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Exploring the Perceptions of EFL Teachers on the Implementation of Critical Dialogue in Language Education: An Ethnographic Grounded Theory Approach

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ABSTRACT

Critical pedagogy places a significant emphasis on dialogue due to its transformative potential within educational settings. This approach fosters critical thinking, self-reflection, and empowerment among students, encouraging them to engage deeply with the material and question underlying assumptions. While research in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts has delved into the application of critical dialogue, there has been a notable gap in understanding how teachers perceive and implement this approach in their classrooms. This study seeks to address this gap by collecting data through ethnographic interviews with 22 teachers over three months. Data analysis was then conducted using a constructivist grounded theory methodology. Results showed that for critical dialogic teaching to be effective, two essential conditions should be met: (1) the presence of a critical dialogical teacher who embodies characteristics such as openness, mediation, and the ability to create a supportive environment, and (2) the use of specific strategies, such as authentic tasks, group work, and technology, to foster engagement and diverse perspectives. These findings have significant implications for language education, highlighting the need for teacher training that supports the development of dialogical teaching practices, promotes inclusive classroom environments, and empowers students to engage critically with both language and content. The study also underscores the importance of addressing the cultural and contextual factors that influence how critical dialogue is perceived and implemented by teachers in EFL settings.

KEYWORDS: Critical dialogue; Critical pedagogy; Critical thinking; Ethnography; Grounded theory; Motivation; Mediation; Technology

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1. Introduction

Bakhtin's dialogism emphasises the role of dialogue in shaping meaning and fostering authentic communication, where genuine exchange encourages new perspectives and mutual understanding (Bakhtin, 1981, 1999). A related concept in education is critical dialogue, which Freire (1970) defines as an approach that engages students in conversations promoting questioning, reflection, and exploration of diverse perspectives. This pedagogical approach plays a crucial role in fostering active learning environments, empowering students to challenge assumptions, interrogate societal norms, and co-construct knowledge (Kaufmann, 2010).

In EFL classrooms, where learners navigate both language acquisition and cultural complexities, integrating critical dialogue is particularly valuable. It not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also nurtures critical consciousness, encouraging students to become more reflective and socially aware individuals (Scotland, 2022). While previous research has examined critical pedagogy and dialogue in various educational contexts, there remains a significant gap in understanding how EFL teachers, particularly in non-Western settings, perceive and apply critical dialogue. Existing studies predominantly focus on theoretical frameworks or student-centred perspectives, leaving limited insight into teachers' beliefs, instructional practices, and the challenges they encounter in facilitating critical dialogue (Borg, 2003; Johnson, 2009).

This gap is especially relevant in Iran, where sociocultural and political factors shape educational practices. Despite the potential of critical dialogue to enhance both language proficiency and sociocultural awareness, little empirical research has explored how Iranian EFL teachers perceive and implement this approach in their classrooms. This study aims to address this gap by examining how 22 experienced Iranian EFL teachers conceptualise critical dialogue, the challenges they face in integrating it into their teaching, and the strategies they employ to foster it.

The research is guided by two key objectives: (1) to investigate the factors shaping Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of critical dialogue and how these perceptions influence their pedagogical approaches, and (2) to identify the strategies teachers use to effectively implement critical dialogue, with the goal of informing teacher professional development initiatives. By offering deeper insights into these issues, this study seeks to contribute to the broader field of EFL pedagogy, particularly in non-Western contexts, and to advance inclusive, transformative, and socially conscious language education (Bouali, 2021). To achieve these objectives, this study adopts an ethnographic grounded theory approach, which facilitates an in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences and instructional practices.

2. Literature Review

Dialogue in education encompasses both classroom instructional dialogues and broader societal conversations that shape educational policies and practices. As a foundational concept in pedagogical theory, dialogical education has been extensively explored by theorists such as Bakhtin (1981), who emphasised the social and dynamic nature of language. His concept of dialogism underscores how dialogue facilitates meaning-making, fosters authentic communication, and allows for the continuous evolution of perspectives. Genuine dialogue, as Bakhtin (1999) asserted, requires openness to diverse viewpoints and engagement in reciprocal meaning construction rather than the unilateral imposition of ideas.

Dialogue has been recognised as a crucial element in educational settings, extending beyond classroom discussions to influence broader educational policies and practices. Bohm (2004) highlighted the significance of creating inclusive dialogic spaces where multiple perspectives are not only acknowledged but actively engaged. Such spaces facilitate intellectual exchange, challenge preconceived ideas, and contribute to the development of democratic and inclusive learning environments (Giroux, 2007). This perspective aligns with the argument of Dewey (1916) that education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but a means of cultivating democratic thinking through collaboration and dialogue. hooks (1994) further emphasised that dialogue serves as a tool for empowerment, enabling students to question, critique, and co-construct knowledge rather than passively receiving information. By embedding dialogue into pedagogical practices, educators can create dynamic learning environments that promote equity, critical thinking, and active citizenship (Brookfield, 2004).

Research indicates that engaging students in meaningful discussions enhances both their language skills and their ability to critically engage with sociocultural contexts (Hashemnezhad, 2020). Critical dialogue aligns with the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasises authentic, interactive, and contextually relevant language use (Celce-Murcia, 2013). By participating in discussions that challenge assumptions and encourage exploration of diverse perspectives, students develop a deeper understanding of language and its role in shaping discourse and identity.

The role of critical dialogue in EFL learning extends beyond oral proficiency. Studies have shown that it enhances writing skills by fostering active classroom participation and peer collaboration (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Dobao, 2012). Additionally, it supports language comprehension by encouraging students to negotiate meaning and analyse linguistic structures (Dobao, 2016; Kim & McDonough, 2008). Critical dialogue is also instrumental in vocabulary acquisition, pragmatic awareness, and intercultural competence, all of which contribute to a holistic language-learning experience (Ahmadian & Tajabadi, 2020; Taguchi & Kim,

2016). Furthermore, research highlights its positive impact on listening skills and metacognitive awareness, both of which are essential for effective language learning (Bozorgian & Alamdari, 2018; Cross, 2009). By integrating critical dialogue into EFL instruction, educators can foster deeper cognitive engagement and enhance students' ability to construct meaning in diverse communicative settings (Hashemnezhad, 2020; Jocuns, 2021; Wertsch, 2006).

Despite its pedagogical benefits, the implementation of critical dialogue in EFL classrooms faces several challenges. For example, variability in teachers' instructional strategies and learners' receptivity to dialogue significantly affects its efficacy (Dongyu et al., 2013). Research suggests that fostering an inclusive classroom atmosphere is essential for successful dialogue-based instruction, yet this requires deliberate efforts by educators to create safe and stimulating learning environments (Jocuns, 2021; Sybing, 2023). An additional challenge lies in selecting intellectually engaging topics that encourage student participation—an aspect that many educators find difficult to navigate.

Eliciting equal participation from all students also presents a considerable obstacle, particularly in non-Western educational contexts where cultural norms influence classroom interactions. For instance, in Confucian-influenced societies such as China, students often exhibit reserved behaviour and a reluctance to engage in public discussions (Cui & Teo, 2024). This cultural dynamic complicates the facilitation of open and student-led discussions. Furthermore, effectively integrating critical dialogue into language instruction demands substantial professional development for teachers, as they must acquire the skills necessary to guide discussions, manage diverse viewpoints, and sustain meaningful interactions (Crookes & Leher, 1998).

While research indicates the potential for implementing critical dialogue in EFL classrooms, institutional constraints and varying levels of English proficiency among students remain significant hurdles. For example, Shin and Crookes (2005) found that Korean EFL learners benefited from dialogical approaches when supported by institutional policies that encouraged communicative engagement. However, for beginner-level students, limited language proficiency often impedes their ability to fully participate in critical discussions. These barriers suggest that successful implementation of critical dialogue requires tailored strategies that consider both linguistic and contextual factors.

The literature on critical dialogue in EFL education provides valuable insights into its benefits, challenges, and theoretical foundations. Research underscores its role in enhancing language proficiency, fostering critical thinking, and developing intercultural competence. However, gaps remain in understanding how teachers perceive and implement critical dialogue, particularly in non-Western educational contexts. Existing studies have primarily focused on student-centred approaches, leaving limited exploration of teachers' experiences, beliefs, and instructional strategies. Additionally, while research has examined the impact of dialogue on various language skills, fewer studies have investigated the institutional and cultural factors that influence its practical application.

This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring the perspectives of experienced Iranian EFL teachers on critical dialogue. By examining how they conceptualise, facilitate, and navigate challenges related to dialogical instruction, this research aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of critical dialogue in diverse EFL contexts. The findings will offer insights into how teachers can be better supported in integrating dialogical practices, ultimately enhancing language education through more inclusive, student-centred pedagogical approaches. This study is based on the following research questions:

1. What characteristics should EFL critical dialogical teachers possess to effectively incorporate critical dialogue into their language education curriculum?
2. What strategies do EFL teachers employ to effectively incorporate critical dialogue into their language education curriculum?

3. Methodology

This study employs a constructivist grounded theory approach within an ethnographic framework to explore how experienced Iranian EFL teachers perceive and implement critical dialogue. Grounded theory provides a systematic approach to data collection and analysis, allowing the study to develop theories based directly on participants' experiences rather than relying on pre-existing frameworks (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Ethnography complements this by offering a contextual and participatory perspective, ensuring that teachers' beliefs and classroom practices are examined within their lived realities (Fetterman, 2019). The combination of these methodologies is particularly suited to this study's aims. The iterative process of grounded theory, where data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, allows for a deep and evolving understanding of teachers' perspectives on critical dialogue (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Ethnographic methods, including prolonged engagement and in-depth interviews, help capture the complexities of how teachers experience and facilitate critical dialogue in their classrooms (Timmermans & Tavory, 2007).

This methodological approach ensures that findings emerge directly from participant narratives, enhancing their validity and relevance (Charmaz, 2014). Additionally, recognising the potential for researcher bias, reflexivity was maintained throughout the study to minimise preconceptions influencing data interpretation (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). By integrating

ethnography with grounded theory, this study provides a nuanced, empirically grounded exploration of critical dialogue in EFL education.

3.1. Participants

This study utilised the theoretical sampling of grounded theory approach and involved 22 experienced Iranian EFL teachers, evenly split between genders, with teaching experience in public and private educational settings in Iran. All of them were at least 24 years old, had at least 5 years of experience in teaching English, and held at least a BA in a field related to English language teaching. Initially, teachers provided consent through a consent form to take part in the research. Subsequently, they were interviewed during their free time. Following the grounded theory approach, data collection persisted until reaching data saturation, where no new categories emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

3.2. Instruments

This study utilised a methodological approach focused on semi-structured interviews conducted through various means, including face-to-face meetings, Skype calls, and both oral and written formats. To gather detailed data and nuanced insights from participants, the research aimed to facilitate in-depth discussions and produce rich qualitative data for thorough analysis and interpretation. Since ethnographic interviews take place over an extended period of time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Spradley, 2016), this study adhered to that principle by conducting interviews over the course of three months, rather than at a single point in time. This approach helped build rapport and made the interviewees more comfortable sharing their perceptions. After each interview, we maintained contact with the interviewees over the three months to clarify any ambiguous or incomplete responses and to observe whether their perceptions had changed or remained consistent. Prolonged and consistent engagement within a research environment, as seen in ethnographic studies, is essential for the formation of grounded theories (Timmermans & Tavory, 2007).

3.3. Procedure

The interviews began with personal background questions (Dörnyei, 2007), covering participants' education, teaching experience, and classroom contexts. Following this, 10 open-ended questions were asked, aligned with the study's research objectives (see Appendix). Interviews were conducted in multiple phases. The first phase consisted of face-to-face interviews at participants' workplaces. The subsequent phases were conducted online, allowing for follow-ups, clarifications, and additional insights. This longitudinal approach ensured a deeper understanding of participants' evolving perspectives (Gobo, 2008). Prolonged engagement also fostered trust and rapport, leading to richer and more candid responses (Emerson et al., 2011).

3.4. Data analysis

This study employed constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) to systematically analyse the interview data. Data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously, following the iterative process of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

The analysis proceeded through three coding phases:

1. Open Coding – Initially, 86 codes were identified through a detailed review of interview transcripts, capturing key themes and recurring patterns.
2. Axial Coding – These codes were then categorised into 14 broader themes, focusing on relationships between concepts.
3. Selective Coding – The final phase distilled the data into two core categories:
 - Characteristics of a Critical Dialogical Teacher
 - Strategies for Reinforcing Critical Dialogue in the Classroom

An example of this process is that among the 86 codes, some codes such as “Supportive Environment,” “Positive Reinforcement,” “Energetic Classroom,” “Student Choice,” “Openness to Innovation,” “Technology,” and “Fun and Interactive Lessons” were combined to form the code “Motivator.” This code became one of 14 codes that was subsequently included in one of the two core categories. To ensure rigor and reliability, constant comparison was applied throughout the coding process, refining categories and verifying interpretations. Memo-writing was also utilised to document analytical reflections and emerging patterns (Charmaz, 2014).

4. Results and discussion

We are focusing on two main categories identified through selective coding: the characteristics of a critical dialogical teacher and the strategies to enhance critical dialogue in the EFL classroom. Here we offer the insights of teachers (T) supported by relevant literature.

4.1. Characteristics of a critical dialogical teacher

4.1.1. Motivation and support

An English teacher plays a crucial role as a motivator, fostering an environment that encourages all students to actively engage in dialogue. According to Brown (2014), effective language instructors create a supportive classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions. Similarly, Dörnyei (2001) emphasised that teachers who employ positive reinforcement and create interactive activities can significantly enhance students' willingness to participate in discussions. In this regard, Nima (T) pointed out,

It's essential to also take into account the psychological aspects when designing a classroom environment. Creating a space that is vibrant and full of energy is crucial for fostering a sense of motivation among students. When a classroom is lively and engaging, it encourages students to actively participate in discussions.

Arash (T) also stated, "A teacher who excites students creates a class where they share ideas and debate, which helps them think and improve their language skills."

English teachers play a pivotal role in fostering dialogue and cultivating a respectful and supportive classroom environment, necessitating a strong foundation of empathy and rapport. As highlighted by the meta-analysis of Hattie (2008), positive teacher-student relationships significantly enhance student engagement and achievement, emphasising the importance of interpersonal connections in the learning process. Matin (T) believed, "When a teacher cares for the class and guides them well, students feel safe to question and share ideas. This openness makes their discussions deeper and more meaningful." Moreover, Pianta (1999) asserted that teachers' empathy facilitates understanding students' perspectives, leading to more effective communication and conflict resolution. By nurturing empathy and rapport, English teachers can create a safe space where students feel valued, heard, and empowered to express themselves, thereby enriching the learning experience and promoting mutual respect (Chick et al., 2012). This aligns with the perception of Bahar (T) that stated,

Establishing a classroom environment characterised by supportiveness and respect fosters student engagement in critical dialogue. When educators prioritise cultivating a culture of mutual respect and encouragement within the classroom, students have more passion to express their thoughts and ask questions.

4.1.2. Critical thinking and open-mindedness

English teachers must embody critical thinking and open-mindedness, challenging conventional norms to foster a dynamic learning environment. According to Facione (2011), critical thinking involves analysing and evaluating evidence to make reasoned judgments, an essential skill for educators to develop in their students. Furthermore, hooks (2010) emphasises the importance of questioning societal norms and embracing diverse perspectives in teaching, enabling students to critically engage with texts and the world around them. Such an approach not only enriches the educational experience but also prepares students for thoughtful and informed citizenship in a complex, interconnected world. With regard to this perspective, Nima (T) nicely asserted, "There is no critical dialogue without critical thinking, and there is no critical thinking without critical dialogue." Mojtaba (T) also proposed, "It is essential to approach every aspect of teaching with an open mind. This openness allows for an inclusive language learning environment where diverse perspectives are welcomed and explored."

4.1.3. Mediation

English teachers must act as mediators and intervene in conflicts of dialogue when necessary to foster a respectful and inclusive classroom environment. By stepping in during contentious discussions, teachers can model effective communication skills, ensuring that all students feel heard and valued, thus promoting a positive learning atmosphere (Johnson, 2012; Richards & Burns, 2012). This proactive approach not only helps to resolve immediate conflicts but also teaches students critical conflict resolution skills essential for their future interactions. With regard to this point, Mona (T) emphasised, "When I observe students going off-topic or engaging in conflicts during dialogue, I step in to address and resolve these issues, ensuring that the conversation stays focused and productive." Atefeh (T) posited, "I always ensure that all students have a chance to speak, clarify misunderstandings, and keep the conversation focused. This helps students engage more deeply, question each other's views, and build stronger arguments."

4.1.4. Diversity responsiveness

The role of an English teacher extends beyond language proficiency to encompass a deep understanding of cultural diversity and sensitivity to students' backgrounds. As asserted by Byram (1997), fostering intercultural dialogue requires educators to possess comprehensive knowledge of their students' cultural backgrounds, enabling them to create inclusive learning environments. Arash (T) suggested, "We should recognise and value the different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of our students. This openness leads to richer discussions where students learn from each other." Additionally, Cummins (2000) highlighted the importance of considering students' varying proficiency levels and linguistic backgrounds, advocating for differentiated instruction to ensure equitable participation and engagement in the classroom. Thus, an English teacher equipped with cultural awareness and a commitment to addressing students' diverse needs can effectively cultivate meaningful dialogue and promote mutual understanding among learners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Regarding this, Bahar (T) mentioned,

When I observe a student within the class who may be marginalised or overlooked, I actively engage by intervening and encouraging their participation in discussions. Additionally, in conducting my needs analysis, I take into account the diverse needs of all students, ensuring inclusivity and equity in the learning environment.

4.1.5. Needs analysis

Needs analysis is vital in English language education as it enables educators to tailor instruction to learners' specific requirements, ensuring relevance and efficacy. By identifying linguistic, communicative, and situational needs, educators can design curriculum and select materials effectively (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), fostering learner autonomy, motivation, and engagement (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Additionally, it helps recognise and address gaps in language proficiency, enhancing learning outcomes (Long & Crookes, 1993). Thus, needs analysis is crucial for personalised and effective language education. Hamed (T) rightly stated on the importance of needs analysis in critical dialogue, "It's all about needs analysis. I always do that and consider it the most important part of my teaching." Mehdi (T) also mentioned,

When I conduct needs analysis in class, I gather valuable insights into students' interests, challenges, and strengths. This process allows me to tailor discussion topics that are relevant and engaging for them. As a result, students are more inclined to share their perspectives and question ideas, which leads to a richer and more dynamic critical dialogue.

4.1.6. New possibilities

The English teacher's role encompasses being both a researcher and a technophile, fostering dialogue in the classroom through openness to new possibilities. This aligns with the study of Hockly and Clandfield (2010) on integrating technology in language education for enhanced engagement, and the recommendation of Kumaravadivelu (2006) for dynamic, research-oriented approaches to language teaching that encourage collaboration and critical thinking. One of the interviewees, Elham (T), pointed out,

I seek out trending topics online to spark interest in my students and constantly research innovative strategies for engaging them in discussions. Utilising the television in the English language institute where I teach, I incorporate movies, songs, and podcasts into lessons, prompting students to discuss and analyse them critically. I believe this multimedia approach fosters critical dialogue and enhances the overall learning experience in the classroom.

Matin (T) also believed,

When I embrace new methods, topics, and student-led discussions, the classroom becomes a space where diverse perspectives are valued. For example, if students propose an unexpected angle on a debate topic, I encourage them to explore it rather than sticking to a fixed plan. This flexibility allows students to ask deeper questions.

4.2. Strategies for fostering critical dialogue

4.2.1. Dynamic discussion

Witherspoon et al. (2016) noted that teachers incorporate discussions in the classroom to enhance their students' skills. By fostering a supportive environment, teachers can ensure that classroom discussions are meaningful. Mona (T) said "I make our class interesting by talking about things that happen in real life. I also bring up topics that matter to them, so we can have meaningful conversations." Simin (T) extended this point by saying,

In my classroom, I like to create discussions by bringing up challenging topics that spark debate and differing opinions

among the students. This approach helps make the classroom environment more engaging and dynamic. I make sure to involve all of my students in these discussions, ensuring that everyone has the chance to share their thoughts and contribute to the conversation.

4.2.2. *Technology assisted*

To foster dynamic and engaging dialogue in the classroom, English teachers must embrace technology and multimedia. Utilising these resources can help bring texts to life, making complex literary concepts more relatable and understandable (Blake, 2013). This approach not only enriches the educational experience but also prepares students for the increasingly digital world (Miller, 2019). Atefeh (T) pointed out, "Using video conferencing tools, students can engage in virtual debates with peers from different cultures. For example, an online exchange with EFL learners from another country can expose them to diverse viewpoints, encouraging deeper questioning and more critical discussions." Walker (2018) argued that digital media serve as tools that enable dialogue and transformation, ensuring that students' voices are acknowledged and that everyone participates. The freedom of expression provided by digital media is fundamental to fostering a creative and inclusive teaching environment. With regard to this, Mojtaba (T) expressed,

We can improve critical dialogue by holding online panel discussions. Additionally, we can use a wide range of multimedia resources to enrich these conversations. For example, we can watch movies, listen to songs, look at pictures, and listen to podcasts. After engaging with these materials, we can have in-depth discussions about them, exploring various viewpoints and analysing their content.

4.2.3. *Authentic tasks*

Using authentic tasks in English language teaching fosters classroom dialogue by providing real-world contexts that engage students in meaningful communication. These tasks, such as project-based activities, require natural language use, enhancing confidence, motivation, and involvement (Brown & Lee, 2015; Nunan, 2004). Nima (T) supported this in practice by claiming,

I use real-life tasks in my teaching, and I believe these tasks help me create an engaging and inclusive environment which fosters critical dialogue. For example, I start by talking about daily news, and then I want my students to participate in the discussion.

Mohsen (T) gave an example of an authentic task by stating,

For example, if students research global environmental issues and interview environmentalists, they must then analyse responses, compare viewpoints, and discuss their findings in class. This process encourages them to use critical thinking and ask deeper and more challenging questions.

4.2.4. *Group working*

Tsui (2001) asserted that in contrast to teacher-led activities, pair work and group work offer learners greater chances to foster and manage the interaction, create a wider range of speech acts, and participate more in dialogue. Simin (T) posited, "Working in groups will make the classroom more inclusive and encourage critical dialogue." Hamed (T) further explained,

I organise the students into small groups of 3 to 5 people each. I give each group a topic to discuss and encourage them to talk about it together. As I walk around and listen, if I notice that the conversations are starting to fade or if students seem to be running out of things to say, I begin to merge the groups. I combine the small groups into larger ones gradually, until eventually, the entire class is discussing the topic together as one big group.

4.2.5. *Literature circle*

Literature circles promote active participation and democratic dialogue, empowering participants to express their perspectives and engage in respectful discourse (Moreillon, 2007). An illustration of literature circles involves integrating short stories into the discussion framework. Collie and Slater (1987) believed that the implementation of short stories in educational environments facilitates concentrated analysis and dialogue, making them particularly suitable for classroom activities and independent learning. Tahereh (T) mentioned a related example,

While discussing *Animal Farm*, one student might argue that Napoleon represents only dictatorship, while another challenges this by pointing out moments where he manipulates ideology for control. This debate encourages students to think critically, justify their ideas with evidence, and refine their perspectives through discussion.

Spack (1985) suggested that short stories introduce learners to a variety of cultural viewpoints and literary techniques, thereby enhancing critical thinking skills and intercultural awareness. This comprehensive method contributes to the overall

development of learners' language proficiency (Lazar, 1993). With respect to this point, Reza (T) claimed, "After reading a chosen story together, I prompt my students to engage in conversation about various aspects of the narrative. This approach not only stimulates critical thinking but also encourages active participation."

4.2.6. Role play

Richards and Rodgers (2014) emphasised that role play promotes the integration of language skills, such as speaking, listening, and negotiation, thereby facilitating holistic language development. Integrating role play activities into English language instruction enhances students' linguistic and communicative abilities while making learning enjoyable and effective. Pertaining to this, Elham (T) mentioned,

Engaging in role play activities is enjoyable and attractive for students. It captures their interest and draws them into active participation. By immersing themselves in different roles, every student gets involved, making the learning experience more dynamic. This interactive approach encourages critical dialogue among students as they explore various perspectives and engage in discussions while embodying different characters or scenarios.

Reza (T) also stated,

When students act out scenarios related to current events, they are challenged to understand different sides of an issue. For example, during a discussion on immigration, some students might represent government officials, while others take on the roles of immigrants. This approach encourages them to consider multiple perspectives, challenge each other's viewpoints, and engage in deeper and more reflective dialogue.

4.2.7. Gamification

Su and Cheng (2015) and Buckley and Doyle (2016) provide evidence of the positive impact of gamification on student outcomes, highlighting its potential as an effective pedagogical tool in language education. It significantly enhances student engagement and motivation by integrating game-like elements into learning activities. Mona (T) argued,

An effective way to encourage students to engage in critical discussions is to use gamification tailored to their specific needs. By understanding what motivates each student, teachers can design activities and discussions that are not only educational but also fun and engaging. This approach can make the learning experience more interactive and appealing, ultimately encouraging critical dialogue.

Mojtaba (T) gave a related example by saying, "In a classroom activity where students work in teams to create a persuasive argument on a controversial topic, they could earn points for presenting strong evidence or for asking thought-provoking questions to challenge the opposing team."

4.3. The core theory

The findings of this study converge to propose a theoretical framework for the role of the critical dialogical teacher in EFL settings. At the core of this framework is the interplay between teacher characteristics and instructional strategies, which together create an environment conducive to critical dialogue. A critical dialogical teacher is not merely an instructor but a facilitator of intellectual and social engagement, fostering motivation, inclusivity, and open inquiry. The process begins with the teacher's ability to establish a supportive learning atmosphere, in which students feel both encouraged and challenged to participate in dialogue. This motivational foundation, coupled with critical thinking and mediation skills, enables teachers to navigate classroom discussions productively, ensuring that differing perspectives are explored and conflicts are managed constructively. The teacher's responsiveness to diversity further enriches the learning space, as it validates students' experiences and perspectives, thereby reinforcing their agency in the dialogical process.

Beyond these individual characteristics, the theory highlights how instructional strategies serve as the operational mechanisms that activate critical dialogue. Dynamic discussions, technology-assisted learning, and authentic tasks are not isolated techniques but interconnected components that scaffold student engagement. By structuring classroom interactions through collaborative group work, literature circles, and role-play activities, teachers provide students with opportunities to construct and deconstruct knowledge in ways that extend beyond language acquisition. These strategies create iterative cycles of questioning, reflection, and response, positioning dialogue as both the means and the outcome of the learning process. Furthermore, the incorporation of gamification and digital media introduces new dimensions of engagement, ensuring that critical dialogue remains relevant to students' lived experiences and contemporary social issues.

This framework extends existing theories of critical pedagogy by illustrating how teachers actively shape and sustain dialogical spaces within the constraints of EFL contexts. Unlike traditional models that emphasise the role of students as

primary agents of dialogue, this study foregrounds the teacher's role as both a catalyst and a co-participant in dialogical meaning-making. Moreover, by synthesising the personal, instructional, and contextual dimensions of teaching, the framework presents a holistic view of critical dialogue as an evolving practice rather than a static methodology. In doing so, this study not only refines theoretical understandings of teacher agency in critical pedagogy but also offers a pragmatic model for integrating dialogical practices into EFL instruction, particularly in non-Western educational settings.

5. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the essential characteristics and strategies necessary for fostering critical dialogue in the EFL classroom. By examining the insights of experienced teachers and relevant literature, we identified several key traits of a critical dialogical teacher, including being a motivator, supportive, a critical thinker, mediator, needs analyst, diversity responsive, and open to new possibilities. These traits collectively contribute to creating a classroom environment that encourages student engagement, mutual respect, and critical thinking.

Moreover, the study explored effective strategies to enhance critical dialogue, namely incorporating discussions, utilising technology, engaging in authentic tasks, promoting group work, implementing literature circles, using role play, and applying gamification techniques. These strategies provide practical approaches for teachers to facilitate meaningful and inclusive dialogues, enabling students to develop their language skills in a supportive and dynamic setting. The findings underscore the importance of a holistic approach in EFL teaching, where the teacher's role extends beyond language instruction to include fostering a positive, inclusive, and stimulating learning environment. By integrating these characteristics and strategies, teachers can significantly enhance the quality of critical dialogue in the classroom, thereby improving students' overall learning experiences and outcomes.

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7. Appendix

Interview Questions

1. How do you define critical dialogue in the context of language education, and what role does it play in enhancing students' language learning outcomes and critical thinking skills?
2. What do you believe are the key benefits and challenges of incorporating critical dialogue into language teaching?
3. How have your personal experiences, cultural background, and any professional development influenced your views on the importance and implementation of critical dialogue in your teaching practice?
4. In what ways do institutional policies, educational systems, or societal beliefs impact your ability to implement critical dialogue in the classroom?
5. How do you assess the effectiveness of critical dialogue in promoting language proficiency and fostering student engagement, and what feedback do you gather to shape your teaching approach?
6. What strategies do you use to overcome resistance from students, colleagues, or institutional constraints when integrating critical dialogue into your practice?
7. How do you navigate language proficiency levels, cultural differences, and potential biases in your classroom when facilitating critical dialogue?
8. Can you describe a lesson or activity in which you successfully integrated critical dialogue, and how did you select topics or materials to facilitate these discussions?
9. How do you create a safe and inclusive environment for students to engage in critical dialogue and ensure active participation and reflection during these activities?
10. Looking towards the future, how do you envision the role of critical dialogue in language education evolving, and how do

you measure its impact on students' development over time?

