

## Probing the EFL Teachers' Perception toward Critical literacy: A Grounded Theory Study

Ahmad Reza Eghtesadi<sup>1</sup>, Narges Amel Sadeghi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Abbaszadegan Institute for Educational Research, Mashhad,

<sup>2</sup> Hakim Sabzevari University, Sabzevar,  
IRAN.

<sup>1</sup> [a.r.eghtesadi@gmail.com](mailto:a.r.eghtesadi@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup> [n\\_amelsadeghi@yahoo.com](mailto:n_amelsadeghi@yahoo.com)

### ABSTRACT

*In any democratic society, preparing individuals as informed citizens is the main tenet of government policy in general and teacher education in particular. However, this can be achieved only when teachers themselves lay great emphasis on critical literacy (CL) perspective in their classes. Moreover, critical literacy due to lacking clear instructional methodologies has received only lip service by teachers. On this account, this study attempted to explore a grounded theory of how EFL teachers perceive critical literacy and whether they are equipped with specific methodology to enact critical literacy practices in their classes. After conducting the three-pass data coding, the two general categories of critical consciousness and teachers' adaptivity and dynamicity emerged. The latter includes the subcategories of critical language awareness and cultural capital awareness and the former encompasses acceptance of diversity and adaptivity to the new demands. With respect to the critical literacy practices applied by language teachers, the study revealed the integration of writing skill and posing challenging questions as appropriate strategies to enact critical literacy.*

**Keywords:** Critical literacy, Critical language awareness, Cultural capital

### INTRODUCTION

Literacy, language, and discourses in any society are not neutral and considerably attempt to accomplish particular social ends. In this view, literacy is not merely linguistic; rather, it is attributed to political and social practices. In other word, becoming literate is in line with the ability to discern what people do with literacy, to identify the hidden ideologies embedded within their various acts, e.g. texts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000), and at the same time, the ability to question and disrupt the associated ideologies, stereotypical views, specific identities or any dominant strand of thought that legitimate and authenticate knowledge within a text (Beck, 2005, Giroux, 1987, McLaren, 1988). By emphasizing the texts, we mean all forms of communication including songs, novels, conversations, movies, art, photographs, etc. (Gregory & Cahill, 2009). This accentuates the concept of critical literacy the aim of which is to unravel the social purposes tapping particular interests and to produce a society which serves the interests and voices of more people. (Bomer, 2004) A chief ideology behind critical literacy practices is enabling individuals in society or empowering teachers and students in educational context to develop their agency (Dozier, Johnston & Rogers, 2006). In any critical environment, it is the role of teachers and students to challenge and question the social, economic, and political dominations and enact social change and justice which in turn necessitate an evolution in teachers' and students' traditional line of thought (Pietrandrea, 2008). To this end, enacting critical literacy practices in education at all levels, from primary education through adult learning is of immense importance (Gregory & Cahill, 2009). In any democratic society, preparing individuals as informed citizens is the main tenet of teacher education; moreover, to satisfy their new students' interests and desires, teachers

as “transformative intellectuals” (Giroux, 1988, p.122) require amending and reforming their literacy curriculum adaptively each year (Pietrandrea, 2008), hence, they are not just the transmitter of knowledge rather they should critically examine and reflect on their educational constructs that carry social inequalities and transform it accordingly (Giroux & McLarn, 1996).

Although noteworthy enough, since critical literacy is not an instructional methodology, but a theory with pedagogical implications and it is the teachers’ responsibility to decide and apply the most appropriate and pertinent critical literacy practices for their classrooms (Behrman, 2006), it has only lip service by educators, teachers and researchers (Leon, 2010). Recognizing this, different researchers study critical literacy from different vantage points. Among them, Iyer’s (2010) study was conducted with 40 pre-service student teachers to explore the contextual situation and accordingly the consequences of utilizing critical literacy across the curriculum. Most of the teachers in this study declared their keenness and readiness to apply a critical approach to knowledge. Achieving this, they started a movement from teacher-centered to a more student-centered curriculum and more importantly to a situation in which students could have enough opportunities to become autonomous learner. However, it is worth stating that the teachers in this study, in spite of noting their willingness to exert CL, expressed the difficulty of adding this perspective to their classrooms. Although it is postulated as a challenging task to apply CL curriculum, there are some research projects which aim at incorporating it within their classroom instruction. For instance, Malamute (2011) in his study depicted the amalgamation of critical literacy with classroom instruction intended to actuate students’ culture knowledge. He helped students have a comprehensive understanding of cultures by encouraging them to read media illustrations of culture thoughtfully and critically. In this study, students were fostered to be conscious about the biases and inequalities through learning how to read their own culture and compare it with what they learn about different cultures. Leon (2010) examined the high school literacy project to decipher evidence regarding critical literacy at work. The result demonstrated that the high school literacy project approached the teaching of poetry and literature through multicultural writers. By exercising this critical pedagogy, the participants’ critical literacy, agency, and engagement were nurtured. A literature review conducted by Behrman (2006) investigated how teachers apply CL in lessons. Six core principles emerged: “1. Reading supplementary texts. 2. Reading multiple texts. 3. Reading from a resistance perspective. 4. Producing counter texts. 5. Conducting student-choice research project. 6. Taking social action” (Behrman, 2006, p.492).

Thus, it is necessary for any teacher to perceive the notion of critical literacy thoroughly and its major goal in education. Additionally, they should be competent to apply and enact it in their own classes. Although the construct of critical literacy has been described as a theory in the research literature, illustrating any specific methodology or considering any fruitful teaching and learning strategy to enact critical literacy in classrooms is almost nil (Bishop, 2014). Stated otherwise, Freebody (2007) declares “the need for researchers with a general interest in literacy to base their theories and empirical interventions on an adequate description of the materials and activities that are found in contemporary educational settings”. He highlighted the literacy studies aiming at probing classroom realities. Therefore, this study attempts to explore a grounded theory of how language teachers describe and perceive critical literacy and whether they are equipped with specific methodology to enact critical literacy practices in their language classroom. There is no particular framework articulating the role of teachers in practicing and cultivating critical literacy among students, for critical literacy varies in every classroom according to the subject matter and population (Behrman, 2006). Thus, the main focus of this study is on foreign language as a subject

matter to explore and suggest, through the use of grounded theory method, a fruitful and helpful delineation of impression and application of critical literacy elicited virtually from foreign language teachers. To this end, the following general research questions are posed by the researchers:

1. How do EFL teachers perceive and describe critical literacy in their classroom?
2. What are the practices applied by foreign language teachers to enact critical literacy in their classroom?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

A grounded theory method was utilized as the framework for this study which was developed by Barney Glaser and Anton Strauss in the late 1960 as a method for generating a theory from qualitative data. The intent of a grounded theory study is to describe a construct at an abstract conceptual framework related to a specific setting (Glaser & Strauss, 1997). Moreover, researcher begins with an idea or a general notion and let the theory itself emerge during the process of data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, in an attempt to understand EFL teachers' perceptions toward critical literacy and the pertinent critical literacy practices used by them to develop their students' CL, applying grounded theory method as a qualitative methodology becomes more necessary. In this study, one hour interviews were conducted with 38 EFL teachers majoring at TESOL. Data collection and data analysis were run simultaneously to reach the theory.

### **Participants**

38 participants (15males and 23females) in this study were all EFL teachers whose ages ranged from 23 to 45 years. Additionally, their teaching experiences vary from 1 to 30 years. What is common to all of these teachers is that they teach English as a foreign language at universities rather than language institutes or schools, thus they experience almost the same teaching environment and fairly the same learners (undergraduates or graduates in universities).

### **Data Collection**

The process of data collection took place over two semesters. Each interview lasted for about 1 hour. The interview questions were semi structured by concentrating on EFL teachers' perceptions toward critical literacy and the related critical practices employed by them in class aiming at developing their students' critical literacy. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed at a later time. Memos were written constantly during the research process of data collection and they were generally used to reflect and describe concepts as they emerged from the data (Douglas, 2003).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis included inductive analysis to explore themes, patterns, and issues emerging from the data. The goal of the data analysis was to develop a grounded theory of teachers' perception and accordingly their method of enacting critical literacy in the classroom. To this end, three-pass data coding into categories was utilized. By analyzing transcripts word-by-word, line-by-line, and phrase-by-phrase, data were sorted into categories that had relationships. The initial categories were determined through the process of open coding, and then axial coding occurred once the categories appeared. In the last pass, by applying selective coding the core concept was identified with which other categories had a relationship (Douglas, 2003). Figure 1 exhibits the hierarchical relationships between initial

concepts of the open coding process (shown by rectangles) with the general categories and subcategories emerged from axial coding (shown by circles) and the core category that is depicted by a big rectangle.

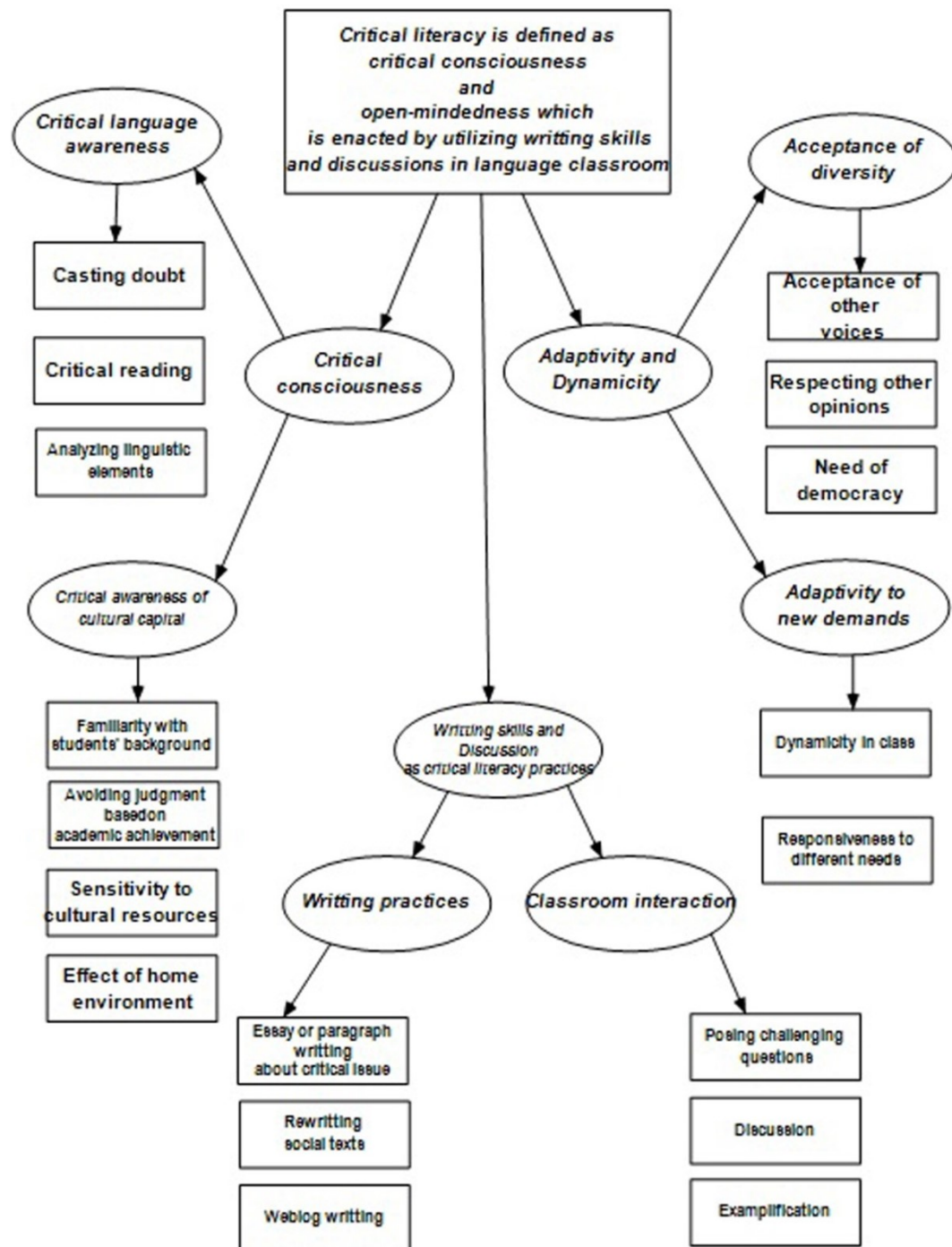


Figure 1. The relationship between categories and subcategories

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Two general categories emerged from data regarding the teachers' perception of critical literacy and one general category related to the critical literacy practices used by them in the language classroom. An attempt to answer the two research questions helped the researcher understand the teachers' perceptions better.

## Research Question 1

How do EFL teachers perceive and describe critical literacy in their classroom?

In an attempt to answer the first research question regarding the EFL teachers' perception of critical literacy, the two overall categories of critical awareness and adaptivity and dynamicity emerged from the data. Critical consciousness encompasses the subcategories of critical language awareness and critical reflection on students' cultural capital and the category of adaptivity and dynamicity as another part of critical literacy definition includes two subcomponents of accepting diversity and adaptivity to new demands. These Two general categories and their related subcategories are illustrated in Figure 2.

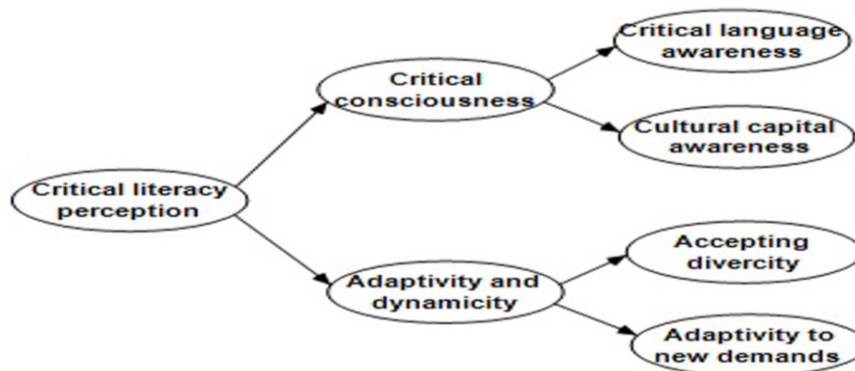


Figure 2. Two general categories and subcategories related to the first research question

### *Critical Consciousness*

The general category of critical consciousness that appeared through the process of axial coding consists of critical language awareness and cultural capital awareness that each of them is discussed thoroughly.

#### *Critical Language Awareness*

Most of the language teachers in this study, during the process of interview asserted the approximation of critical literacy to language awareness. They believed that critical literate teachers tend to encourage students to have a critical lens toward every word within a text and not to accept linguistic elements without any controversy. They agreed that students should take a reflective stance in the classroom and try to question, challenge, and uncover any social ideas or themes circulated around any text. This is in line with the broader definition of critical literacy attributed to a deep apprehension of themes and ideologies within a text (Iyer, 2010). Recognizing this; the teachers indirectly indicated the close association between language and society. The conceptualization of critical literacy as the ability to seek the underlying ideologies within language, confirms what Fairclough (1989) suggests about the internal relationship of language and society, in that "language is part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort and social phenomena are (in part) linguistic phenomena" (p. 5).

Though necessary, regrettably, many teachers in this study acknowledged that it is nearly a demanding task to equip language learners to pose challenging questions regarding the embedded ideas within the text, since they are foreign language teachers and their first responsibility is to view English language from the autonomous model of literacy by considering written language as decontextualized e.g. independent of social context (Stephens, 2000), that is, the ability of reading, writing, speaking, and listening of English is considered as the first chief goal in the foreign language classroom. Therefore, promoting critical thinking and enacting critical practices in language classes are understood as the



second purpose which is vitally important. Similarly, Diaz, Whitacre, and Esquiedo (2013) have stated that students should first possess a comprehensive knowledge of basic concepts before asking them to analyze, evaluate and even synthesize the information. The three statements below narrated from two different language teachers provide evidence supporting language teachers' perception of critical literacy as critical language awareness. Moreover, pedagogically, this conceptual model of critical literacy reported by the teachers in this study evokes Freirean critical literacy in the sense of examining, evaluating, analyzing, and deconstructing texts. Here, emphasizes placed upon the role of teachers in striving to empower learners through the process of "conscientisation" (Lie, 2010).

*I believe generally in my classes the learners should not accept everything without casting doubt on its meaning... I mean e.g. when they are reading a newspaper or a piece of writing they should notice the things or realities not said and why....honestly I should say in practice this is really difficult in foreign language classes.*

*In reading comprehension classes, some students are really good at this skill but they didn't read critically... while students are reading a passage, I would like to draw their attention to some linguistic cues or... that show inequality issues in society e.g. regarding gender I make them aware that mostly males are associated with power and females with productivity.*

*To me, critical literacy is something beyond information literacy. I mean after being equipped to perceive information literacy, the ability to analysis, reason and criticize them can be considered as critical literacy.*

As it is apparent in the second and third statements above as examples and also based on the perception of other teachers obtained through the constant comparison analysis in this study, there is a general consensus over the concept of critical reading and critical thinking as the two important ingredients and portions of being critical literate. Based on the view of considering critical literacy as the critical reading and thinking, Olson (1996) associated literacy with critical reading as developing, perceiving, and apprehending complex forms of reasoning and cognitive processes (e.g., categorization) through which students are expected to recognize author's bias by comprehending diverse meaning derived from the integration of pre-requisite knowledge and textual intention (Luke, 2012). With respect to critical thinking, it can be understood from these statements narrated by language teachers that critical literacy is known to be an essential component in encouraging students to become thinkers, accompanied by application of the required skills to evaluate, associate and synthesize available information by moving beyond basic understanding as well as thinking abilities (Pescatore, 2007, Smith, 2010). Although critical reading has been viewed as important part of critical literacy by the teachers in the current study, Cervetti, Pardales, and Damico (2001) distinguished critical literacy from critical reading, emphasizing that the purpose behind the former is providing a more just world by challenging and questioning what is assumed as normative and legitimized while the latter is seen as cognitive development of higher order thinking skills related foremost to comprehension. Additionally, Lee (2011) denoted that comprehending critical literacy and critical thinking as the same entities is a general myth regarding the perception of critical literacy.

#### *Critical Awareness on Students' Cultural Capital*

The teachers' sensitivity to their students' cultural capital is another important subcategory emerged from the data as their perceived concept of critical literacy. This category was basically derived from the understanding, awareness and reactivity of foreign language teachers to the notion that their students come from diverse backgrounds; different families,

different life styles and even different socioeconomic status. Most of them declare that it is unfair to judge students without any reference and consideration of their background. They mentioned critical literate teachers should behave open mindedly and wisely in estimating their students. Accepting and believing students merely based on their academic attainment was suppressed by the language teachers in this study. The teachers' statement virtually upheld the notion of cultural capital proposed by Bourdieu (1973). Cultural capital refers to a combination of behaviors, status, or habits passed on to the children through the process of family socialization. In other words, what we think and how we act reflect our cultural inheritance, an important vignette of our "*habitus*" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p 204-205) which mutates by class and only middle class capital resources tend to be a cultural capital appraised by society. This perception of critical literacy can be amplified by the following statements.

*One of my students speaks fluently because he has been stayed in Canada for about 6 years just to learn English better....all of my colleagues called him a genius in learning and speaking English but I think it is wrong to judge in this way. A literate teacher esp. a critical one should be aware of the background of their students and do not discriminate them.*

*As an experienced teacher, I believe being critical literate is.....and maybe students' parents are educated and this will influence their academic achievement, I mean the home environment is a factor that must be considered by the teachers.*

In the first statement in this section, the teacher has professed that most of her colleagues ascribe their student's higher language ability to such things as intelligence or higher intellectual ability. One possible explanation for this misunderstanding might be linked to the fact that they couldn't notice the determining role and impact of the cultural capital on their students' academic achievement. In this line, Bourdieu & Passeron, (1990) have stated that a chief reason attributed to linguistic discrimination at the classroom level is the incomprehension of linguistic competence and cultural resources students bring to school. Many earlier studies have investigated the effects of parental cultural capital in its institutionalized state (education) and cultural participation or taste as the measure of embodied cultural capital on children's educational attainment (DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985, De Graaf 1986; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp 1996; Goldthorpe, 2007, Müller & Karle, 1993). Another chief reason underpinning the misrecognition of attributing academic attainment to intellectual ability and ignoring students' cultural capital can be lightened by accepting this mentality that since middle-class families utilize books more than lower ones, and by pursuing that their process of life socialization transmitted to their children (here staying at Canada to learn English well is valued by the students' parents) is different from the lower ones, they are empowered with written language which is a preferred status for schooled literacy. However, lower class families are equipped with spoken language which is little associated with standard language required in school. In other words, certain forms of thinking, doing, and acting become valued in school (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993). Recognizing this, Lareau (2000) took the view that because middle and upper-class parents believe in some intervention program in that they have propensity to assist with their children homework or provide and appreciate some after school enrichment extracurricular activities like enrollment in music and foreign language classes, they are more successful in schools than working class children whose parents entirely rely on and accentuate only the determining role of school in their children academic achievement. Moreover, Sullivan (2001) declared that the academic achievement of the students from privileged social class is due to the intellectual resources including cultural knowledge and vocabulary they bring with themselves to the class atmosphere.

### ***Adaptivity and Dynamicity in the Class***

Another general category emerged from the data is the notion of adaptivity and dynamicity of language teachers in class which includes two main subcategories: accepting diversity in class, and teachers' adaptivity to arising demands in class.

Foreign language teachers' thoughtfulness affiliated to accepting dynamicity and adaptivity in their class is imputed to the subcategory of accepting and reflecting on different voices and attitudes in class. The teachers declared that as a critical literate person they should demonstrate their approval of other voices, ideologies, beliefs, attitudes, and cultures in the class even those contradictory with their owns. Arguably, this might necessitate high degree of ambiguity tolerance and open mindedness as two important personality traits required for critical literate teachers. Besides this, they draw on the issue that a literate teacher should strive to provide a helpful opportunity and a secure atmosphere in the class to allow the learners discuss their beliefs and opinions. This is nearly in line with the main tenet of critical literacy in that the recognition of diversity to enhance the democratization of education and to empower marginalized populations is necessary (Street, 1995). Following statements refer to such claims among foreign language teachers:

*As literate language teachers we should allow our students to discuss their beliefs and their attitudes, reveal their feelings even their prodigious toward different things... Um better say, providing a kind of student-centered class or a secure place for them to talk and this in turn will influence our teaching style or selected materials since we are familiar with our students' interests. But in fact students prefer to accept whatever teachers transmit to them at least in my own classes.*

*I think a critical literate person at first must be a good listener to other opinions and thoughts to see different social issues from different points of views.*

The teachers' claims regarding the acceptance of the students' voices and opinions in the class denote the essentiality of a more student—centered system to promote critical literacy. The first statement by one of the teachers explicitly stated the word “student-centered class” as an essential pedagogic component of conceptualizing critical literacy. In the same line, Iyer (2010) study delineated the concept of critical literacy as the transition from a traditional teacher-centered class to a child-centered system which intrigue students' active participation with critique and negotiation of meaning which are fundamental to learning. This confirms the idea of “politics of voice” which takes the view of engaging, perceiving and reflecting over the various histories, identities, and opinions of marginalized groups on the basis of difference of gender, language, culture, race, and sexual orientation (e.g., Kumishiro & Ngo, 2007). Thus, the student-centered design might lead to such an engagement with cultural and linguistic diversity in language classroom. Moreover, almost all the teachers in this study repeatedly accentuated the importance of being familiarized with the students' interests and changing one's teaching styles and even classroom materials accordingly. This presents the second subcategory which is teachers' adaptivity to arising demands. Put it another way, in contemporary education the students' cognitive and affective learning experiences should navigate all the decisions in class regarding the selection of the materials and activities done in class and how. So, learning is naturally shifted to the students. However, teachers in this study regularly have mentioned their students' high preference to accept and record the information in class. This problem has been explained by Weimer (2002) that today neither students nor teachers are skilled at making the shift toward learner centered system and still teachers follow their traditional role of choosing and organizing content as well as interpreting and applying the concepts and also evaluating students' learning (Wright,



2011). This approach to student-centered learning is in concordance with the constructivism in which learning is seen as the active construction of meaning by learner (Michael, 2006).

## Research Question 2

What are the practices applied by foreign language teachers to enact critical literacy in their classroom?

The second research question aims to address the significant pedagogical practices used by language teachers to develop critical literacy in the class. After exploring the voices of 38 teachers regarding their methodological orientations, and after doing open coding analysis and then through the axial coding, the role of writing practices and the posing question strategies are greatened as the two principal categories of enacting critical literacy in language classrooms ( see figure 3). These two general categories related of critical literacy practices are shown in Figure 3, and they are discussed below:

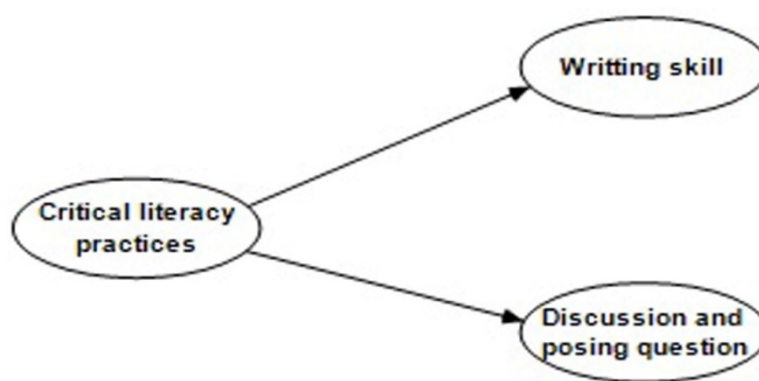


Figure 3. The two general categories related of critical literacy practices

### Writing Practices

Teachers in this study have enforced the writing practice as an adequate entity in equipping learners to look with a critical and evaluative lens. They ask their students to write critically e.g. about different societal issues such as family, poverty, education, and equality which requires their ability to criticize the structures that are considered as norms in society. Generally, through the process of open coding, it is explored that having students to write critically can be achieved in the shape of paragraph writing, essay writing, or rewriting a specific short story or even throughout the cyberspace by doing weblog writing. Teachers take the view that through the application of writing and composition skills, they become skilled at the foreign language mechanisms of writing as well as become familiarized with writing critically when they are asked to write about a hot critical topic. For instance, the following examples testify above claims:

*I bring a short story to the class in which the female characters or um... .. Negro persons are marginalized or depicted as inferior characters. Then I ask them to rewrite the story from those inferior characters' point of view and want them to sympathize with them... I believe, this procedure makes them aware of the themes such as equality and this can make them more critical literate. (this drowned from a teacher of English literature)*

*In all my classes, for students' homework, I asked them to write e.g. 20 sentences to 20 people around them and criticize them e.g. to an intimate friend, or to their teacher or even to those dominant characters in society such as the president .... When I read their sentences, I notice that they do this task very well.*

*I myself prefer weblog instruction and cyberspace in language classroom, so I design a class blog for students and after introducing a particular topic regarding their course, e.g. global warming, I asked the entire class to put their opinions or to share their comments about that with their other classmates interactively. You know I believe.....they feel free without any tension to express themselves and this will encourage them to think critically.*

These findings highlight the importance of writing in developing critical literacy. Wade (1995) elaborated the role of writing in prompting critical thinking skills. He emphasized that by utilizing writing practices, teachers can develop students' dialectic reasoning through which they can argue and discuss almost the thorough picture of an issue critically. Moreover, the focused content of literacy education dramatically shifted from 2000-2001 to 2010-2011. *Phonemic awareness* and *phonics* were considered as the hot topics in 2000-2001. However, in 2010-2011 these topics were nearly less important and such issues as new literacies/digital literacies, critical reading and critical writing have been viewed as the hot topics of literacy education (Cassidy & Ortlieb, 2012). Thus, the pedagogic practices of enacting critical literacy used by the teachers in this study affirm the current vital topics of literacy education. Notably, the teachers persisted weblog writing as helpful in developing critical literacy. Harris (2008) acknowledges that weblogs empower learners to think critically since they become sensitive, reflective, analytical and responsive to every issue around them.

### **Discussion and Posing Questions**

The second general category which emerged from the data based on the second research question is associated with classroom interaction which are mostly committed to classroom discussions and posing questions by present teachers to enact critical literacy in their classroom. The language teachers in this study share a method of promoting critical literacy in class by initiating a classroom discussion about the critical issues. They indicated that diminishing social injustices in society begins to take place primarily from schools when teachers strive to make their students aware of some existing social norms. They contend that it will best happen in the form of class discussion and posing challengeable questions. Moreover, they emphasize that teachers need to be more flexible by allowing the students also to formulate critical questions to let the students know that the teacher values their thoughts and ideas. See the following as pertinent evidences from teachers:

*In class by highlighting some social examples about the inequalities in society or about a lived experience and then I ask some related questions to engage students in a discussion about e.g. some social or political issues.*

*By posing questions and initiating debate in class, I try to sensitize students' minds about important social topics and some social problems in their surroundings.*

The teachers' explanations about the role of formulating questions in class is consistent with the developing focus among researchers upon the realization of questioning strategies as accountable element in developing, expanding, and challenging students thinking (Klem & Connell, 2004; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001, Miciano, 2004, Olvera & Walkup, 2010). Moreover, since one of the main tenet of critical literacy is enabling individuals to develop their agency by exploring the subjectivity within the texts (Dozier, Johnston & Rogers, 2006, Iyer, 2010), the application of the deep-level-reasoning questions in the course content will have led to self-explaining, and learners may discern mismatches between their own mental models and the models presented by the text (Craige, Sullins, & Witherspoon, 2006), and also questioning strategy has been confirmed as a fruitful strategy by the teachers

in this study to trigger students' thinking process and uncover the problematic issues. Arguably, divergent questions might be helpful in promoting critical literacy. Divergent questions are the high level questions mostly open ended with acceptability of wide variety of responses and require learners to reveal their own opinions and moreover, encourage students' sense of evaluation (Ornstein, 1995, Moore, 1995). In addition, Fournier-Sylvester (2013) suggested that for addressing controversial issues in the classroom, establishing an open and respectful environment is helpful and that teachers should encourage their students to speak their minds by familiarizing them with the structure of an argument and evaluating the strength and weaknesses of an argument.

## **CONCLUSION**

With respect to the main purpose of the study and through the data analysis procedure, the findings demonstrated that language teachers perceived and described critical literacy as critical consciousness including critical language awareness and comprehension of students' cultural capital. By conceptualizing the critical literacy based on these views, language teachers offered an orientation to language learning and teaching pertinent to critical pedagogy. For example, by emphasizing the critical language awareness as one of the foundational concept in this study, they affirmed a scope the aim of which is to empower learners to look critically at their own language practices, that of others in the settings of which they are a part and in the wider society they appear (Clark & Ivancic, 1997). Additionally, teachers defined CL as the ability to comprehend students' cultural capital in that recognizing their process of socialization which is mostly emerged in home is of great importance (Bernhardt, 2013). At the most general level, the notion of cultural capital has been formulated by Bourdieu (1973) in relation to the sociology of education (Lareau, Weininger, 2003) in which he articulated the families' social origin as an important predictor of the educational attainment in that the cultural resources of privileged parents impact greatly the educational outcome of their children regarding the mastery of curriculum in schools (Graaf, Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000). In other words, it pertains to the knowledge of the dominant, legitimate, and normative codes contributing to a culture (Jæger, 2010). Moreover, minority students may be disadvantaged by their school in relation to college attendance or even their employment opportunities since they cannot mold the dominant cultural norms within themselves (Hong & Young, 2008). Indeed, teachers in the present study showed their understanding that students come from different environments with different processes of life socialization and this has been viewed as an important aspect of critical literacy. Besides these two main tenets of critical literacy namely critical language awareness and comprehending students' cultural capital perceived by language teachers, accepting diversity and teachers' adaptivity to the students' needs are the issues that frequently arose throughout data analysis. Drawing on these categories which emerged from the data, the recognition of diversity to enhance the democratization of education and to empower marginalized populations becomes more evident (Street, 1995). Apple (1992) suggested that in order to assure the functions of schools as democratic institutions, teachers and students must examine the constructed nature of knowledge about those specific schools. For example, one manifestation of a democratic institution is when students feel they have the right to convey their opinions, questions, evaluations, arguments and teachers must behave neutrally and independent of their own personal opinions with all those voices (Edelsky, 1999). In this regard, thus, constructing critical literacy in education and embedded it across curriculum is of immense importance at all levels, from primary education through adult learning (Gregory and Cahill, 2009).

In regard to the teacher-developed critical literacy activities in class to promote critical literacy, two general categories emerged which are writing practices and classroom interaction discussed earlier and can be applied by other language teachers. Teachers wish to enact a critical literacy curriculum in which they can work alongside their students to encourage them to develop their critical literacy. This can be achieved, according to language teachers in the current study, by providing space to discover, question, challenge, and write or rewrite sociocultural assumptions with a critical lens in the class environment. Moreover, it is vital to mention that increase in the students' sense of agency over their own life experience and opportunities require their deep reflection on critical topics and engagement in critical literacy activities (Pietrandrea, 2008). As the last phase of this study, through the process of selective coding, critical literacy is perceived as critical consciousness and open-mindedness which can be enacted by utilizing writing skills and discussions in language classroom. Although the derived theory is not a grand theory, according to Glasser and Strauss (1967), it is a theory that is applicable to substantive topic. In this study all the participants selected by the researchers were EFL teachers and thus to increase the probability of generalization regarding teachers' perception toward critical literacy, future studies can be designed and conducted with the teachers from other fields of studies and this will depict a more comprehensive picture of critical literacy.



## REFERENCES

- [1] Apple, M. (1992). The text and cultural politics. *Educational Researcher*, 21(1), 4-11.
- [2] Beck, A. (2005). A place for critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48(5), 382-400.
- [3] Behrman, E. (2006). Teaching about Language, power, and text: A review of classroom practices that support critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(6), 490-498.
- [4] Bernhardt, P. E. (2013). The Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) Program: Providing Cultural Capital and college access to low-income students. *School Community Journal*, 23(1), 203-222.
- [5] Bishop, E. (2014). Critical literacy: Bringing theory to praxis. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 3(1), 51-63.
- [6] Bourdieu, P. (1973). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In R. Brown (Ed.), *Knowledge, education and cultural Change: Papers in the sociology of education* (pp.71-112). London: Tavistock
- [7] Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, culture and society* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). London: Sage.
- [8] Bomer, R. (1995). *Time for meaning: Crafting literate lives in middle and high school*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- [9] Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one community*. New York: Routledge.
- [10] Cassidy, J., Ortlieb, E., & Shettel, J. (2011). What's hot, what's not for 2011? *Reading Today*, 28(3), 6-8.
- [11] Cervetti, G., Pardales, M. J., & Damico, J. S. (2001). A tale of differences: Comparing the traditions, perspectives, and educational goals of critical reading and critical literacy. *Reading Online*, 4(9). Available: [http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art\\_index.asp?HREF=/articles/cervetti/index.html](http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=/articles/cervetti/index.html)
- [12] Clark, R., & Ivanic, R. (1997). *The Politics of writing*. London: Routledge.
- [13] Craig, S. D., Sullins, J., Witherspoon, A., & Gholson, B. (2006). The Deep-level-reasoning-question effect: The role of dialogue and deep-level-reasoning questions during vicarious learning. *Cognition and Instruction*, 24(4), 565-591.
- [14] De Graaf, N. D., De Graaf, P. M., & Kraaykamp, G. (2000). Parental cultural capital and educational attainment in the Netherlands: A refinement of the cultural capital perspective. *Sociology of Education*, 73(2), 92-111.
- [15] De Graaf, P. M. (1986). "The impact of financial and cultural resources on educational attainment in the Netherlands". *Sociology of Education*, 59(4), 237-246.
- [16] Diaz, Z., Whitacre, M., Esquierdo J. J., & Escalante, J. A. (2013). Why did I ask that question? Bilingual/ESL pre-service teachers 'insights. *International Journal of Instruction*, 6(2), 163-176.
- [17] DiMaggio, P. (1982). Cultural Capital and School Success: The Impact of status culture participation on the grade of U.S. high school students. *American Sociological Review*, 47(2), 189-201.

- [18] DiMaggio, P., & Mohr, J. (1985). Cultural capital, educational attainment, and marital selection. *American Journal of Sociology*, 90(6), 1231-1261.
- [19] Douglas, D. (2003). Grounded theories of management: A methodological review. *Management Research News*, 26(2), 44-52.
- [20] Dozier, C., Johnston, P., & Roger, R. (2006). *Critical literacy/critical teaching: Tools for responsive teaching*. New York: Columbia University; & London: Teachers College Press.
- [21] Edelsky, C. (1999). On critical whole language practice: Why, what, and a bit of how. In C. Edelsky (Ed.), *Making justice our project: Teachers working toward critical whole language practice* (pp. 7-36). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- [22] Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. Harlow: Longman.
- [23] Fournier-Sylvester, N. (2013). Daring to debate: Strategies for teaching controversial issues in the classroom. *College Quarterly*, 16(3), 1-9.
- [24] Freebody, P. (2007). Literacy education in school research perspectives from the past, for the future. *Australian Education Review*, 52, 372-376.
- [25] Giroux, H. A. (1987). Citizenship, public philosophy, and the struggle for democracy. *Educational Theory*, 37(2), 103-120.
- [26] Gregory, A.E., & Cahill, M.A. (2009). Constructing critical literacy: Self-reflexive ways for curriculum and pedagogy. *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices*, 3(2), 6-16.
- [27] Giroux, H. A. (1988). *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- [28] Giroux, H. A., & McLaren, P. (1996). *Teacher education and the politics of engagement: The case for democratic schooling*. In P. Leistyna, A. Woodrum, & S.A. Sherblom (Eds.), *Breaking free: The transformative power of critical pedagogy* (pp. 301-331). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review.
- [29] Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- [30] Goldthorpe, J. H. (2007). "Cultural capital": Some critical observations. *Acta Sociologica*, 50(3), 211-229.
- [31] Harris, D. (2008). *Blogging 100 success secrets: 100 most asked questions on building, optimizing, publishing, marketing and how to make money with blogs*. United States: Emereo Pty Ltd.
- [32] Hong, W. P., & Youngs, P. (2008). Does high-Stakes testing increase cultural capital among low-income and racial minority students? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 16(6), 1-21.
- [33] Iyer, R. (2010). Literacy models across nations: Literacy and critical literacy in teacher training programs in India. *Procedia*, 2(2), 4424-4428.
- [34] Jæger, M. M. (2011). Does cultural capital really affect academic achievement? New evidence from combined sibling and panel data. *Sociology of education*, 84(4), 287-298.
- [35] Kalmijn, M., & Kraaykamp, G. (1996). "Race, cultural capital, and schooling: An analysis of trends in the United States." *Sociology of Education*, 69(1), 22-34.

- [36] Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationship matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health*, 74(4), 262-273.
- [37] Knoblauch, C., & Brannon, L. (1993). *Critical teaching and the idea of literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- [38] Kumishiro, K., & Ngo, B. (2007). *Six lenses for anti-oppressive education*. New York: Peter Lang.
- [39] Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- [40] Lareau, A., & Weininger, E. B. (2003). Cultural capital in educational research: A critical assessment. *Theory and Society*, 32, 567-606.
- [41] Lee, C. J. (2011). Myths about critical literacy: What teachers need to unlearn. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* [Online], 7(1) 95-102.
- [42] Leon, R. J. (2010). *Engagement through poetry: A qualitative study of the high School literacy project*. (Doctorial Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession Order No. AAT 3449110).
- [43] Lie, K. Y. (2010). Sustaining diversity in higher education: Engaging the critical literacy of multilingual students in a Malaysian postgraduate classroom. *Procedia*, 7(1), 389-397.
- [44] Luke, A. (2012). Critical literacy: Foundational notes. *Theory into Practice*, 51(1), 4-11.
- [45] Malamute, A. V. (2011). "Critical literacy and the world language classroom: Complicating culture education." MA (Master of Arts) thesis, University of Iowa.
- [46] Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- [47] McLaren, P. (1988). Schooling and the postmodern body: Critical pedagogy and the politics of enfleshment. *Boston Journal of Education*, 170(3), 53-83.
- [48] Michael, J. (2006). How we learn: Where's the evidence that active learning works? *Advances in Physiology Education*, 30(4), 159-167.
- [49] Moore, K. D. (1995). *Classroom teaching skills* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). New York: McGraw-Hill Inc.
- [50] Müller, W., & Karle, W. (1993). Social selection in educational systems in Europe. *European Sociological Review*, 9(1), 1-23.
- [51] Olson, D. R. (1996). *The world on paper*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [52] Olvera, G. W., & Walkup, J. R. (2011). Questioning strategies for teaching cognitively rigorous curricula. Retrieved May, 2012, from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED518988>
- [53] Ornstein, A. C. (1995). *Strategies for effective teaching* (2nd Edition). Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark.
- [54] Pescatore, C. (2007). Current events as empowering literacy: For English and social studies teachers. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 51(4), 326-339.

- [55] Pietrandrea, L. M. (2008). *Co-constructing critical literacy in the middle school classroom*. Doctoral dissertation. Ohio State University.
- [56] Smith, C. H. (2010). "Diving in deeper": Bringing basic writers' thinking to the surface. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(8), 668-676.
- [57] Stephens, K. (2000). A critical discussion of the 'New Literacy Studies'. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 48(1), 10-23.
- [58] Strauss, A. L, & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- [59] Street, B. V. (1995). *Social Literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education*. London & New York: Longman.
- [60] Sullivan, A. (2001). 'Cultural capital and educational attainment'. *Sociology*, 35(4), 893-912.
- [61] Wade, C. (1995). Using writing to develop and assess critical thinking. *Teaching of Psychology*, 22(1), 24-28.
- [62] Weimer, M. (2002). *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- [63] Wright, G. M. (2011). Student-centered learning in higher education. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 23(3), 92-97.
- [64] Apple, M. (1992). The text and cultural politics. *Educational Researcher*, 21(1), 4-11.
- [65] Beck, A. (2005). A place for critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48(5), 382-400.
- [66] Behrman, E. (2006). Teaching about Language, power, and text: A review of classroom practices that support critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(6), 490-498.