

SIGNIFICANCE OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN ELT CLASSROOM FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT:

ELT is one of the major areas of study among language learners and teachers. It encompasses several theoretical and conceptual frameworks related to how language is learnt and taught in varied contexts and at different levels. In India, English is taught as a second language at different levels of educational set up. However, a lot of complexities persist in the chalking out the content of study in teaching-learning of English as a second language as many a times students grapple with unfamiliarity of the content they are forced to read in terms of the subject matter and context of the text that seems to be alien for them. The reason behind this problem might be pointed at lack of exposure to culturally varied texts which are difficult to connect by our students. Thus, it is of paramount importance to select the content of their study which is backed by the principles of particularity, practicality and possibility and the contexts to which they could connect and learn effectively from their surroundings. In this view, the paper throws light on the significance of culturally relevant texts as a part of critical pedagogy to foster learning of English as a second language more effectively and productively for sustainable future.

Keywords : ELT- Theoretical framework, critical pedagogy, discourse, cultural context, social change, sustainable future.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a means to express our thoughts and get linked with the world around us. Language is a major component of human society which distinguishes us from the other creatures on the earth. Teaching and learning of English language have gained significance over a period of time as they enable humans to communicate and get linked with varied aspects of their life. However, many researches have been conducted in the domain of English Language Teaching to come out with effective components of the language texts to make the learners efficient in language learning, its usage and make their learning productive. Psychologists like Vygotsky (1978) stresses on the role of background knowledge and environment of learning which play significant role in language learning process. Critical pedagogy dates back to two decades in the history of language learning theories. Its significance still persists as context of learning is equally important to the subject or content that is being learnt by the students. Language learning is a means to connect with the world around us. In order to make our world and its environment sustainable, there is need of realizing the importance of critical pedagogy and its components to foster language learning as well as social transformation through education.

EXPLICATION OF THE TOPIC:

Critical pedagogy (CP) in ELT is an attitude to language teaching which relates the classroom context to the wider social context and aims at social transformation through education (Ramin Akbari, 2008, pp. 276). Critical language pedagogy is an approach to language teaching used by minority who have belief in democratic principles of education supported

by Brazilian educator Freire's (1967) democratic theory of education. According to Freire literacy must be taught in such a way that the poor and the underprivileged could interpret the reality so to act on it and improve their lives. Alessia Cogo(2023) asserts that critical pedagogy develops students critical understanding of the world based on democratic principles. It empowers students to critically analyse and engage with English language and its implications. These pedagogical practices are needed for the students to develop practices and negotiation tactics to deal with differences in cultural practices around them and also encounter them through the learning material in the classroom. According to Graham Crookes (2012) language has both structural and functional dimensions. It is considered as socially implicated discourse which constructs individuals as well as maintains and changes the social structures. Critical pedagogy identifies language as ideology, not just a system. Critical pedagogy deals with the question of social justice and social change through education. It puts the classroom context into wider social contexts with the belief that what happens in the classroom should end up making a difference outside the classroom. It aims at discriminatory foundations of education and initiate step towards social change in such a way that there would be more inclusion and representation of the groups who are left out. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006) critical pedagogy extends educational space to the social, cultural and political dynamics of language use. He has proposed three-dimensional system of pedagogy to be followed in the language classroom consisting of parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility. According to Kumaravadivelu post method pedagogy must facilitate the advancement of context sensitive language education based on true understanding of local linguistic, socio-cultural and political particularities. It should enable the teachers to construct their own theory of practice depending on the context of the classroom and background of the learners. Teachers should construct their own personal theories by testing, interpreting and evaluating the usefulness of professional theories existing in the domain which have been proposed by experts to suit to their specific local needs. This idea encourages teachers to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize. In this sense, a theory of practice is an ongoing living, working theory involving continual reflection and action. Pedagogy for Kumaravadivalu, should include wide range of historical, political and socio-cultural experiences that directly or indirectly influence the second language education. Pedagogy must not only increase learning opportunities in the classroom but also transform possibilities in and outside the classroom. There are numerous instances when race, gender, class and other variables directly or indirectly influence the content and context of the classroom input and interaction. Pennycook (2001) posits that language is said to be part of larger semiotic system within which it has emerged and is infused with ideological, historical, political symbols and relations. It is also considered as discourse of liberation from dominant power relations and acts as an empowering tool for the marginalized groups as Freire believed education must address the totality of experiences of the voiceless and the underprivileged.

Culture is another factor which plays an important role in teaching-learning of English as second language. Cultural diversity of the students in the classroom creates different identities of the students with varied individual experiences borne out of their culture. What students are taught mainly differ on the grounds of their locality, ethnicity, linguistic, socio-economic factors and their political affiliations. In the classroom, critical pedagogy creates contexts for positive action and increasing awareness about the struggles of those who are not us but 'others.' Critical pedagogy insists on including learning content/material themes that

emanate from the students' day to day lives which enable them to think about their situation and explore possibilities of change. The syllabus must include students' real-life concerns rather than alien topics which are of insignificance for their social life. Critical pedagogy takes local as its point of departure thereby protecting the marginalized ethnic and linguistic groups. Most of the times language classrooms are bombarded with the learning material or content and the context from the west which are far removed from their social lives and nothing to do with the experiences of the students. In addition to that, the students in our classrooms are diversified in terms socio-economic factors such as rural/urban, majority/minority, haves & have not's i.e. different socio-economic backgrounds. So, the objective of learning and material provided must be relevant and transformative to the immediate lives of the learners. Hence critical pedagogy emphasises the learners to develop competencies to talk about their own culture and represent their cultural identity. It adds value and enables the learners to ponder over diverse aspects of their culture in which they live and find ways to bring about change in the society wherever change is much needed. Transformation of the lives of the marginalized and help them to attain better economic and social conditions are possible through critical pedagogy. Even the problems of the physically challenged, plight of the amputees, miseries of the aged, traumas of the gendered minority are to be included in the discourse under critical pedagogy. As the content and the context under critical pedagogy are very close to the learners, comprehension becomes easier. In the post method era, the teachers will have academic and social autonomy wherein they can identify the teaching-learning strategies based on the learners' needs based on the principle of practicality. They can also evaluate the ongoing learning process by monitoring progress of language learning. The teachers in a way become researchers in the classrooms where they can explore and reform their own pedagogical practices. The learners will also function effectively as co-operative members of a classroom community. The teachers scaffold in their learning with necessary intervention. This kind of autonomy under the new pedagogical environment paves way to empower the learners by making them critical thinkers. The ELT classroom can bring about sustainable social environment bringing in the environmental, social and economic issues as well into the classrooms for critically analysing them and come out with possible solutions. The students can go beyond their immediate communities and understand their interconnectedness with the world. These practices create a sense of global citizenship among the learners. The classroom discussions will make learners to have empathy and sensitivity towards different cultures. ELT classroom should not only make the students merely to communicate well but also teach how to make a positive change in the world. The role of first language is significant at this point while teaching-learning is being done in second language. It is considered as an asset through which communication in second language is facilitated. The focus of attention, therefore on the second language while following the more liberal use of learner's first language to facilitate communication and comprehension.

CONCLUSION

The transformation in the society is possible only when the trouble spots are identified, room is provided for the voiceless to express, all the citizens of the society realize that there are multiple narrative and divergent perspectives on reality. It can be attained through creating a sense of respect and tolerance which are the first steps towards social change. Critical pedagogy enables the teachers to conceptualize and contextualize their pedagogy based on the educational, cultural and political imperative of language learning, testing and teacher education. It is the responsibility of the teachers in ELT class to empower the students

through enhancing their language skills, at the same time equip them to create sustainable future by making use of opportunities to face the global challenges.

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