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Critical Pedagogy in Iraqi Kurdistan: EFL Teachers' Awareness and the Role of Context and Individual Differences

Hezha Abdalla[1], Abdorreza Tahriri[2,*], Seyyed Ayatollah Razmjoo[3], and Masoud Khalili Sabet[4]

[1]*PhD candidate in ELT, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran*
ORCID: 0009-0002-0257-8239, Email: hezhabakhtiyar@phd.guilan.ac.ir

[2]*Corresponding Author: Associate Professor of ELT, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran, ORCID: 0000-0001-8631-7938*
Email: atahriri@guilan.ac.ir

[3]*Professor of ELT, Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran,*
ORCID: 0000-0002-6542-9399, Email: arazmjoo@shirazu.ac.ir

[4]*Associate Professor of ELT, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran, ORCID: 0000-0002-3959-6310, Email: khalilisabet@guilan.ac.ir*

Abstract

Critical Pedagogy (CP) has gained increasing recognition as an educational approach that fosters critical thinking, social awareness, and transformative learning. However, its integration into English language teaching (ELT) in the Iraqi Kurdistan context remains underexplored, where traditional pedagogical methods dominate. This study examines the awareness of CP among EFL teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan, investigating whether academic degree, teaching setting, and gender influence CP awareness levels. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 397 EFL teachers employed in high schools, secondary schools, and universities across the region. A newly developed Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire (CPQ) was administered, and the responses were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The results revealed significant differences in CP awareness across academic degrees and teaching settings, with BA holders and high school teachers exhibiting the highest awareness levels. Gender-based differences were also observed, with female teachers displaying greater awareness in co-construction of knowledge and adapted content, while male teachers showed higher awareness in agency and praxis. These findings underscore the need for practice-based teacher training programs and institutional support to facilitate CP's practical implementation in ELT.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, EFL teachers' awareness, educational context

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Introduction

There has been a substantial reorientation in educational philosophy, with a focus on humanistic principles that promote critical thinking, social awareness, and revolutionary change replacing more conventional paradigms (Au, 2017). A key educational framework and social movement within this dynamic field, CP draws on critical theory to question long-established cultural and educational power systems (Aksikas et al., 2019). CP sees education as a tool for emancipation and calls on both students and teachers to think critically, assess situations, and act when they see injustice (McLaren, 2023).

The foundations of CP are deeply rooted in postcolonial discourse, which critiques the hegemony of Western-centric narratives perpetuated through education (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988). Scholars, like Freire (1970/1993), Giroux (1983), and McLaren (1995), have significantly shaped the field, proposing methods that challenge the *banking model* of education, based on which the learners are passive recipients of knowledge. Instead, CP promotes dialogic, participatory learning environments that enable learners to critically engage with socio-political realities. Freire's method of combining literacy education with the analysis of societal structures exemplifies this approach, advocating for a transformative practice that connects individual growth with collective social change.

Despite its widespread adoption globally, the practical application of CP often encounters significant challenges, particularly in contexts with unique socio-political dynamics, such as Iraqi Kurdistan. Shaped by its historical struggles and sociocultural complexities, the region's educational landscape offers fertile yet underexplored opportunities for implementing CP principles. Educational practices in Iraqi Kurdistan frequently reflect centralized, traditional models that emphasize rote learning over critical engagement, leaving limited room to explore the socio-political dimensions of education (Sofi-Karim, 2015). Within the realm of English language teaching (ELT), CP holds the potential to transcend its theoretical foundations by transforming language education into a process that fosters critical literacy and societal awareness (Pennycook, 2001). Norton and Toohey (2004) have underscored the transformative role of language in shaping identity and social consciousness. However, the practical integration of CP into ELT in Iraqi Kurdistan remains insufficiently examined, with a limited understanding of how socio-political issues intersect with and influence pedagogical practices in this unique environment.

This study aimed to address these gaps by examining the awareness of CP among EFL teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan. By investigating the educational and contextual dimensions of CP's applicability, this research sought to contribute valuable insights into the status of CP from the teachers' perspectives with respect to this region's educational system.

Literature Review

Theoretical Underpinnings of Critical Pedagogy

CP, as introduced by Freire (1970/1993) in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is rooted in the belief that education is a political act with the potential to challenge oppression and foster social justice. Freire rejected the

traditional banking model of education, where knowledge is deposited into passive learners, and instead emphasized dialogue, collaboration, and critical reflection as tools for transforming oppressive systems. Central to this philosophy is the concept of *conscientization*, or critical consciousness, which encourages learners to recognize and challenge social, political, and economic inequities within their lived experiences.

Over time, Freirean pedagogy has evolved through integration with other frameworks, such as decolonial, feminist, and intersectional theories (Darder, 2017). Giroux (2021), McLaren and Jandric (2020), and Hooks (2003) have expanded its scope by addressing limitations in its Eurocentric foundations and incorporating indigenous and localized perspectives have expanded its scope by addressing limitations in its Eurocentric foundations and incorporating indigenous and localized perspectives. For example, decolonial approaches to CP emphasize the importance of situating education within local cultural and historical contexts, challenging the dominance of Western-centric ideologies in knowledge production. Similarly, intersectional theories enrich CP by examining how overlapping systems of oppression, such as race, gender, and class, influence educational experiences. These theoretical advancements highlight CP's enduring relevance in fostering transformative education and its adaptability to diverse sociocultural contexts.

The evolution of CP research spans decades, marking significant strides in educational theory and practice (Kincheloe, 2008). This area of study examines the influence of societal and institutional structures on educational environments, with initial investigations focusing on how these factors shape teachers' awareness and attitudes toward CP (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2011). Such early research underscores the importance of CP in exploring and addressing the dynamics of education systems, setting the stage for a deeper investigation into specific empirical studies.

A substantial body of research has focused on how demographic variables such as gender, teaching experience, and academic qualifications influence teachers' awareness and attitudes toward CP. Abdelrahim (2007) investigated whether gender and teaching experience played a role in shaping CP awareness among Iranian ELT teachers. Through a mixed-methods approach combining semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers and a survey of 240 teachers in Tehran, the study found no significant differences in awareness based on gender or experience. This suggested that demographic factors alone do not necessarily determine CP awareness. Expanding on this inquiry, Azimi (2008) developed and validated the Critical Pedagogy Attitude Inventory to assess attitudes toward CP among Iranian ELT students and instructors. The study, which included 318 participants across undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels, similarly found that gender, teaching position, and experience did not have statistically significant effects on CP attitudes. These findings reinforced the idea that openness to CP is not necessarily influenced by demographic characteristics.

Further research has explored how academic qualifications and teaching experience contribute to CP awareness. Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh (2015) conducted a large-scale study involving 403 Iranian EFL teachers to examine whether teachers' academic training impacted their CP awareness. The results

revealed that Ph.D. holders demonstrated significantly higher CP awareness than those with B.A. or M.A. degrees. Moreover, experienced teachers showed a deeper understanding of CP principles than those with fewer years of teaching experience. These findings emphasized the role of academic training and continued professional development in fostering greater CP awareness.

In addition to demographic factors, some studies have focused on teachers' perceptions of CP principles and how these perceptions shape educational practices. Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012) examined schoolteachers' perceptions using an adapted version of Yilmaz's (2009) Principles of Critical Pedagogy Scale. Their findings revealed no significant differences in perceptions based on age or teaching level, though a slight gender-related effect was noted. Similarly, Pishvaei and Kassaian (2013) developed another Critical Pedagogy Attitudes Questionnaire for Iranian university and institute teachers, identifying five key themes that shaped educators' attitudes: rejecting native-speaker biases in ELT, advocating for localized materials, and addressing ideological biases in teaching content. Together, these studies highlighted that while demographic factors might have minimal influence, beliefs about CP are shaped by teachers' educational philosophies and ideological orientations rather than personal characteristics.

A different line of research has examined the practical applications of CP in classroom settings. Davari et al. (2012) explored Iranian ELT professionals' views on integrating CP into language classrooms, utilizing a questionnaire developed based on interviews with applied linguists. The study, which surveyed 86 participants, revealed strong support for incorporating local culture and global issues into teaching materials—an approach consistent with CP's emphasis on contextualized, socially responsive education. However, traditional ELT practices, such as a preference for standard language norms and limited use of learners' first languages, persisted. These findings suggested that while educators recognize CP's value, its practical implementation remains uneven.

Building on the application of CP in skill development, Zokaeieh and Tahriri (2016) investigated how Critical Language Awareness (CLA) affects the writing skills of upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners. Using a quasi-experimental design, participants were divided into control and experimental groups, with the latter receiving 12 sessions of CLA-based instruction aimed at raising awareness of the sociopolitical dimensions of language use. While there was no statistically significant improvement in overall writing ability, the experimental group showed considerable progress in the critical response component of their essays. These findings reinforced the potential of CP-based pedagogy to enhance learners' analytical and reflective skills.

Beyond language instruction, research has also explored the relationship between CP and broader cognitive skills, such as critical thinking and cultural awareness. Sahragard et al. (2014) investigated how cultural awareness influences critical thinking among Iranian EFL learners, collecting data from 150 high school students through a mixed-methods approach. Their findings revealed a strong correlation, showing that students with higher cultural awareness also exhibited greater critical thinking abilities. These results underscored the significance of

culturally responsive pedagogy in fostering critical engagement and suggested that integrating students' cultural backgrounds into teaching practices can enhance both analytical and reflective skills.

While most studies have examined CP within ELT and EFL contexts, some scholars have extended its application to other disciplines. Lodge (2021) explored how CP principles can be implemented in science education, demonstrating that dialogical teaching practices help challenge repressive ideologies while fostering inclusivity. The findings indicated that democratic learning environments significantly enhance students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills while addressing systemic inequities in science instruction. Similarly, Macalalag et al. (2024) applied CP principles to STEM education, integrating socio-scientific issues (SSI) into curricula. Their study revealed that embedding SSI into lesson plans not only increased student engagement with global challenges such as climate change and public health but also improved ethical reasoning and socially responsible problem-solving. Furthermore, Johnson and Mughal (2024) examined how CP can support trans-inclusive educational practices in UK secondary schools, emphasizing the importance of teacher training and institutional policies in creating affirming environments for transgender and nonbinary students. Despite these benefits, their findings also pointed to persistent barriers, including limited resources and entrenched cisnormativity, which hinder full adoption of CP principles in secondary education.

Beyond formal education settings, recent research has explored CP's application in nontraditional learning environments. Mendes (2024) investigated how artistic remediation fosters critical reflection and cultural awareness. By analyzing three art pieces that reframe colonial narratives, he found that engaging with such works encouraged participants to question dominant ideologies and gain a deeper understanding of historical injustices. Similarly, Morgan and Parker (2023) examined the impact of inclusive, co-created sport-for-development programs on marginalized youth in the UK, showing that these initiatives enhance personal growth, resilience, and community consciousness. Furthermore, Gutiérrez-Ujaque and Degen (2024) emphasized the role of sensory-embodied learning in deepening CP engagement in university settings. Their study demonstrated that physical and interactive learning experiences, such as campus walking tours, helped students better connect with their surroundings and develop a richer understanding of social dynamics. Jiang and Alizadeh (2025) also explored CP's role in post-crisis recovery, using community-based theatre to promote social cohesion after the COVID-19 pandemic. Their ethnographic study revealed that arts-based pedagogies foster dialogue, reflection, and collective action, reinforcing CP's potential to rebuild social relationships in post-crisis contexts. However, Skelton (2023) offered a more critical perspective, arguing that CP's Eurocentric foundations often fail to address the realities of marginalized communities. Advocating for decolonial and localized approaches, he stressed the need for CP to evolve to remain globally relevant.

Despite the recognized benefits of CP and the focus on its development, no attention has been given to it in the literature in the context of Iraqi Kurdistan. Furthermore, few reliable, valid, and comprehensive instruments have been developed to explore ELT teachers' beliefs about various aspects of CP. Existing

questionnaires in the field were deemed unsuitable for this study due to several issues, including ambiguous, overly general, overly specific, double-barreled, or overly technical items. Additionally, some of these instruments lacked clear factor structures, while others used complex or vague wording that teachers might struggle to understand. As a result, the findings of previous studies may not fully represent teachers' perspectives on CP. Consequently, there remains a gap in understanding EFL teachers' awareness of CP particularly among Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teachers. To address this gap, this study sought to develop a CP questionnaire to investigate the awareness of EFL teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan regarding the principles and components of CP. To this end, the following research question was raised:

Is there a significant difference in the awareness of CP among EFL teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan across gender, academic degrees, and instructional settings?

Method

The Design and the Context of the Study

The present study used a cross-sectional survey design with a quantitative orientation. It was conducted in public and private secondary, high school, and universities across the four provinces in Iraqi Kurdistan, namely Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Duhok, and Halabja. The rationale behind using these contexts across varying geographical areas was to capture the essence of the research so that the sample mirrors the population.

Participants

The participants of this study were divided into two groups, each contributing to a different phase of the research. The pilot study included 33 participants including 15 male and 18 female non-native EFL teachers, selected through purposive sampling with a mean teaching experience of 16.84 years, and their academic degrees were consistent with those of the participants of the main phase. Specifically, the participants held Bachelor's (BA), Master's (MA), and Doctorate (PhD) degrees in disciplines related to English language. They were drawn from a variety of educational settings, including universities, high schools, and secondary schools. The second group, consisting of 397 male and female teachers, participated in the study. The participants were employed across a range of educational settings, including secondary schools, high schools, and universities, offering diverse perspectives from different teaching contexts. Their ages ranged from 20 to 54 years, with a mean teaching experience of 14.67 years. This diversity provided a broad spectrum of insights relevant to the study's objectives.

All participants were native Kurdish speakers and held academic degrees at various levels in English language-related fields. Their degrees included BA, MA, and PhD, with specializations spanning different areas of English language studies, such as teaching methodology, linguistics, literature, etc. This academic and professional diversity enhanced the richness and depth of the data collected. A detailed demographic profile of the participants, including their gender educational qualifications, and teaching contexts, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Participants

Gender		Workplace			Academic Degree		
Male	Female	High school	Secondary school	University	BA	MA	PhD
172	225	132	162	103	264	81	52
Total							397

Instrument

A Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire (CPQ) (see Appendix) was designed and developed specifically for the Iraqi Kurdistan context to address the research question. The questionnaire consisted of 21 items condensed into five factors, namely *agency* (i.e., items 1, 5, 8, 11, 18, & 22), *praxis* (i.e., items 6, 23, 26, & 28), *co-construction of knowledge* (i.e., items 3, 7, & 9), *critical thinking* (i.e., items 2, 12, 17, 24, & 29), and *adapted contents* (i.e., items 10, 13, & 16). The five factors revolved around the EFL teachers' awareness of CP and its underlying components and principles, which were all geared toward responding to the research question. Participants were required to respond to the CPQ items using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree (SD); 2 = Disagree (D); 3 = Neutral (N); 4 = Agree (A); 5 = Strongly Agree (SA)). The initial phase of questionnaire development began by selecting and adapting relevant items from the 17-item CP questionnaire developed by Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh (2015). These items were reworded and modified to reflect the linguistic, cultural, and educational realities of Kurdish EFL teachers, ensuring relevance to their pedagogical experiences and challenges. However, since these items alone did not fully address the research question, additional CP questionnaires from previous studies (e.g., Adel et al., 2019; Roohani et al., 2016; Soodmand Afshar & Donyaie, 2019) were consulted. As a result, an expanded pool of 36 items was initially composed. These items were then revised and refined based on keywords derived from CP principles (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2022). Upon further review, 13 redundant items were identified and subsequently removed, reducing the questionnaire to 23 items.

To further align the questionnaire with CP principles, seven additional items were incorporated based on the framework proposed by Crookes (2013, 2022). With these additions, the questionnaire expanded to 30 items.

To ensure content validity, the 30-item CPQ was reviewed by six university professors from the subject-specific field. They provided feedback on item clarity, redundancy, and relevance. Based on their recommendations, some items were omitted due to redundancy, some items were merged to improve coherence and for better coverage of CP principles. As a result of these modifications, the questionnaire was reduced from 30 to 20 items. Further refinements were made based on additional comments from the supervisors, whereby 9 items were added to

improve comprehensiveness. This resulted in the development of a 29-item CPQ, categorized into five key factors as can be seen from table 2.

Table 2

Components of the Questionnaire

Components	Items
1. Agency	1, 5, 8, 11, 18, 22
2. Praxis	6, 23, 26, 28
3. Co-construction of knowledge	3, 7, 9
4. Critical thinking	2, 12, 17, 24, 29
5. Adapted contents	10, 13, 16

The tentative 29-item CPQ was administered to 33 participants from the target population to test its reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire, yielding an excellent reliability estimate (r = .962).

Before conducting factor analysis to determine construct validity, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's (1950) test of sphericity were performed to ensure that the data met the factorability assumption. Bartlett's test of sphericity (See table 3) rejected the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix was an identity matrix, yielding a Chi-square value of 17311.9 with df = 406. The KMO measure was acceptable overall, with a value of .78, and individual variables ranged between .50 and .94, except for one variable with a KMO value of .41. These results confirmed that the correlation matrix was appropriate for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (Hair et al., 2019; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Table 3

KMO and Bartlett's (1950) Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		**.780**
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	17311.929
	Df	406
	Sig.	.000

To extract factors, principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was conducted on the 29 items. This analysis yielded five factors with eigenvalues greater than one, accounting for 79.85% of the total variance. The eigenvalues for the five factors were 11.37, 4.51, 3.33, 2.30, and 1.66, respectively. A visual inspection of the scree plot further supported the retention of five factors.

However, as relying solely on the scree plot for determining the number of factors can be subjective and prone to underestimation or overestimation, additional statistical methods were employed. Following the recommendations of Velicer et al. (2000), a combination of parallel analysis (Horn, 1965) and the minimum average partial (MAP) method (Velicer, 1976) was used. Parallel analysis confirmed the retention of five factors, while the MAP method suggested six factors.

Table 4

Rotated Component Matrix

	Component				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
item1	.663	.115	.259	.389	.352
item2	.155	-.767	.009	.267	.185
item3	.261	.700	.084	.425	.300
item4	-.008	-.159	.528	.595	.173
item5	.303	-.055	.777	.254	-.027
item6	.121	.396	.191	.739	-.118
item7	-.024	.046	-.315	.105	.664
item8	.139	.408	.196	.774	-.041
item9	.425	.745	.176	.125	.045
item10	-.403	-.005	.136	-.639	.039
item11	-.102	-.035	-.175	.114	-.832
item12	.858	.144	.018	.263	.066
item13	.187	.850	.219	.200	.115
item14	.039	-.027	-.523	.306	.623
item15	.679	.620	.104	.035	.096
item16	.864	.263	.185	.162	-.086
item17	.807	-.145	.409	.004	.043
item18	.380	.223	.802	.165	-.177
item19	.499	.120	.721	.065	.066
item20	.703	.017	.503	.096	.033
item21	.657	.573	.276	.032	.156
item22	.256	.308	.775	.041	-.163
item23	.194	.856	.087	.217	.086
item24	-.120	-.238	.832	-.175	-.208
item25	.757	.447	.256	.034	.134
item26	.251	.268	.846	.013	.152
item27	.769	.470	.004	.057	-.196
item28	.037	-.139	-.114	.910	.187
item29	-.199	-.799	.312	.084	.123

To refine the model, a conservative threshold of 0.45 for minimum item loading was applied to the first factor, which had the highest eigenvalue of 11.37 (Raubenheimer, 2004). Initially, all 29 items were retained, as they met the 0.45 threshold. However, upon further inspection, items 4, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 25, and 27 (See table 5) were removed due to cross-loadings on multiple factors, which hindered interpretability, resulting in 21-items 5-point Likert scale questionnaire.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The data were collected using online and face-to-face procedures. For the online one, the researchers prepared and distributed a Google Form containing the questionnaire items. The relevant link was shared through various digital social media platforms. Given that the sampling method was purposive, combined with a snowball technique, the respondents were encouraged not only to complete the form themselves but also to forward the link to other teachers who met the specified criteria. This approach aimed to expand the reach and include a broader range of participants.

For the in-person distribution, the researchers contacted school principals and heads of English departments at universities in the Halabja and Sulaymaniyah provinces. The purpose of the study was explained to them, and their consent to cooperate was obtained. Once permission was granted, the researchers left 50 copies of the questionnaire at each location they visited and set a 10-day deadline for their return. The data from the online Google Form and the completed questionnaires were subsequently entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26, for further analysis.

The collected data were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistics. To answer the research question, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine the existence of any statistically significant difference in the awareness of CP among EFL teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan across gender, degrees, and settings. Inspection of both Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of normality of data distribution showed that, although not perfectly bell-shaped, the data was normally distributed.

Results

Academic Degree

The descriptive statistics for the five CP components—agency, praxis, co-construction of knowledge, critical thinking, and adapted contents—by academic degree are summarized in Table 5. The results indicated that BA holders consistently exhibited the highest awareness across all CP components, followed by MA holders, while PhD holders displayed the lowest awareness.

In agency, BA teachers had the highest awareness (M = 3.56, SD = .69), while PhD teachers had the lowest (M = 2.94, SD = .76), with MA teachers in between (M = 3.01, SD = .60). Similarly, for praxis, BA holders scored highest (M = 3.95, SD = .62), followed by MA holders (M = 3.83, SD = .47), while PhD teachers scored the lowest (M = 3.36, SD = .70).

The co-construction of knowledge scores was relatively similar across groups, with MA teachers demonstrating slightly higher awareness (M = 4.02, SD = .97) than BA (M = 3.98, SD = .85) and PhD holders (M = 3.64, SD = .77). In critical thinking, BA teachers again reported the highest awareness (M = 3.68, SD = .65), while MA teachers had the lowest (M = 3.05, SD = .72), with PhD teachers in between (M = 3.53, SD = .44). A similar trend was observed in adapted contents, where BA teachers scored highest (M = 3.49, SD = .64) compared to MA (M = 3.28, SD = .66) and PhD holders (M = 3.15, SD = .87).

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of CP Factors by Degree

	Academic Degree	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Agency	BA	3.5606	.69634	265
	MA	3.0123	.60744	81
	PhD	2.9496	.76603	51
Praxis	BA	3.9585	.62399	265
	MA	3.8364	.47461	81
	PhD	3.3676	.70419	51
Co-Construction of Knowledge	BA	3.9849	.85316	265
	MA	4.0288	.97068	81
	PhD	3.6471	.77578	51
Critical Thinking	BA	3.6815	.65041	265
	MA	3.0519	.72786	81
	PhD	3.5333	.44482	51
Adapted Contents	BA	3.4956	.64295	265
	MA	3.2840	.66062	81
	PhD	3.1503	.87766	51

Workplace

The descriptive statistics for CP components across workplace settings (university, high school, and secondary school) are presented in Table 6. High school teachers exhibited the highest awareness levels across most CP components, while university teachers demonstrated the lowest.

For agency, high school teachers had the highest awareness (M = 3.66, SD = .71), followed by university teachers (M = 3.30, SD = .66) and secondary school teachers (M = 3.17, SD = .72). A similar trend was observed in praxis, where high

school teachers scored the highest (M = 4.01, SD = .60), followed by secondary school teachers (M = 3.80, SD = .63) and university teachers (M = 3.74, SD = .64).

For co-construction of knowledge, the scores were closely aligned, with high school teachers scoring the highest (M = 4.01, SD = .80), followed by secondary school teachers (M = 3.98, SD = .88) and university teachers (M = 3.81, SD = .93). Critical thinking showed a more pronounced difference, with high school teachers scoring highest (M = 3.74, SD = .61), followed by secondary school teachers (M = 3.43, SD = .73) and university teachers (M = 3.42, SD = .64).

Regarding adapted contents, there was little variation among workplace settings, with high school teachers scoring (M = 3.49, SD = .71), university teachers scoring (M = 3.43, SD = .59), and secondary school teachers scoring (M = 3.32, SD = .72). These findings indicate that high school teachers, who frequently engage with diverse learners, may be more inclined toward CP principles.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics CP Factors by Workplace

	Workplace	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Agency	University	3.3065	.66899	103
	High School	3.6602	.71994	132
	Secondary School	3.1746	.72494	162
	Total	3.3703	.73834	397
Praxis	University	3.7451	.64737	103
	High School	4.0152	.60117	132
	Secondary School	3.8009	.63731	162
	Total	3.8577	.63680	397
Co-Construction of Knowledge	University	3.8155	.93203	103
	High School	4.0177	.80637	132
	Secondary School	3.9815	.88718	162
	Total	3.9505	.87493	397
Critical Thinking	University	3.4272	.64961	103
	High School	3.7424	.61509	132
	Secondary School	3.4321	.73659	162
	Total	3.5340	.69003	397
Adapted Contents	University	3.4304	.59524	103
	High School	3.4924	.71155	132
	Secondary School	3.3251	.72513	162
	Total	3.4081	.69127	397

Gender

The descriptive statistics based on gender differences are presented in Table 7. Female teachers showed higher awareness in co-construction of knowledge (M = 4.02, SD = .86) and adapted contents (M = 3.42, SD = .75), while male teachers had slightly higher scores in agency (M = 3.48, SD = .71) and critical thinking (M = 3.58, SD = .59). Praxis scores were nearly identical for both genders (M = 3.87, SD = .63 for males, M = 3.84, SD = .63 for females).

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics of CP Factors by Gender

	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Agency	Male	3.4896	.71595	171
	Female	3.2800	.74375	226
Praxis	Male	3.8787	.63729	171
	Female	3.8418	.63738	226
Co-Construction of Knowledge	Male	3.8558	.87745	171
	Female	4.0221	.86809	226
Critical Thinking	Male	3.5895	.59893	171
	Female	3.4920	.75025	226
Adapted Contents	Male	3.3860	.60105	171
	Female	3.4248	.75326	226

To examine whether the observed differences in CP awareness were statistically significant, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed, with academic degree, workplace, and gender as independent variables.

The results of the MANOVA, as presented in Table 8, indicated that there were statistically significant differences in CP awareness across academic degree (Pillai's Trace = .323, $F(10, 774) = 14.932$, $p < .05$, Partial $\eta^2 = .162$, representing a large effect size) and workplace (Pillai's Trace = .076, $F(10, 774) = 3.069$, $p < .05$, Partial $\eta^2 = .038$, representing a small effect size). However, no significant effect was found for gender (Pillai's Trace = .019, $F(5, 386) = 1.464$, $p = .201$, Partial $\eta^2 = .019$), indicating that male and female teachers had comparable CP awareness levels.

Table 8

Multivariate Tests

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Academic Degree	Pillai's Trace	.323	14.932	10	774	.000	.162
	Wilks' Lambda	.699	15.110	10	772	.000	.164
	Hotelling's Trace	.397	15.287	10	770	.000	.166
	Roy's Largest Root	.281	21.717	5	387	.000	.219
Workplace	Pillai's Trace	.076	3.069	10	774	.001	.038
	Wilks' Lambda	.925	3.090	10	772	.001	.038
	Hotelling's Trace	.081	3.111	10	770	.001	.039
	Roy's Largest Root	.068	5.289	5	387	.000	.064
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.019	1.464	5	386	.201	.019
	Wilks' Lambda	.981	1.464	5	386	.201	.019
	Hotelling's Trace	.019	1.464	5	386	.201	.019
	Roy's Largest Root	.019	1.464	5	386	.201	.019

To further investigate the significant differences found in academic degree and workplace settings, Scheffe's post-hoc tests were conducted, as shown in Table 9 and 10. The results revealed that significant differences existed between BA and PhD holders across all components of CP, with BA teachers consistently demonstrating higher awareness. The most pronounced difference was observed in critical thinking (MD = .62, $p < .001$), where BA holders showed significantly greater awareness than MA holders. These findings suggest that BA teachers, who are more actively engaged in direct classroom practice, may have a stronger connection with CP principles compared to their PhD counterparts, who often engage in more theoretical discourse.

In terms of workplace differences, high school teachers exhibited significantly higher scores than university teachers in agency (MD = -.35, $p < .001$)

and critical thinking (MD = -.31, p = .001). This suggests that high school teachers, who frequently engage with diverse student populations and real-world learning contexts, may integrate CP concepts more effectively into their teaching practices compared to university instructors, who often operate within more rigid curricular structures.

Table 9

Multiple Comparisons (Scheffe) by Degree

Dependent Variable	(I) Academic Degree	(J) Academic Degree	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Agency	BA	MA	.5483	.08427	.000	.3412	.7554
		PhD	.6111	.10149	.000	.3617	.8604
Praxis	BA	MA	.1221	.07409	.259	-.0600	.3041
		PhD	.5908	.08924	.000	.3716	.8101
Co-Construction	BA	MA	-.0439	.10889	.922	-.3115	.2237
		PhD	.3378	.13115	.037	.0156	.6601
Critical Thinking	BA	MA	.6297	.07733	.000	.4396	.8197
		PhD	.1482	.09314	.283	-.0807	.3770
Adapted Contents	BA	MA	.2116	.08528	.047	.0021	.4212
		PhD	.3453	.10270	.004	.0929	.5976

Table 10

Multiple Comparisons (Scheffe) by Workplace

Dependent Variable	(I) workplace	(J) workplace	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Agency	University	High School	-.3537	.08726	.000	-.5681	-.1392
		Secondary School	.1319	.08364	.289	-.0736	.3374
Praxis	University	High School	-.2700	.07672	.002	-.4585	-.0815
		Secondary School	-.0558	.07354	.750	-.2365	.1249
Co-Construction	University	High School	-.2021	.11276	.202	-.4792	.0749
		Secondary School	-.1659	.10809	.309	-.4315	.0996
Critical Thinking	University	High School	-.3152	.08008	.001	-.5120	-.1185
		Secondary School	-.0049	.07676	.998	-.1935	.1837
Adapted Contents	University	High School	-.0620	.08830	.782	-.2790	.1550
		Secondary School	.1053	.08465	.462	-.1027	.3133

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the awareness of CP among EFL teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan, specifically investigating whether gender, academic degree, and teaching setting were associated with differences in teachers' awareness levels. The findings revealed statistically significant differences in CP awareness across academic degrees and workplace settings, while gender differences were less pronounced but still notable in some CP components, particularly co-construction of knowledge and adapted contents. These results provide valuable insights into how professional background, educational training, and institutional environments shape teachers' engagement with CP principles.

One of the most significant findings is that CP awareness varied significantly across academic degrees, with BA holders demonstrating the highest awareness levels, followed by MA and PhD holders. This result contrasts with previous research suggesting that higher academic qualifications correlate with greater CP awareness (Mahmoodarabi & Khodabakhsh, 2015). Instead, these findings align with Azimi (2008), who argued that academic standing does not necessarily predict an individual's openness to CP. A possible explanation for this trend is that BA holders are more engaged in practical classroom-based teaching, requiring them to navigate diverse pedagogical challenges, which may lead to a stronger, experience-driven connection to CP principles. In contrast, PhD holders, who often engage in theoretical discourse rather than daily teaching, may approach CP more abstractly, focusing on conceptual understandings rather than classroom applications.

This raises important questions about the role of advanced education in fostering CP awareness. While graduate programs emphasize critical theory and pedagogical frameworks, they may not sufficiently equip educators with practical tools for CP implementation (Kumashiro, 2002; Zeichner, 2010). This aligns with Skelton's (2023) critique, which argues that CP's traditional theoretical foundations often fail to address localized teaching realities. Moreover, teaching experience, often associated with workplace settings, was also significantly related to CP awareness. The results indicated that CP awareness differs significantly across teaching settings, with high school teachers reporting the highest awareness, followed by university and secondary school teachers. This suggests that high school educators, who often engage with more diverse student populations, may have greater exposure to pedagogical practices that align with CP principles. This supports Davari et al. (2012), who noted that while CP remains an emerging framework in ELT, its adoption is often more pronounced in environments where teachers actively address student diversity and real-world issues.

However, the lack of significant differences between university and secondary school teachers raises concerns about CP's institutional implementation in higher education. Lodge (2021) and Macalalag et al. (2024) emphasized that integrating CP into traditional subjects requires systemic support, including teacher training, curriculum reform, and institutional backing. Without these, teachers may struggle to fully integrate CP into their practice, despite having theoretical

awareness. The study also found some gender-based differences in CP components. Female teachers exhibited higher awareness of co-construction of knowledge and adapted contents, while male teachers showed slightly higher awareness in agency, praxis, and critical thinking. These findings are consistent with Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012), who observed minor gender-based differences in CP perceptions.

One possible interpretation of these differences is that female teachers may be more inclined toward collaborative, student-centered approaches (Gilligan, 1993; Sadker & Zittleman, 2009), which align with CP's emphasis on dialogical learning and adapted content. In contrast, male teachers' higher scores in agency and praxis suggest a more structured, teacher-led engagement with CP. This aligns with Morgan and Parker (2023), who found that gendered approaches to co-creation and participatory learning shape how CP is implemented in various educational settings. From a sociocultural perspective, these gendered differences may reflect broader societal structures that influence how male and female teachers engage with pedagogical reform. As Johnson and Mughal (2024) argued, gender-inclusive CP practices require institutional support, particularly in regions where traditional power hierarchies shape education.

This finding also highlights a paradox in CP implementation—while CP awareness is evident across demographic groups, its application remains inconsistent. One of the most critical implications of these findings is that while CP's theoretical dimensions are well understood, its practical application remains limited. For example, critical thinking emerged as one of the most recognized CP components, yet its implementation varied significantly across degree levels and workplace settings. BA holders demonstrated higher awareness of critical thinking than MA holders, which supports Pishvaei and Kassaian's (2013) conclusion that ideological biases in ELT content often go unchallenged by graduate students. Similarly, praxis—a core tenet of CP—exhibited significant differences across groups, suggesting that CP is often understood conceptually rather than actively applied in teaching. This resonates with Zokaeieh and Tahriri (2016), who found that while CP interventions enhanced students' critical response skills, they did not necessarily lead to improvements in overall academic performance.

This suggests that while teachers recognize the importance of CP, they may lack institutional support or methodological strategies to fully implement it in classrooms. Despite growing CP awareness, teachers face institutional constraints that hinder its full integration into ELT curricula. These include textbook constraints that prioritize standardized content over critical perspectives, exam-oriented instruction that limits the flexibility needed to incorporate critical discussions, and administrative expectations that often emphasize traditional ELT models over CP approaches. These findings align with Lodge (2021) and Macalalag et al. (2024), who argued that transforming education through CP requires more than teacher awareness—it requires systemic change. Additionally, the results supported Gutiérrez-Ujaque and Degen (2024), who emphasized that experiential, sensory, and place-based learning approaches are critical for CP's successful implementation.

Conclusion

Drawing upon the data gathered and analyzed using MANOVA, the findings revealed significant differences in CP awareness across academic degrees, workplace settings, and gender. BA holders demonstrated higher awareness levels than MA and PhD holders, suggesting that practical exposure may contribute more to CP awareness than academic training alone. Similarly, workplace-based differences indicated that high school teachers exhibited the highest awareness levels, while university and secondary school teachers demonstrated relatively lower awareness, reinforcing the argument that institutional settings may shape CP engagement. Additionally, female teachers showed higher awareness of co-construction of knowledge and adapted content, while male teachers exhibited greater awareness in agency and praxis, suggesting gendered approaches to CP application in ELT contexts.

These results contribute to existing CP research by providing empirical evidence that higher academic qualifications do not always result in greater CP awareness, contradicting prior assumptions (Mahmoodarabi & Khodabakhsh, 2015). Instead, the findings align with Azimi (2008) and Davari et al. (2012), who emphasized that demographic factors alone do not predict CP engagement. Furthermore, the study expands the discussion on the role of workplace settings in shaping CP awareness, highlighting how teachers in certain institutional environments may have more exposure to critical perspectives than others. This reinforces the argument that CP is not merely an outcome of theoretical education but also a function of teaching contexts and professional experiences.

Pedagogically, these findings suggest the need for transformative, practice-based teacher education programs that go beyond theoretical coursework and embed CP principles directly into real classroom scenarios. Institutions should implement sustained professional development programs focused on practical strategies for CP, such as collaborative lesson planning, critical reflection workshops, and peer mentoring—especially for teachers with less exposure to CP. Teachers are encouraged to co-design curriculum materials that reflect their students' sociocultural realities, use dialogical and problem-posing teaching methods, and regularly engage students in discussions that connect language learning to real-world issues. Moreover, it is recommended that educational leaders and policymakers revise teacher evaluation criteria and institutional policies to prioritize critical, student-centered teaching over traditional, exam-oriented methods. This may require providing resources, time, and institutional support for teachers to experiment with and reflect on CP-based practices. Additionally, partnerships between universities and schools could be established to facilitate ongoing training, action research, and classroom-based inquiry into effective CP adaptation. Creating a comprehensive support system that addresses practical challenges is essential for teachers to adapt to and implement CP in Iraqi Kurdistan's ELT classrooms.

Despite the study's valuable contributions, certain limitations need to be addressed, particularly in terms of data collection and generalizability. The study primarily relied on self-reported data from surveys, which may have introduced social desirability bias in participants' responses. Additionally, while the study

identified significant differences in CP awareness, it did not explore how these perspectives translate into actual classroom practices, limiting the ability to assess the practical implementation of CP principles. Moreover, the study was conducted within a specific sociocultural and educational context, which may affect generalizability to other EFL settings.

Future research should explore longitudinal studies to determine whether CP awareness leads to sustained pedagogical transformation over time. Additionally, qualitative investigations, such as classroom observations and in-depth interviews, would provide richer insights into how teachers apply CP principles in their teaching practices. Further studies should also investigate institutional and curriculum-related constraints that may hinder the implementation of CP, building on Lodge (2021) and Macalalag et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of systemic change for CP integration.

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Appendix

The Critical Pedagogy Questionnaire

EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Critical Language Pedagogy

Dear Respondents:

The purpose of the present questionnaire is to gain knowledge about L2 teachers' beliefs about different aspects of teaching, such as classroom activities and materials. Your careful answers to the following questions will provide valuable information that will hopefully impact language teaching in Iraq. There are no right-or-wrong answers to these questions. Please try not to change the answers you give once you check a box. The first answer which comes to your mind is what is required. Your cooperation is highly appreciated. Needless to say, we ensure that your private information will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used during data analysis to maintain confidentiality.

Biographical information:
Contact Information: …….
Age: …….
Sex: Male ( ) Female ( )
The last academic degree: B.A. ( ) M.A. ( ) Ph.D. ( )
Major: …….
Workplace: Secondary school ( ) High school ( ) University ( )
Teaching years: …….

Please check the box that best expresses your belief about each item.

(1 = strongly disagree (SD); 2 = disagree (D); 3 = neutral (N); 4 = agree (A); 5 = strongly agree (SA))

No	Factors	Beliefs	1=SD	2=D	3=N	4=A	5=SA
1	F1	The main role of an Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teacher is to assist the EFL learners with moving toward autonomy (i.e., independent learning, thinking, and acting).	□	□	□	□	□
2	F4	An Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teacher is expected to tailor their teaching methods and strategies to the EFL learners' individual differences and learning styles.	□	□	□	□	□
3	F3	There needs to be a shared ground for the Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teachers and learners to have authority and responsibilities in the classroom.	□	□	□	□	□
4	F1	The ELT education seems to pursue hidden agendas when designing coursebooks to westernize the Iraqi EFL learners.	□	□	□	□	□
5	F2	An Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teacher is expected to facilitate the classroom discussion by acting as a learner among the learners.	□	□	□	□	□
6	F3	An Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teacher is expected to provide grounds for everyone in class to impart knowledge.	□	□	□	□	□
7	F1	An Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teacher is expected to encourage the EFL learners to create learning opportunities for themselves.	□	□	□	□	□
8	F3	An Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teacher needs to	□	□	□	□	□

		promote knowledge sharing through dialogue and open communication in class.					
9	F5	The coursebook contents in Iraqi Kurdistan EFL classes have no relevance to the EFL learners' real lives, concerns, and problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	F1	An Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teacher has the major responsibility of assisting their EFL learners with developing an understanding of their identity (i.e., who and where they are in the world).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	F4	An Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teacher is expected to raise the EFL learners' awareness of inequalities in society.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	F5	The teaching and learning context in Iraqi Kurdistan EFL classes should revolve around genuine and real-life dialogue.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	F5	ELT materials designed by English-speaking countries and taught in Iraqi Kurdistan promote western culture.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	F4	Iraqi Kurdistan EFL learners should be allowed to voice their concerns about society in their EFL classes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	F1	ELT materials designed for Iraqi Kurdistan EFL learners should not promote western ideologies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16	F1	Iraqi Kurdistan EFL learners are not knowledgeable enough for program planning and needs-based material development.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17	F2	An Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teacher is expected to find ways to relate their instruction to the real lives of their learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18	F4	An Iraqi Kurdistan EFL class can cover topics for discussion, such as environmental, social, and political issues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19	F2	An Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teacher can create problem-based situations that require critical thinking, reflection, and action to promote critical pedagogy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20	F2	An Iraqi Kurdistan EFL teacher is expected to evaluate their EFL students by raising problem-based questions that would require them to use the critical skills they have acquired.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21	F4	The EFL education in Iraqi Kurdistan is geared toward assisting EFL learners with understanding the dominant social norms and beliefs in society and educational system.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Authors' Biography

Hezha Abdalla received his B. A., and M.A degrees in English Language and Literature and English Language Teaching from University of Halabja, Halabja, Kurdistan, Iraq, and University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran, respectively. He is currently a PhD candidate in English Language Teaching at University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran. His research interests are Research Methods, Teaching Methodology, and Second Language Acquisition.

Abdorreza Tahriri is currently an Associate Professor of ELT at University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran. His major research interests are Differentiated Instruction and Second Language Acquisition.

Seyyed Ayatollah Razmjoo is a Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics at Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran. His areas of interest are Advanced Testing and Assessment, Advanced Research Methods, Materials Development, and Teaching Methodology.

Masoud Khalili Sabet is an emeritus Associate Professor of ELT at University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran. His research interests include Language Teaching Methodology and Language Assessment.