

In-Service EFL Teachers' Perceptions Towards the Application of Critical Pedagogy Principles in Palestinian Public Schools

by Mona M. Shalhoub^{a*} and Ilkay Gilanlioglu^b

^a Mona M. Shalhoub, PhD candidate, Department of Foreign Language Education/ Faculty of Education, Eastern Mediterranean University/ North Cyprus

***Corresponding author, Mona M. Shalhoub**

Email: mona.shalhoub@moe.edu.ps

ORCID: Mona Shalhoub: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3028-6233>

^b Ilkay Gilanlioglu, Assistant Prof. Dr., Department of Foreign Language Education/ Faculty of Education, Eastern Mediterranean University/ North Cyprus

Email: ilkay.gilanlioglu@emu.edu.tr

ORCID: Ilkay Gilanlioglu: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9902-3311>

Abstract

This paper aimed to explore in-service English language teachers' perceptions towards the classroom applications of critical pedagogy (CP) principles in Palestine. It also focused on the possible relationships between categorical variables such as gender, years of experience, major, classes taught per week, educational degree and teachers' perceptions of using a mixed-methods approach. Ninety-six teachers participated in this study, 64 females and 32 males. Both quantitative and qualitative results indicated that the participants had positive perceptions towards the application of CP principles in the FL classroom. Particularly, qualitative results revealed teachers' lack of awareness of CP and lack of emphasis on the importance of integrating CP principles in the English curricula taught at public schools, shedding light on the difficulty of applying these principles because of the subtleties of the situation in Palestine. The overall results suggested that CP principles can and should be applied to public schools in the Palestinian context.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, critical language pedagogy, in-service language teachers, Palestinian context.

Introduction

Critical language pedagogy (CLP) has recently been accompanied by a major movement in research to include a wider range of critical lenses (Başar, 2020; Johnson & Ricento, 2013; Lusianov; 2020) while observing issues of language instruction as a post method approach to language teaching (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011; Kanpol, 1998; Khatib & Fathi, 2014). The main purpose of this movement is to investigate how critical theory may be integrated effectively into the classroom practice (Breuing, 2011) with the goal of strengthening students' critical skills and transforming them into change agents. (Afshar & Donyaie, 2019; Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Fyall & Metzler, 2019). As a result of the uncritical response to the experimental approaches by language-teaching practitioners, this transition has begun (Pennycook, 1989; Prabhu, 1990; Siqueira, 2021). Such a passive reception, it is said, might be decreased by employing the concepts of critical theory, which seeks to evaluate and modify educational environments, and by guiding EFL instruction through a critical pedagogical approach (Giroux, 1997; Herrera-Molina & Portilla-Quintero, 2021; Keneman, 2016). According to relevant research, critical pedagogy (CP) gives a unique perspective on language education that has begun to influence EFL students (Afshar & Donyaie, 2019; Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Gustine, 2018; Khatib & Fathi, 2018; Rahimi, Kushki, Ansaripour, & Maki 2015; Rahimi & Sajed, 2014; Siqueira, 2021). CP sees the roles of FL students and teachers as mutually beneficial, with both learning from the other (Kanpol, 1998). As a result, students should be viewed as critical, autonomous thinkers capable of assessing, criticizing, and questioning their surroundings, and teachers as not the exclusive source of information (Halabsaz, Hedayati, & Branch, 2016; Vdovina & Gaibisso, 2013). According to Siqueira (2021), CP is a way of living rather than a theory or a strategy. CP's mission is to "teach for social justice in ways that foster the formation of active, engaged citizens who will, as circumstances permit, critically inquire into why the lives of so many human beings, possibly including their own, are materially, psychologically, socially, and spiritually inadequate" (p.4). As a result, it appears that the ultimate goal is to aid in the construction of a more equal society by utilizing education in a gradual social transformation process (Freire, 1997; Breuing, 2011; Vdovina & Gaibisso, 2013).

Research Context

English is a compulsory subject taught as a foreign language (EFL) in Palestinian schools and institutions following a centralized educational system that is focused on a top-down approach. The system includes three categories of schools: public, private, and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools. Public schools began teaching English in the fifth grade before the Palestinian Authority was recognized. In Gaza, Egypt's curriculum was taught, whereas Petra, Jordan's English curriculum, was taught in the West Bank (Khalil, 2005), English for

Palestine curricula, developed following the establishment of the Palestinian Ministry of Education (MoE) in 1994, was introduced in the first grade in public schools. The Palestinian curricula have recently been revised for all grades (2017-2019), with an urge by MoE to encourage teachers to enhance critical thinking skills in their classrooms (Yamchi, 2006). The need for such revision was reported by Ramahi (2015), asserting that language curricula and teaching practices in Palestine have failed to enhance critical thinking and the ability to apply reasoning among students of various ages. Despite MoE's ongoing efforts to improve EFL teaching in Palestinian public schools, and the growing importance of critical pedagogy in university foreign language teaching (Crookes & Ziegler, 2021), the application of CP principles in Palestinian English language teaching has received little attention (Templer, 2015). Some researchers have looked at the issue through a political lens only (Hamdon & Harris, 2011), while others have considered it in general terms without focusing on language classrooms and curricula (Al Rahl, 2018), which add to the gravity of the problem. In an attempt to address the problem, the current study sought to find out how in-service English language teachers in Palestine perceived the application of CP principles in the EFL classroom, as well as whether there were any differences in perceptions based on gender, years of experience, major, number of classes taught per week, or educational degree. Accordingly, the following questions were addressed in this research:

1. How do in-service EFL teachers perceive the application of CP principles in the EFL classroom in public schools in Palestine?
2. Do in-service language teachers' perceptions toward the application of CP principles in the Palestinian EFL classroom in public schools differ due to *gender, years of experience, classes taught per week, scientific degree, and major*?

One major null hypothesis stemming from the second research question was divided into five for the analysis:

- 2.1. There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the means of in-service language teachers' perceptions towards the application of CP principles in the Palestinian EFL classroom in public schools in terms of *gender, years of experience, classes taught per week, scientific degree and major*.

Literature Review

Critical pedagogy (CP), is an educational approach whose main purpose is to acquaint students with existing structures both inside and outside the classroom (Zare-Behtash, Izadi, & Rezaei, 2017). For Piosang (2018), however, Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) is a language pedagogy method that considers language education as a tool for generating learners who are not just critically aware of societal problems, but are also potential problem solvers, resulting in critical classroom dialogue. Salehi (2013) argued that one of the goals and purposes of CP should be to encourage debate

and dialogue. CP in language teaching, according to Crookes (2013), is a position in language curricular theory and instructional practice that promotes and improves socially equitable teaching and language study. To further explain this stance, Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh (2015) noted that CP views language as a social activity that enables learners to comprehend themselves, their social contexts, and their histories.

Morino-Lopez (2004) argues that CP encourages instructors and students to rethink the purpose and meaning of schooling by fostering an examination of the educational system based on a redefinition of the theory-practice relationship. Rahimi et al. (2015) advocated the notion that any educational system's goal can be strengthened by CP through implementing adjustments aimed at increasing students' awareness of their current position and existence. CP is based primarily on Freire's (1997) concept of educational processes as non-neutral, in which people can be domesticated or liberated. Liberation begins with "Praxis", which Freire defined as "reflection and action on the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). Therefore, transformation necessitates a wide range of unconventional teaching methods, such as discourse, reflection, collaboration, and action (Ramahi, 2015). Despite the difficulty of implementing Freire's dialogic approach in the classroom, Halabi (2017) discovered that exposing students to its principles can lead to exposure to aspects of their work that they may not have been aware of otherwise.

Siqueira (2021) investigated the dialogic link between CP and EF education in the context of English as a global language using an anthropological method. The study looked at how EFL instructors viewed themselves as language professionals in today's society and how aware they were of the implications of the status of English as an international language. One of the most important findings of Siqueira's (2021) research was that language instruction in today's world could not be objective and/or uncritical.

In their analysis of major ideas of critical pedagogy as a strategy for teaching EFL in Iran, Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) recommended applying CLP in the EFL instruction. One reason is that CLP enables students to express themselves by focusing on real-life concerns while also supporting them in analyzing and diagnosing their own problems, which helps them strengthen their speaking abilities. Another reason is that its use leads to transformative activities that make teaching sessions more pleasurable and encourage students to think critically, allowing them to change the structure of their society. Rahimi and Sajed (2014) elaborated this point by illustrating that CLP differs from previous methodologies in that it aims to find good pedagogical interventions which will most effectively enable learners' assimilation of new systemic knowledge into known knowledge structures.

With this line of thought, Shokouhi and Pashaie (2015) confirmed that adopting CP is about making a deliberate choice of teaching style in which knowledge is never

a given, but always negotiable and partial. To illustrate, Crookes and Ziegler (2021) compared the task-based language teaching (TBLT) method to the key concepts in CLP curriculum organization. Their research revealed that CLP barely interacted with some of the complexities of its chosen activities when seen through the lens of second language learning. However, when they examined it from a socioculturally critical standpoint, they discovered that TBLT interacted with only a few of the characteristics of its preferred activities. They concluded that it would be more effective to approach task design, content creation, and curriculum development from a more critical perspective. In the same vein, Rahimi et al. (2015) called for criticalization of the EFL curricula by outlining how material designers may develop curricula that correspond to CP's premises and offered proposals for the selection and gradation phase of materials development in line with CP. The researchers presented an illustration of a critical class with critical materials by utilizing Freire's problem posing, generative themes, and concentric circles ideas and proposed immediacy and comparison to be employed as tools to select and grade the content of critical materials.

Herrera-Molina and Portilla-Quintero (2021) analyzed the literature on the most current developments in the use of CP in English language teaching (ELT) in Colombia's different regions as well as across a number of nations. The findings of the study indicated a rising tendency in CP in ELT, particularly in nations that still suffer from political, social, and economic inequalities. The results also demonstrated that a number of tactics, such as curriculum analysis and positioning teachers and students as social subjects, were used to promote knowledge of this theory as well as its application and implications in real-life scenarios. Employing CP in English instruction has proven to be worthwhile and beneficial for students in developing their critical thinking skills. In order to demonstrate how the application of critical pedagogy in English language instruction alters teaching and learning, Jeyaraj and Harland (2014) brought together the voices of academics from eight different countries. As they attempted to alter students' worldviews, teachers were seen to be subjected to significant emotional turmoil and occasionally danger, and both inside and outside of the academy, student transformation was visible. Instead of learning through information settings that were neutral, students acquired their new language through concepts that were actually important to them. They came to the conclusion that, as teachers become accustomed to dealing with the unexpected in their classrooms, critical pedagogy necessitates a balance between critical contemplation and action.

Still, and despite the beneficial changes CP has brought about in the sphere of education by switching from traditional pedagogy to emancipatory pedagogy, Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh (2015) claimed that there is a gap in Iranian EFL instructors' knowledge of CP and its implementation in teaching EFL. Their findings showed that the participants' background and level of education had an impact on their knowledge and awareness of critical pedagogy, with PhD holders being the most knowledgeable about its concepts and practices. Additionally, they pinpointed that teachers' EFL teaching experience and professional development had an impact on their

capacity to assume crucial and transformative tasks in their teaching practices in comparison with newly- appointed teachers.

As seen, relevant research has highlighted the significance of CP in education as a means to transform the teaching-learning process, revise language curricula and enhance learners' critical thinking skills. However, such research related to the application of CP principles in EFL education in the Palestinian context is limited. Therefore, this research aimed to address this particular gap. Additionally, since CP is still a new theoretical movement in the field of language education, the findings of the current study may contribute to the CP literature in this area at large.

Methodology

Participants

The targeted study sample (which comprised the whole population) included 110 in-service English language teachers who worked in public schools in the Directorates of Education of Hebron, South Hebron, North Hebron, Jenin, Tubas, South Nablus, and Qalqilia in Palestine during the academic year 2019-2020. Convenience sampling was used as the sample was accessible for one of the researchers who worked with them as a teacher educator through 2014-2018 in the Leadership and Teacher Development diploma course. Out of the initially targeted 110 teachers, 96 (32 male and 64 female) responded voluntarily through emails (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Distribution of the Study Participants.

Gender		Male (N)	Female(N)
District	Jenin	5	18
	Qalqilia	0	3
	North Hebron	5	7
	South Hebron	4	11
	Tubas	4	4
	Hebron	7	19
	South Nablus	7	2
Total number		32	64

Research Design and Instrumentation

In this study, mixed-methods approach, specifically 'explanatory sequential design' (Creswell, 2012, p. 542) was used. It started with the quantitative phase through the use of a questionnaire and proceeded with the qualitative phase through the use of an interview. The questionnaire developed and validated by Roohani, Hashemian and Haghparast (2016) was adapted in this study. It is a five-point Likert scale questionnaire designed to assess the level of CP used in the EFL classroom. It

consisted of 35 items which were classified into six dimensions, namely philosophical orientation, programme (instruction) planning, curriculum and materials, teacher development (praxis), teacher- student relationship, and evaluation. Adaptation encompassed some modifications within the items themselves using strategies such as deletion, addition, replacement, and rephrasing to make the questionnaire fit into the Palestinian context and to avoid compound meaning in some items such as 1, 3, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 23, 25, 26, and 27. Roohani *et al.* (2016) went through the required process to ensure validity and reliability of the questionnaire including literature review, content validation forms from experts and from teachers, and piloting. Since the questionnaire underwent some modifications, a pilot study was conducted with a group of 20 teachers other than the study sample. The Cronbach Alfa value was found to be 0.753, which is considered 'satisfactory' (Creswell, 2012, p. 606). The interview questions were developed based on the questionnaire domains. The questions were discussed and reviewed in detail with an expert in the field in addition to two language supervisors and two language teachers in Palestine.

Data Collection and Analyses

The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms to 110 participants, out of whom 96 responded. The data was then downloaded as an excel sheet and entered into SPSS version 25 for statistical analysis. To quantitatively address the research questions about teacher perceptions, descriptive statistics were calculated. The range was computed using the formula $(5 - 1 = 4)$ and then divided by five to produce the lowest and maximum length of the 5-point Likert type scale used in this study to find out how in-service English language teachers evaluate the use of critical pedagogy principles. As a result, the following set of ranges which included the following intervals to be used in the interpretation of the results was obtained:

- $1 \leq M < 1.8$ very passive perceptions
- $1.8 \leq M < 2.6$ passive perceptions
- $2.6 \leq M < 3.4$ moderate perceptions
- $3.4 \leq M < 4.2$ positive perceptions
- $4.2 \leq M < 5$ very positive perceptions

The negative items in the questionnaire (1, 17, 23, 28 and 31) were reversed before conducting the analysis using recoding into different variables in SPSS. The Independent Samples T-test was used to examine the gender hypothesis. Analysis of Variance (One-Way ANOVA) test was used to examine the variables of years of experience, classes taught per week, scientific degree, and major (Strunk & Mwavita, 2020, p. 14).

Throughout the qualitative part of the study, semi-structured interviews with nine teachers were conducted via Skype on a voluntary basis. Open-ended questions were the foundation of the interviews, allowing participants to freely express their opinions. All of the questions were asked to teachers in the same order, recorded with

consent, and then transcribed verbatim to preserve the precise words and phrases of the participants and minimize the risk of losing any essential data. The transcribed data were returned to participants to check for consistency. The participants were given numbers instead of their real names to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. They were quoted according to their gender preferences. The researchers then analyzed the qualitative data using thematic analysis, which allowed the interpretation of collective or shared meanings and experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

Before the study was conducted, the Ethical Approval letter was obtained from the university's Board of Ethics. Both written and oral informed consent were ensured for both the questionnaire and the interview. Particularly, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' responses and their right to withdraw were assured by making an explicit statement as such at the beginning of the questionnaire and the interview.

Findings

This section deals with the findings of the study based on both the questionnaire and the interview data. It first presents summaries of the quantitative and the qualitative findings. Next, it presents these findings in greater detail. Lastly, findings are triangulated to show the converging and diverging points between both types of data.

Summary of the Findings

Table 2 summarizes teachers' perceptions towards the application of CP principles quantitatively. It shows that teachers' perceptions of all dimensions were mostly positive as illustrated by the high overall means of teachers' responses to each dimension of the validated CP questionnaire.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of CP Dimensions in Descending Order.

Order	Dimensions	N	Mean	SD
Dimension5 (Items 25-30)	Teacher- student relationship	96	3.90	.38
Dimesnion2 (Items 10-15)	Programme (instruction) planning	96	3.86	.40
Dimension3 (Items 16-20)	Curriculum and materials	96	3.81	.38
Dimension1(Items 1-9)	Philosophical orientation	96	3.62	.34
Dimension4 (Items 21-24)	Teacher development (praxis)	96	3.61	.52
Dimension6 (Items 31-35)	Evaluation	96	3.57	.33

Table 3 below presents the teachers' perceptions towards the application of CP principles qualitatively. These findings were used to explain the quantitative results of the six dimensions of CP summarized in Table 2 above in addition to complementing and highlighting any missing points in the questionnaire.

Table 3. Summary of the Qualitative Findings.

Themes	Sub- themes
Teacher role vs. student role	Traditional vs untraditional roles of teachers. Positive vs. negative perceptions of students' roles.
Equity, equality, social justice in the curricula	Unclarity of CP concepts in the English for Palestine curricula. Importance of teacher's role to highlight these concepts.
Critical Thinking	Emphasis on questioning. Problem solving (Posing). Importance of these skills for students' future life.
Responses to students' needs, reactions, opinions, problems	Space for dialogue. Relation of the curricula to real life problems. Preference to avoid inclusion.
Awareness of critical pedagogy	Insufficient awareness of CP among teachers. Importance of CP for change.
Views of CP	Importance of professional development on CP The need to include CP principles in the EFL curricula.
Integration of CP in the FL classroom	Individual initiatives Obstacles for implementing CP concepts in the classroom.

Data Analyses

RQ 1: How do in-service English language teachers perceive the application of CP principles in the EFL classroom in Palestine? Means and standard deviations were calculated and then presented in descending order for all the dimensions (Tables 4-9) with numbers of each item kept as it was in the original questionnaire.

Table 4 below presents the results of teachers' perceptions towards the philosophical orientation dimension whose items ask EFL teachers how they perceive CP and the application of its principles in their classrooms.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of the Philosophical Orientation Dimension.

No	Items	Mean	SD
5	I believe I should involve all students in my class to promote CP concepts like equality, justice, etc.	4.58	.64
7	I am against injustice whether in the classroom or society.	4.51	.90
4	I motivate my students to think critically about their own culture or previous experiences in life.	4.26	.65
2	I think teachers should encourage students to have a critical look at the school.	4.21	.78
9	I believe in dialogism (dialogue) to solve the problems in the classroom.	4.17	.81
1	I think teachers should not enter/address the political or ideological issues whatsoever in the classroom with the hope of changing society.	2.82	1.02
6	I believe the main goal in my class is to convey information.	2.80	1.06
8	I am the knower in the class.	2.70	1.00
3	I think teachers should be the only authority in the classroom.	2.55	1.07

The high mean scores of items 5, 7, 4, and 9 in Table 4 above revealed that teachers perceived CP principles such as social justice, critical thinking and dialogue positively. From another perspective, they disagreed with items 6, 8 and 3 which highlighted the traditional orientations of the teacher. Qualitative results indicated that the majority of teachers stated that CP concepts were not clearly stated in the EFL curricula. Some results may be considered contradictory since although teachers agreed or strongly agreed to the promotion of CP concepts quantitatively with mean scores ranging from 4.17 to 4.58, when some of them were asked for clarification of such concepts during the interview, they reflected insufficient knowledge of what CP actually meant. They also called for modification to the EFL curricula so that it encompasses CP principles, placing particular emphasis on the teacher's role in the process. For example, a female teacher answered,

No! We do not know something called critical pedagogy! I try my best to let students read or write or speak but outside the Palestinian curricula. It is not clear in the Palestinian curricula we do not have items like these: equality, equity, social justice.

A male teacher complemented this comment saying, "CP principles are not clear in our textbooks. I believe that the ones who make the curricula should reconsider some of the objectives". Another male teacher stressed their responsibility as teachers by stating that 'the main role of the teacher is to tell the students what is the deep

message, what it wants to convey, but the lesson itself does not convey it clearly or fully.'

Table 5 below describes the results of teachers' perceptions towards the programme instruction/ planning dimension whose items mainly focus on learners' future and engagement as a center for instruction.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of the Programme Instruction/ Planning Dimension.

No.	Items	Mean	SD
12	For teaching language skills, I try to relate topics in the syllabus to my students' social or cultural experiences.	4.41	.59
10	In planning what to do in the classroom, I consider my students' expectations and/ or immediate needs.	4.26	.56
11	The students' future needs and/ or interests are considered for organizing my class agendas.	4.09	.72
14	My instruction tends to make students effective decision makers.	4.06	.79
15	In instruction planning, my students are involved.	3.61	1.01
13	In my class, I just follow the goals/ objectives of the curriculum.	2.78	.99

As seen in Table 5 above, teachers perceived their instruction/planning practices very positively to positively as reflected in the high mean scores of items 10-15 (M= 3.61 to M= 4.41), except for item 13 which limited them to curriculum goals and objectives. The data obtained from the interviews implied similar perceptions where teachers considered students as partners in the learning process which could affect their decision-making abilities. A male teacher elaborated as follows:

I know students' needs and backgrounds since I teach successive classes. They get to ask me what they are going to learn, but I never answer them. I ask them to use the book, the dictionary or look for other sources of information.

In accordance with teachers' disagreement to curriculum restriction, a female teacher commented:

I always try not to abide to curriculum goals only. There are many pages some of which are useless and we have to follow. I always try to think of new methods in my class which should be part of the curricula.

Table 6 below displays the results of teachers' perceptions towards the curriculum and materials dimension. The following items highlight the importance of adaptation in tailoring the curriculum to fit the learners' context.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of the Curriculum and Materials Dimension.

No.	Items	Mean	SD
18	I adapt the teaching materials to suit my students in the class.	4.45	.54
16	Needs analysis is an essential part of my programme.	3.97	.67
19	As an activity, I request students to express their viewpoints about teaching materials/ topics.	3.92	.77
20	In my teaching, I try to follow the pre-set curriculum along with text books.	3.48	.89
17	My students are not knowledgeable enough for curriculum planning.	2.76	.94

Table 6 shows positive to very positive perceptions towards the curriculum and development dimension with mean scores ranging from 3.48 to 4.45, except for item 17 (Mean=2.76) that doubted students' knowledge about curriculum planning. These items highlight the student-centered needs-oriented approach that gives voice to students regarding their own learning. Qualitatively, the interviewed teachers did not consider EFL curricula the only source of information despite the fact that the educational system in Palestine is centralized. A male teacher stated:

I always tell students that the curricula are not the only right things. There are many other things they can benefit from. I talk with their parents and bring lecturers to give lectures to students to talk about social problems like smoking. I arranged a lecture to more than 160 students about the dangers of smoking and students discussed and gave their opinions and some admitted that they smoke and promised to quit smoking. I encourage them to talk about any problem and not only those related to the curricula.

One of the interesting findings was that teachers considered their students knowledgeable, which may explain their disagreement with item 17 as this male teacher explained:

Students are bombs of knowledge. They need the teacher just to guide them. They are more open to the world because of the Internet. I tell my students especially in the 10th grade that they are free to look for information, check and examine it and come for discussion. Students spend time participating, even those whom I think will not.

Table 7 below demonstrates the results of teachers' perceptions towards their development as educators who can help learners become critical thinkers while relating instruction to their real-life and paying particular attention to social values.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of the Teacher Development (Praxis) Dimension.

No.	Items	Mean	SD
24	I try to connect my instruction to the real lives of my students.	4.30	.796
22	My instruction/ teaching materials seek to make students become critiques.	3.54	1.123
21	My curriculum is strictly formal, paying little attention to underlying values.	3.26	.943
23	In my class, I do not find enough time to learn about my students' hopes, needs, interests, etc.	2.63	.897

Table 7 discloses that teachers' perceptions regarding their development ranged from moderate to very positive with mean scores ($M = 2.63$ to $M = 4.30$). Most teachers agreed that they connected their instruction to students' real lives and tried to help them become critical thinkers. Similarly, the interviewed teachers emphasized that they encouraged their students to become critical thinkers through questioning or the types of activities they employed. They focused special attention on real-life problems and dialogue because of the importance of those skills for students' future life. A female teacher illustrated such a critical response with a striking real-life experience below:

We have to prepare our students for life. They have to question the information they receive. Once one of my students discovered a spelling mistake in the textbook that Al- Aqsa Mosque was written 'Al- Asqa Mosque' in one of the reading comprehension texts and they got upset and said Miss this could have happened randomly or by chance, it should be corrected because it is very important. Then, they started asking questions, 'why it is not familiar? How can we spread the names of our mosques and places?' So, we established a webpage to give the world information about the religious sights, most historical sites in Palestine from the Palestinian point of view.

Most of the teachers viewed problem-solving as an important activity to enhance critical thinking and related teaching inside the classroom to social life. One male teacher explained:

I ask students to discuss certain problems. Everyone should give his point of view, then whole class discussion goes with respect to each one's ideas. Students are so creative. When teaching them about weather problems, or how to improve the transportation system in Palestine, they offer creative solutions to overcome such problem related to street repair, signs addition or traffic lights.

Table 8 below illustrates the results related to teacher-student relationship dimension. It explains how teachers perceived their roles and their learners' roles in the EFL classroom.

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics of the Teacher-Student Relationship Dimension.

No	Items	Mean	SD
25	I am interested in learning new things from my students or sharing the responsibilities in the class.	4.46	.560
29	In my class, whenever possible, I let my students take the teacher's role.	4.20	.690
28	In the process of language teaching-learning, I collaborate with my students to come to a conclusion together.	4.14	.626
30	My students obediently follow what I ask them to do in the classroom.	3.66	.881
26	In my class, my students are knowledge receivers whereas I am knowledge transmitter.	2.74	1.117
27	In class discussions, I do not allow all students to express their opinions.	1.77	.827

Table 8 shows that teachers' perceptions to this dimension were very low to very positive with mean scores ranging from 1.77 to 4.46. The examination of the items revealed that teachers considered their students active partners who played an important role in the learning-teaching process in an untraditional learner-centered environment where sharing responsibilities and collaboration prevailed. However, responses to item 30 contradicted with such perceptions, disclosing the traditional teacher-centered relationship. Interview data mirrored a set of perceptions which reflected a list of teacher roles such as *facilitator*, *manager*, *planner*, *supervisor*, *director*, *monitor*, and *trainer*. For instance, a female teacher clarified her role as follows: "I am a facilitator, a supervisor, I try to explain the material to students, give them the objectives of the lesson, then I give them practice. Actually, I monitor the whole process". However, some teachers still held the traditional role of the teacher as explained by one: "a transmitter of information since interaction is teacher-student and sometimes may be student-student". With respect to teachers' perceptions of students' roles, they were mostly positive: *students as teachers*, *creators of activities*, *partners*, and *problem solvers*. One female teacher exemplified:

I ask students to search the Internet to read about a problem they will talk about and try to solve next class. Roles are flipped. They are the teachers and I learn from them. There are some students who refuse to use this strategy. Sometimes I try to convince them, if they do not want, I cannot force them and only try to help them understand the topic.

Passive perceptions to item 30 were unveiled in this teacher's description of students' roles such as "passive recipients of knowledge and receivers of information". One male teacher reported: "Students should be ready to gain knowledge, to be prepared to get the knowledge they have to study the curricula".

Table 9 below displays the results of the evaluation dimension which uncovers the types and methods of evaluation used in the EFL classroom.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics of the Evaluation Dimension.

No.	Items	Mean	SD
33	I continuously evaluate my students.	4.35	.598
32	To evaluate my students' abilities, I raise questions that require the students to answer them using the critical skills they have acquired.	3.94	.662
35	Students in my class evaluate themselves.	3.57	.880
34	I evaluate my students only at the end of the term.	1.67	.790
31	In my class, there is no interaction between me and my students.	1.64	.964

Table 9 unveils that teachers' perceptions were positive to very positive to items 32, 33, and 35, which supported untraditional methods of evaluation that involve learners and enhance their critical skills. However, teachers disagreed to items 31 and 34, which conveyed the traditional ways of evaluation only at the end of the term or supported one-way communication. Qualitatively, a female teacher asserted her disagreement to formal evaluation:

Most of the time I do not follow the formal evaluation. I involve students in the evaluation process. I also asked them to evaluate my performance this semester or if there is something I missed and they want me to add next semester.

Another male teacher, who partially agreed to informal evaluation, stated: "the huge number of students prevents me from doing so. We have a curriculum to cover and assess. Sometimes I give 10th graders a topic to prepare, to research, and to do some presentations in the classroom."

In conclusion, the reported teachers' perceptions of the application of CP principles in the EFL curricula call for modifications either in the curricula or teaching methods despite the many possible obstacles that may make such an approach hard to implement. Among the reported major obstacles were time constraints, the social context in marginalized areas, political instability in Palestine, the centralized educational system in Palestine, and lack of training.

RQ2: Do in-service English language teachers' perceptions differ towards the application of CP principles due to gender, years of experience, classes taught per week, scientific degree and major? Five tests were conducted to test the stemming null hypothesis, "There are no statistically significant differences at $\alpha \leq 0.05$ in the means of in-service language teachers' perceptions towards the application of CP principles in

the Palestinian EFL classroom due to gender, years of experience, classes taught per week, scientific degree and major”. In addition to descriptive statistics, Independent Samples T-test was used to test the gender variable since it compares two groups (men and women), whereas One Way ANOVA test was used to test the other four because each variable has more than two levels. LSD was employed for post-hoc comparisons where differences were found to locate their sources (see Tables 10-14.2).

Table 10. Independent Samples T-Test Results of Teachers’ Perceptions due to Gender.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Male	32	3.73	.244	.043	.630
Female	64	3.73	.236	.043	

Table 11.1. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers’ Perceptions According to Teaching Experience.

Teaching experience	N	Mean	SD
Less than 5 years	14	3.81	.270
5-10 years	27	3.72	.255
11-15 years	22	3.71	.256
more than 15 years	33	3.71	.195

Table 11.2 One-Way ANOVA Results that Show Group Differences in Teachers’ Perceptions According to Teaching Experience.

Sources of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.120	3	.040	.704	.552
Within Groups	5.250	92	.057		
Total	5.371	95			

Table 12.1. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers’ Perceptions According to Classes Taught per Week.

Variable (Classes taught per week)	N	Mean	SD
16-21	39	3.68	.260
22-27	54	3.75	.221
more than 27	3	3.90	.043

Table 12.2. One-Way ANOVA Results that Show Group Differences in Teachers’ Perceptions According to Classes Taught per Week.

Sources of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.202	2	.101	1.816	.168
Within Groups	5.169	93	.056		
Total	5.371	95			

Table 13.1. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Perception According Scientific Degrees.

Variable (scientific degree)	N	Mean	SD
BA	60	3.76	.219
BA+ Diploma	21	3.70	.211
MA or above	15	3.65	.328

Table 13.2. One-Way ANOVA Results that Show Group Differences in Teachers' Perceptions According to Scientific Degree.

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.140	2	.070	1.241	.294
Within Groups	5.231	93	.056		
Total	5.371	95			

Table 14.1. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Perception According to Major.

Variable (teachers' majors)	N	Mean	SD
Teaching	60	3.68	.237
Translation	5	3.88	.144
Linguistics	4	3.77	.254
Literature	27	3.81	.225

Table 14.2. One-Way ANOVA Results that Show Group Differences in Teachers' Perceptions According to Teachers' Major.

Sources of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.449	3	.150	2.798	.044*
Within Groups	4.922	92	.053		
Total	5.371	95			

Table 14.3. LSD Post- Hoc Multiple Comparisons.

Dependent Variable: means			95% Confidence Interval			
(I) Major	(J) Major	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower	Upper
Literature	Teaching	.131*	.053	.016	.025	.238
	Translation	-.066	.112	.558	-.289	.157
	Linguistics	.035	.123	.777	-.210	.281

Note. * The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Tables 10-14.2 covered the results of the five tested hypotheses. The results of the four sub- hypotheses testing the variables of teachers' gender, teaching experience, number of classes taught per week and scientific degree showed no significant differences in teachers' perceptions towards the application of CP principles in the EFL classroom since Sig. values were higher than 0.05 (see Tables 10- 13.2). The only significant difference was due to the major variable with Sig. value equaling to 0.044

(Table 14.1) in favour of the literature major according to LSD post hoc comparisons shown in (Table 14.2).

Discussion

The aim of this research was to see how in-service EFL teachers perceived employing critical pedagogy in the classroom. Despite the good assessments of the CP approach's utility, the findings revealed that transformational CP is scarcely examined and addressed in the Palestinian educational system (Al Rahl, 2018; Hamdon & Harris, 2011). The quantitative and qualitative findings backed up CP research that suggested emphasizing the dialogic approach to teaching English as a way to improve students' critical thinking (Başar, 2020; Lusianov, 2020). Emphasis was placed on questioning because of its role in developing students' personalities as change agents (Afshar & Donyaie, 2019; Fyall & Metzler, 2019) who are aware of social problems so that they can propose solutions to enhance social justice (Crookes, 2013; Piosang, 2018; Siqueira, 2021). Furthermore, they can improve their language and speaking skills through discourse in a learner-centered classroom (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011; Halabsaz *et al.*, 2016; Salehi, 2013).

The qualitative findings of this study demonstrated a lack of awareness of CP and its principles in Palestinian curricula, notably in terms of notions that emphasize equity, equality, and social justice (Siqueira, 2021) which connect students to real-world situations. This, in turn, calls for further analytical and evaluative studies for the EFL Palestinian curricula to determine to what extent CP concepts and principles are incorporated within these curricula so as to provide stakeholders with research-based evidence for curriculum modification and reform. The majority of the participants encouraged the integration of CP principles into the EFL Palestinian curricula since it offers a new perspective on language instruction (Afshar & Donyaie, 2019; Giroux, 1997; Rahimi & Sajed, 2014) which asserts the reciprocal relationship between teachers and students (Kanpol, 1998) and highlights the importance of the application of CP principles in enhancing learners' critical thinking skills (Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014; Vdovina & Gaibisso, 2013). Most interviewees pointed out that both instructors and students should receive training in implementing CP concepts and principles in the teaching-learning process. Freire's (1997) perspective that educational processes cannot be neutral in the sense that they can either domesticate or liberate has been widely advocated in research (Crookes & Ziegler, 2021; Herrera-Molina & Portilla-Quintero, 2021; Pennycook, 1989; Siqueira, 2021), CP concepts should be clearly stated in the curricula despite its challenges as a process (Halabi, 2017). However, this task should be carried out by taking into account the specificity of the Palestinian context which can best be described as a conflict zone suffering from serious instabilities. It is under these circumstances that Palestine strives to develop a new generation of critical autonomous learners, and thus improve its educational system.

It is worthwhile to mention that the current study's convenience sample was confined to 96 participants who received a one-year professional development diploma that followed a learner-centered approach by the Palestinian MoE. This could explain, to some extent, teachers' positive perceptions of CP and their familiarity with some of its principles. This finding appears parallel to Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh's (2015) claim that teachers' professional development and background impact their CP knowledge and awareness. Nonetheless, the findings revealed that such principles and concepts were not included in the aforementioned diploma programme, necessitating a review and modification of the training curricula accordingly. Ideally, similar future research with samples of teachers who have not received training needs to be undertaken to be able to assess the effectiveness of training and also provide more robust data for decision makers, particularly those involved program development and curriculum design (Herrera-Molina & Portilla-Quintero, 2021). One of the interesting results in this study is that none of the variables tested showed differences in teachers' perceptions except for the major variable in favour of those who studied literature. Exploring this association further may be an interesting future direction for research. Further research could investigate the effects of literary tasks on developing learners' critical and analytical skills at the school level.

Conclusion

To sum up, this research explored how in-service English language instructors in Palestinian public schools perceived the implementation of critical pedagogy (CP) principles in their EFL classrooms. The findings illustrated that in Palestine, English curricula and teaching methodologies have failed to improve critical thinking and the ability to apply reasoning among students of various ages. The findings also revealed that the application of CP principles in English language training has received little consideration. This is crucial because, while in-service EFL teachers reflected positive perceptions about CP implementation in the EFL classroom, they demonstrated lack of awareness and knowledge of CP concepts and their applications in class. Consequently, if the educational system in Palestine is intended to create a future generation of learners capable of acting as agents of change in this transformative world, stakeholders should reevaluate the notion of schooling. Despite political instabilities arising from the conflict zone, the Palestinian educational system needs to make more reform efforts in order to move away from traditional methodologies towards such that embody critical pedagogies in EFL contexts.

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