether there is any alternative for not leaving the country, she believed there is no alternative and people should leave the country for prosperous future. It seemed she could not think critically of any possible solution to this crisis.

Tutor*: Is it possible for educated people to stay in the country and not leave it?*
Maryam*: No*
Tutor*: There is no way, you mean either you leave the country or you remain unemployed?*
Maryam: *Yes*

This shows that she succumbed to the status quo which is an indicative of passivity, something which CP attempts to eradicate.

The eighth passage put the spotlight on new regulations for teachers' employment proposed by Iran Ministry of Education, which prevent unattractive teachers from being employed. She believed that appearance should not thwart people's progress.

Individuals' appearances should not prevent them from making progress. Teachers should be employed based on their knowledge rather than their appearances.

The ninth text highlighted the status of Arab minority in Iran. As Maryam was an Iranian Arab, she was able to think of her experiences in the Iranian context. She believed that discrimination against Iranian Arab is rampant in the country. She brought up the appalling unemployment conditions in her context which has discriminately affected Iranian Arab youth. She stated that they have little chance to find any jobs in their city as the workforce is not selected from among the native inhabitant. She referred to her brother as a victim of this discriminatory process. She indicated that although her brother is a holder of BA degree and he finished his military service, he has not been able to find any jobs yet. It seems she was frustrated with the unsatisfactory state of affairs as she said

"we are not provided with even menial jobs although our province possesses all the natural resources and companies such as oil, gas, petrochemical companies and steal industry".

She provided a solution to this issue:

People should ask their Members of parliament to discuss this issue with the President to find a solution to this discrimination.

The last passage focused on the examination failure and its consequences. This passage was completely relevant to her most recent experience as she failed the university entrance examination. After failing the examination, she felt frustrated and disgruntled. This passage thus provided insight into the changes in her way of thinking about real life issues, which might happen after nine sessions of critical reading.

Tutor: *what factors cause a person to feel sad after failing an exam?*

Maryam: *Not achieving what you expected and not meeting others' (parents and teachers) expectations. I feel ashamed of myself.*

Tutor: *Do you think those who are around you haven't seen any clever students who couldn't pass the university entrance examination?*

Maryam: *Yes, they have seen such students, but in class we were clever and they expected us to pass the exam*

Tutor: *If a clever student couldn't pass an exam, what would teachers and people around him/her think of him/her?*

Maryam: *You know here instead of encouraging, they discourage us. If you succeed, people will admire you, but if you fail an exam they will not think much of you.*

Tutor: *So this means you study to satisfy people?*

Maryam: *For both myself and others*

Tutor: *Do you think those who study to satisfy people will be more successful than those who study for themselves?*

Maryam: *No*

4.1. Thematic analysis of the interview

Immediately after the last session, she sat an unstructured interview, which took around 15 minutes. She believed at school they did not go beyond the passages in the EL textbooks and were confined to some prescribed passages.

At school all the ideas and topics were imposed on us and we were supposed to accept them and we thought everything boiled down into what they asked us to do and there was nothing beyond it. But when I read these passages and discussed things, I found out there were some issues beyond the passages.

She also preferred the implementation of CP in teaching reading comprehension as she believed that this approach toward teaching can broaden students' mind and help them have a better understanding of the status quo.

This way of teaching can broaden our minds, we shouldn't accept things immediately. At school we just accepted things without questioning them and at the end nothing happened.
The topics helped me to have a better understanding of my society.

She further noted that prescribed textbooks and topics may not attract students; however, when students take part in their syllabus and curriculum design, they feel autonomous and enthusiastic.

At school we were not allowed to discuss the issues and go beyond the passages. Confining students to a particular textbook is not interesting because the topics are imposed on students and students may not be interested in the topics included in the textbooks

Given her e-life after the study, it seems she came to believe that the Internet can provide one with ample useful sources for reading skills.

In the future when I'm a teacher I will also use the Internet to find relevant passages for my students and I think one can find many relevant texts there to read.

Her quote seems to corroborate Borg's statement highlighting the impact of teachers' prior experience on their attitudes and beliefs (2011). Drawing upon her experience with the Interne, she considered it a useful and enjoyable tool for her future students.

Final remarks

The Internet can be a useful source for reading inside and outside the classroom. Krashen (2007) indicates that Free Voluntary Web-Surfing (FVS) can provide learners with comprehensible, interesting and relevant texts, which can help them acquire language subconsciously. In FVS, learners browse the Internet for texts of their own interest without having any fear of evaluation. The vast topics on the internet can also be a fruitful source for Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) (Krashen, 2004), through which learners read voluntarily to develop their reading skills. Having access to the Internet can therefore assist students to develop their reading skills and find relevant materials of their own interest.

The findings further indicate development in the participant's critical consciousness, which has been manifested in the forms of posing critical questions (Golding, 2011; Mason, 2007), providing solutions (Jeevanantham, 2005), connecting the problems with what is happening around her (McLaren, 2003), analyzing (Page & Mukherjee, 2007). However, it should be noted that this development did not happen in a linear fashion as she fluctuated between

criticality and passivity in different situations. The results of the study were partly in harmony with Sadeghi's (2008) Abdollahzadeh and Haddad Narafshan's (2016) Izadinia and Abednia's (2010) Abednia and Izadinia's (2012). However, on closer inspection, it seemed she could not think critically when it came to her personal issues. This can be explained by the premise that the participant was intensely indoctrinated by her society regarding some aspects of her social life, which requires further efforts to raise her awareness of the inequalities over a longer period. She succumbed to people's expectations and ignored her needs. According Abednia and Izadinia's (2012), as CP addresses monolithic ideologies and beliefs, one cannot expect significant changes in individuals' beliefs over a short-period course; however, small changes in students' criticality can be regarded as a harbinger of further success in the future. The schooling habits in the Iranian context which underpins the authority of teachers who are responsible for shoving knowledge down students' throat do not allow rapid significant changes in students' critical consciousness. According to Gustin (2001), teaching should go beyond merely transmitting knowledge. Gustin further argues that we are living in a world in which ongoing and rapid changes take place, one fixed formula hence cannot lead students to success. Students should be equipped with critical thinking ability to deal with their life realities. Fogarty and McTighe (1993) hold that seasoned teachers are well-versed in the subject contents but what they really need to focus on is to teach students how to think critically, which can help them deal with the vicissitudes of their social life. Golding (2011) also exerts emphasis on encouraging students to ask thought-provoking questions from each other as critical thinkers can extract more meaning from a text and come up with informed decision (Jeevanantham, 2005). Teachers therefore should encourage students to ask critical questions and evaluate things critically rather than nurture passive recipients (Mason, 2007). However, this cannot happen unless significant changes take place in teacher training programs with the aim

of raising in-service and pre-service teachers' awareness of critical thinking and its effect on students' social life. In addition, it should be noted that in a society where women have been disempowered, it takes time to develop a society embracing female critical thinkers. Women themselves also need to abandon their passivity and struggle for reaching emancipation, something which can be expedited through educational systems. However, it should be emphasized that the safety of critical pedagogues is still an issue in many countries specifically when they deal with sensitive political issues in the classroom. Any reckless disregard of this issue can put their life in jeopardy. The full inclusion of CP in a given syllabus is therefore negatively affected by some constraints, indicating that there is still a set of problems on the horizon, which may not be solved any time soon. This case study is not an exception, even though attempts were made to cover the most relevant socio-political issues. Ironically, critical pedagogues need to be circumspect when dealing with sensitive political issues in some countries so that they will not end up in prison. However, Wilson (2017) holds that EL instructors can use ordinary topics while encouraging students to think critically about them and link them to more critical issues in their social life. For example, the topic of university entrance examination in the present study may seem uncontroversial on the surface but the participant was encouraged to delve into it critically.

Although the findings of case studies are not intended to be generalized to other contexts, they can be regarded as valid scientific research (Krashen, 2014) as the major concern in case studies is to present a thick description of the context and participants to explore what is going on not to generalize the findings (Merriam, 2009). Further such case studies in a range of contexts are therefore required to have a more comprehensive picture of the development of critical consciousness in EL learners using CP principles. As Krashen further maintains that similar case studies should be treated as different pieces of a puzzle rather

than considering them separately so that one can test his/her hypotheses about the learning process. On the other hand, in case studies like in any other qualitative studies, researchers are regarded as the main data collection instruments and interpreters, which can impinge upon the validity of findings as human beings are subject to partial and subjective interpretation of the outcome (Merriam, 2009). Having said that, there are some methods such as member checking which can decline this drawback of qualitative studies to a great extent (Saldaña, 2015). Therefore, caution should be exercised not to generalize the findings of the present study to other contexts and cases, as generalizability is not an ultimate goal in case studies.

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