

EXPLORING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY PRINCIPLES IN EFL CLASSROOMS: BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF INDONESIAN TEACHERS

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Abstract: The incorporation of critical pedagogy (CP) principles in the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Indonesia has been promoted since the last two decades. However, research on how Indonesian EFL teachers view the CP principles are rarely conducted. This case study aims to discover the perceptions of 30 Indonesian EFL teachers teaching in different levels of education and having various educational backgrounds and diverse degree of familiarity regarding the four CP principles. The data for this study were collected by distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis procedure. After analyzing the collected data, it is discovered that among the four principles, dialogue and problem-posing are the two most desirable as well as applicable ones, comparing to praxis and conscientization. Additionally, in practicing the four principles, the participants claimed that they performed twelve categories of classroom activities including (1) negotiating classroom decision; (2) appreciating students' opinion; (3) using students' first language; (4) discussing students' real problems; (5) connecting learning to students' life; (6) using students' prior knowledge, experience, and local culture; (7) inviting students to take action based on classroom discussion; (8) assisting students to reflect on their learning; (9) encouraging students to continually act and reflect; (10) incorporating problematic social and political issues; (11) asking students to think critically; and (12) promoting justice. Considering the findings of this study, more training and research on critical EFL pedagogy are recommended. It is also suggested for further researchers to include classroom observation as data collection technique.

Keywords: *critical pedagogy principles; EFL teachers; beliefs; practices.*

INTRODUCTION

The integration of critical pedagogy (CP) in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia has been called for and promoted since the last two decades. The call is getting stronger after the release of the latest Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) policy, *Merdeka Belajar* (Emancipated Learning), in 2020. Prahani et al. (2020) in their article explicitly elaborate the alignment as well as the correlation between Emancipated Learning policy and the tenets of CP. They claim that it is relevant to Paolo Freire's view and that there are

intersections between the policy issued by the MOEC and the principles of CP.

CP is a transformative theory and practice of education that was firstly applied by a Brazilian educator, Paolo Freire, in teaching an adult first language literacy program for low-wage workers and peasants at Recife, Brazil, in 1960s (Yulianto, 2020; Crookes, 2022). Over time, CP has been implemented worldwide in diverse contexts for different purposes, including at the EFL context in numerous non-English speaking countries. In the context of EFL education itself, the report on the use CP can be traced back to the early years of this

century (Crookes, 2022). CP, when defined in the context of language learning, especially foreign language learning, is a teaching learning approach that is based upon the acceptance of its socio-cultural implication and has the ultimate purpose to transform society by discussing and relating grammatical knowledge and real-life wider social issues (Crookes, 2021; Farias & Silva, 2021; Kizildag, 2023; Olivera & Martinez, 2023). Numerous CP philosophers, theorists, and practitioners have formulated countless CP principles. However, this article proposes four CP principles as a result of syntactical reading upon the massive literature and publications. Those four CP principles are dialogue, problem-posing, praxis, and conscientization (Yolanda, 2020). Dialogue is understood as the foundation of every teaching and learning process as it involves both teachers and learners as the agents who exchange knowledge and experience as well as share power (Masood & Haque, 2021; Santoso & Christianti, 2021; Zarei & Dobakhti, 2023). Problem-posing provides necessary direction for bringing students' real-life problems to classroom and connecting them to the materials as the basis of classroom discussions (Yenesew, 2019; Farias & Silva, 2021; Herrera-Molina & Portilla_Quintero, 2021). In the meantime, praxis is defined as the integration of action and reflection both inside and outside classroom (Yolanda, 2020; Jeyaraj, 2021; Kavenuke & Muthanna, 2021). The last principle, conscientization, is the process of achieving the third level of consciousness, critical consciousness, in which individuals are aware of the systematic oppressive realities and strategically take actions to counter them (Khan, 2019; Kircali, 2021; Leal, 2021).

A lot of research on how EFL teachers view and implement CP principles in different education levels in both Indonesia and abroad has been conducted by numerous researchers. Only to mention three of the current research conducted in Indonesia, there are Sulistyowardani et al. (2020), and Santoso & Christiani (2021), Mambu (2022), and Waliyadin et al. (2023). Sulistyowardani et al. (2020) studied two senior high school EFL teachers' cognition and practice toward CP in their classroom also in Salatiga, Indonesia. Santoso & Christiani (2021) carried out a research about to investigate five higher education EFL teachers' perspective regarding CP principles in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. Mambu (2022) conducted a qualitative study in order to investigate how the three teacher-learners teaching in two different levels of high school co-construct

ELT curriculum under his guidance as a teacher educator and concluded that during the pre-teaching service project, the three participants developed the critical lesson plans and the critical adapted learning materials. Waliyadin et al. (2023) discovered that by defining or elucidating the concept of CP, instructors' knowledge of it is not made clear. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify specific CP phases and components, indicating that teachers apply critical pedagogy in their reading lessons to some extent.

Meanwhile, from outside Indonesia, there are several reports on the applications and research of CP in the EFL context worth to note in this article. Afshar & Donyaie (2019) performed a mixed-method research involving 181 Iranian EFL teachers and found that there was a significant difference between the participants' positive CP beliefs and their actual teaching practices. Conducting an ethnography study on the integration of CP in the foreign language classroom in Thai context, Yang (2020) unearths that CP as a teaching framework is relevant as well as productive in assisting students' learning process of foreign language writing. Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia, researching 60 EFL lecturers teaching in different universities, AlHarbi (2021) concluded that CP was CP, at the philosophical level is a somewhat familiar concept for most of the research participants. Herrera-Molina & Portilla-Quintero (2021) did a literature review on the integration of CP in ELT in various regions in Columbia and found that the integration has been successful in developing students' critical thinking. Conducting research in Tanzanian EFL context, Kavenuke & Mutahanna (2021) discover that there are three categories of challenges that face by educators in practicing CEP that are crowded classes, lecturing style, and unsuitable assessment. It can be concluded that there is still a gap in terms of lack of reported research on how EFL teachers teaching at different levels of education perceive and practice the four CP principles. Conducting research in Taiwan for his dissertation involving 68 instructors and 265 higher education EFL students using mixed-methods (questionnaire and interview), Chang (2022) found, the majority of instructors have positive attitudes and practices towards CP. Quantitatively researching 116 Serbian EFL teachers' attitude and practices of CP, Topalov (2022) unearthed that teachers have positive attitudes toward their role as agents of changes. Teachers who have more than ten years of experience and teach in groups of six to ten

students are most likely to report positive attitudes, whereas those who teach in groups of thirty-one to fifty students are least likely to report positive views towards implementing critical pedagogy policies in their EFL classrooms.

Taking into account the aforementioned elaboration, in order to fill the previously stated gap, the present study was conducted to discover beliefs and practices of Indonesian EFL teachers teaching in different school levels, having various educational backgrounds as well as degree of familiarity with CP, and living in different provinces, regarding the implementation of CP principles in EFL classrooms. In achieving its purpose, the upcoming elaboration of this article is organized mainly into four sections that are (1) literature review where the CP theories are provided to frame the study, (2) research method, (3) finding and discussion consisting of beliefs and practices, and (4) conclusion where the implications of this study are proposed.

METHOD

This study employed a case study design with 30 participants consisting of ten junior high school EFL teachers, ten senior high school EFL teachers, and the rest are EFL lecturers teaching at various higher education institutions in different regions in Indonesia. The 30 EFL educators were selected as the participants based on their familiarity towards CP uncovered in the preliminary stage of the research. The participants are having various teaching experience and educational backgrounds. Nineteen of them are master degree holders, one is having doctoral degree, and ten are having bachelor degree. There are twenty-one male participants, and the rest are female.

The data were collected using questionnaire and interview during the 2022/2023 academic year, from July 2022 to August 2023. The questionnaire, Teacher Critical Pedagogy Attitude and Implementation (TCPAI), was an adaptation from Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire (CPQ) and Critical Pedagogy Classroom Observation Checklist (CPOC) developed by Afshar & Donyaie (2019). The adaptation was performed by selecting the most relevant statements representing the four CP principles for the Indonesian EFL context. Intended to investigate the participants' beliefs and teaching practices regarding the four CP principles, the questionnaire consists of twenty statements (five statements for each CP principle) that have to respond using one to five likert-scale representing strongly disagree to strongly agree (for belief) and never to always (for practice). To

ensure the quality of TCPAI instrument before being used, two EFL and CP experts were requested to review it. The questionnaire was in Indonesian language and written in the form of Google Form and distributed online through e-mail and WhatsApp group with the help of EFL teachers' associations.

In the meantime, the interviews were conducted in semi-structured way to confirm and dig deeper the participants' questionnaire responses to six of the participants; two participants, PJ1 and PJ2, are junior high school teachers; two participants, PS1 and PS2, are senior high school teachers; and two interviewees, PU1 and PU2, are lecturers teaching in two different universities. The interviews were carried out online using video conference applications and audio-visually recorded. Each interview lasted no longer than two hours and conducted in Indonesian language. The interview questions were made considering the statements in the questionnaire as well as the related theoretical framework about the incorporating CP in EFL education. To pursue the valid and reliable interview guideline, several revisions were performed considering the feedbacks provided by the two professors in the field of EFL.

The data analysis procedure was performed in two major steps. The first step of analysis was carried out on questionnaire data through descriptive statistics while the second stage was executed to the interview data through thematic analysis. The data were then interpreted and compared to the previous related studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After analysing the collected data, it is found that generally, the participating teachers have a positive view as the mean score for the belief items toward the principles of CP is 4.21 (out of 5). Meanwhile for the practice, although it is still slightly lower than belief items (the total mean score for practice is 4.11), it still can be interpreted that the participating teachers, for some extents, perform classroom practices that are in line with the principles of CP, especially the dialogue and problem-posing ones. The following Table 1 displays the total mean score for both beliefs and practices from junior high school teachers, senior high school teachers, and university teachers.

Table 1. Total mean score of TCPAI

Fields	Beliefs	Practices
Junior High School	4.17	4.11

Senior High School	4.19	4.10
Higher Education	4.28	4.13
Total	4.21	4.11

As it is seen in the table, the higher education EFL teachers have highest mean scores for both belief and practice. It can be interpreted that the participants teaching EFL in higher education institutions are having more openness and acceptance towards the four CP principles than those who teach in junior high schools and senior high schools. This is probably because of in the academia, the teachers are receiving a great amount of authority and freedom in designing as well as running their classrooms so that they can be more flexible and adaptable in their practices as one of the consequences of practicing dialogue is the classrooms tend to be unpredictable (Ozaydinhk & Saglik, 2021; Santoso & Christianti, 2021).

Beliefs

Regarding beliefs toward the four CP principles, the data collected from both the questionnaire and the interview consistently demonstrate that the participating teachers have positive ones as it can be seen in the Table 3. Moreover, the interview data support the affirmative views of participants toward the CP principles. It is indicated in the following excerpt mentioned by, PJ2, a participant teaching in junior high school:

“The students have potential that is possibly bigger than ours or knowledge that is wider than ours)”

The excerpt, that is in line with the dialogue principle, is an indication that the participating teacher recognizes her students as real humans and does not reduce them only as empty glass nor bank account (Olivera & Martinez, 2023).

Furthermore, PS1, a participating teacher teaching in senior high school, expressed an opinion that represents the alignment with the principle of problem-posing in the following excerpt:

“Teacher must facilitate the diversity by providing various learning activities according to different situations, needs, and characteristics of students).”

Along with its relevance to the problem-posing, the excerpt also reinforces the connection between CP and the latest Indonesian curriculum policy, *Merdeka Belajar* (Emancipated Learning), especially the differentiated learning concept

(Prahani et al. 2020).

In addition to dialogue and problem-posing, conscientization as another CP principle is notably represented during the interview. One participant teaching EFL in university, PU1, stated:

“Whatever said, discussed, and tried to solve in the classroom is expected to give contribution to wider community.”

This means that the interviewee is aware of and open to the principle of conscientization or critical consciousness as the participant explicitly stated that eventually the purpose of every executed classroom activity should be able to be utilized by both learners and educator in bettering their lives and surrounding situations (Yolanda, 2020; Zarei & Dobakhti, 2023).

When being compared among the belief questionnaire items, it is notable that there is one item for each principle that gains the highest mean score. It is evident that the most likeable CP principle, especially seen from the participants’ beliefs, is dialogue. Among the items representing the principle of dialogue, the item “Learning is a social process and takes places as a social interaction.” has the highest mean score that is 4.67. The following Table 2 displays the belief questionnaire items that gain the highest mean score for each CP principle.

Table 2. Beliefs on CP principles

Principle	Score
Dialogue	4.67
Problem-posing	4.53
Praxis	4.30
Conscientization	4.10

From the data displayed in the table above, it can be seen that, after dialogue, the most likeable CP principles is problem-posing, praxis, and conscientization. It is understandable that conscientization is the least likable CP principle among the four for not all the participating teachers can see the correlation between the English subject and the social wellbeing as indicated in the following excerpt stated by PJ1:

“I just teach what I understand. It is totally in their hands whether they will use it to better their lives or not. It depends on students themselves).”

The previous excerpt may represent the everyday practice that possibly reflects the participant’s slight disagreement upon the conscientization principle since he does not

directly aim his teaching practice to transform his students' lives nor to encourage his students to utilize the competence acquired inside the classroom to better their social conditions (Olivera & Martinez, 2023). However, the more detailed elaboration of the participants' practices regarding the integration of CP principles in the EFL classrooms is delineated in the upcoming section.

Practices

As it is demonstrated in the Table 1, the mean score for practice is lower (4.11) than the mean score for belief (4.21). It can be inferred that the participating teachers are having positive beliefs regarding CP principles yet do not fully implement them in their actual daily teaching practices due to several reasons. The finding is parallel with what has been discovered by Kavenuke & Muthanna (2021) and Santoso & Christianti (2021) in their research. Those researchers found that, generally, EFL teachers are in favour with CP principles but do not apply those completely in their classrooms.

Additionally, it can be concluded from the questionnaire data displayed in the Table 1 that participants teaching in higher education institutions implement CP principles in their classroom practices more than those who teach in junior high schools and senior high schools. This is also strengthened by the statement occurred during the interview with PU2, one of the participants teaching in one of universities in West Sumatra and holds doctoral degree:

“Slowly, I tried to encourage them to discuss the common burning issues, and then started presenting the more debatable issues which, eventually, it is expected that they can come up with proposed solutions for government or policy makers.”

The finding is in line with the research findings uncovered by AlHarbi (2021) and Santoso & Christianti (2021) that mention EFL lecturers tend to align their practice with the principles of CP especially dialogue.

Different from the belief questionnaire items, when being compared among the four CP principles, Problem-posing has the highest mean score in practice questionnaire items. The upcoming Table 3 shows the practice questionnaire items that have the highest mean score for each CP principle.

Table 3. *Practices of CP principles*

Principle	Score
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Dialogue	4.33
Problem-posing	4.40
Praxis	4.37
Conscientization	4.37

The aforementioned questionnaire data is consistent with the data emerged during the interview sessions. One interviewee teaching EFL in a private university, PU1, when being asked how she usually composes her class in order to fit the lesson objectives, learning materials, and students' prior knowledge and background, claimed that:

“There are attempts to match learning outcomes and my students' condition. Not only with the learning materials, my teaching method is also aligned with my students' situation. There are considerations; their knowledge and social backgrounds.”

Giving a close attention to the excerpt, it can be inferred that the participant, in particular degree of intensity, has executed one of the classroom activities representing the principle of problem-posing (Kohnke, 2019; Puspita & Mambu, 2020). However, the opportunity to consider learners' prior knowledge and social background in the process of deciding learning objectives and materials as well as teaching methods used may only be possessed by teachers who teach in higher education context as they have the necessary space and time to perform it. It is possibly because of the exitance of rigid predetermined EFL curriculum in Indonesian schools (Yulianto, 2020; Mambu, 2022).

The identical practice is also performed by another teacher, PS1, who teaches EFL in one public senior high school in Subang, West Java. Being aware of the challenges he faces caused by the limited allocated time and students' lack of English proficiency, in the interview session, he states:

“I always connect my learning material context with what happen in surrounding currently. Those materials are intentionally inserted in my English lesson for my student to think critically.”

As indicated in the previously displayed statement, it can be interpreted that although the participant cannot fully study his students' backgrounds, PS1 tries to no teach learning materials solely without connecting it with something that is commonly known including by

his students. The activity, relating EFL lesson with surrounding trending events, is carried out by PS1 to facilitate his students' critical thinking skills. It is in line with what has been theorized by Herrera-Molina & Portilla-Quintero (2021) that incorporating problematic and close to student social issues through dialogue can facilitate them think critically.

Regarding critical thinking as one of the essential aspects of EFL classrooms applying CP, another interviewed participant, PS2, claimed that she has assisted her students to exercise it. When being asked about the incorporation of critical thinking in her class, she answered:

“I think I have facilitated my students to think critically based on, one of them, their learning readiness, interest, and talent. At the end of the day, I want to help them to be wiser in interacting with their community.”

Although the participant is not familiar with the theory and practice of CP, the integration of critical thinking in her EFL classroom has actually been aligned to the principles and purpose of CP. The principles of CP reflected in the participant's practice as can be inferred from the excerpt are problem-posing along with conscientization for it is constructed on the learners' existing situation and aimed to prepare them appropriately function in the wider outside classroom community. The objective of the stated practice that is not only to make the learners be able identifying fact from opinion, but also to assist them being wiser in interacting with other member of community is in line with what has been elaborated by Yulianto (2020), Herrera-Molina & Portilla_Quintero (2021), and Qoyyimah et al. (2022) regarding the intersection between critical thinking and CP.

In addition to confirm the participants' responses toward the questionnaire, the interviews were also carried out to investigate the classroom activities the interviewees perform in their daily teaching practices that possibly based on and related to the four CP principles. It can be inferred that there are twelve classroom activities that performed by the participants with various degree of frequency and intensity, considering the answer the six participants gave and the story they told during the interviews that can be interpreted as the practice of CP principles in the context of EFL education at different levels of school in Indonesia.

The twelve activities are classified under the four CP principles namely dialogue, problem-posing, praxis, and conscientization. It means

there are three activities in each CP principle. Those twelve activities are (1) negotiating classroom decision; (2) encouraging and appreciating students' opinion; (3) using students' first language; (4) presenting and discussing students' real problems; (5) connecting learning materials to students' life; (6) using students' prior knowledge, experience, and local culture; (7) inviting students to take action based on classroom discussion; (8) assisting students to reflect on their learning activity; (9) encouraging students to continually act and reflect; (10) incorporating problematic sociocultural and political issues; (11) asking students to think critically; and (12) promoting justice and equality. However, taking into account the fact that only two out of six interviewees are familiar with the theory and practice of CP, it can be stated that most of the activities representing CP principles are carried out implicitly (Yesenew, 2019; AlHarbi, 2021; Anjum et al., 2021; Chang, 2022).

In summary, highlighting the aforementioned data display and its elaboration, it can be interpreted that the findings of this research are in accordance to what have been discovered before by Jeyaraj & Harland (2019) and Sulistyowardani et al. (2020). Conducting research by interviewing eleven critical EFL lecturers from seven different countries, Jeyaraj & Harland (2019) found that problem-posing and negotiation are two of the common activities that are carried out by the EFL lecturers that incorporate CP in teaching practices. Moreover, they concluded that there is a universal acceptance towards CP especially in the context of higher education. In the meantime, a study carried out by Sulityowardhani et al. (2020) in investigating two high school EFL teachers' recognition and implementation of CP is relevant to the present research in terms of the inconsistency between teachers claims and their practices regarding the integration of CP in their EFL classrooms. As it is previously elaborated, while the participating EFL teachers value dialogue more than problem-posing, they apply problem-posing more than dialogue.

CONCLUSION

There are two purposes of this study that are investigating the teachers' beliefs upon the four CP principles and uncovering their CP principle-based classroom activities. Bearing in mind the findings and discussion elaborated in the previous sections, there are three conclusions that can be formulated. Firstly, the participating EFL teachers view CP as desirable but less feasible as it is evident in the Table 3.

Secondly, among the four CP principles, dialogue and problem-posing are more familiar, favorable, as well as applicable than praxis and conscientization. Lastly, according to the claims stated by the six participants during the interviews, there are twelve EFL classroom activities performed in their daily teaching practice that are both consciously and subconsciously based on their positive views regarding the four CP principles.

Taking into account the aforementioned conclusions, there are three implications of the present study. It is recommended for EFL teachers to start expanding their teaching practice beyond classroom by emphasizing more on the incorporation of praxis and conscientization principles. Furthermore, it is also recommended for government, especially Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), to support the application and study on CP in EFL classroom by providing trainings along with research grants. Finally, it is suggested for further researchers to do more research by employing various methods as well as involving more data resources in diverse contexts. It is essential for further research investigating EFL teachers' perspective upon and their application of CP principles to employ classroom observation as data collection technique in order to attain the clearer comprehension regarding how the principles of practiced.

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